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SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE HINDU APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

Arvind Sharma

I

It is a widely, though perhaps not universally accepted proposition that one of 'the chief distinguishing features of Hinduism in its traditional' as well as modern forms has been

A propensity to assimilate rather than to exclude. This last feature divides Hinduism sharply from the religions of the west, based on Judaism. The latter, at least in their earlier forms, generally reject as false all other religious beliefs and practices; Hinduism, on the other hand, concedes some validity to them all. The western attitude is expressed in the words of Yahweh on Sinai, 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Ex. xx:3); in the Bhagavad Gita, the incarnate god Krishna says, 'Whatever god a man worships, it is I who answer the prayer' (1).

The Hindu approach to religious plurality has been variously described as accommodating, catholic, universal, open, tolerant, assimilative, synthetic, hospitable, liberal, syncretistic, and inclusive. These assessments of the Hindu approach to religious plurality have enjoyed great popularity, but in spite of that or perhaps because of it, the Hindu position seems to have been sometimes misunderstood.

This paper sets out to identify some of these misunderstandings and hopefully to correct them.

There can be little doubt that, comparatively, the Hindu religious tradition tolerates more doctrinal diversity, accepts more liturgical variety and displays more iconic

exuberance than perhaps any other tradition. This aspect of Hinduism has been connected by some scholars with other aspects of Hinduism and that constellation is then seen as constituting a single integrated understanding - as forming a single package, as it were. Two such connections have figured prominently in recent (2) understandings of Hindu religious tolerance: 1. that this toleration is rooted in *advaitic* philosophical assumptions and 2. that this tolerance is intimately connected with the Caste System. The first of these connections is often clearly stated; the second sometimes merely suggested.

It is contended in this paper that both of these understandings are misunderstandings.

II

Let us begin by examining the suggestion that an *advaita* philosophy provides the essential underpinning for Hindu tolerance. This point has been made in various ways. It is pointed out that the chief spokesmen of the point of view that Hinduism is tolerant - such men as Rāmākṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda and Radhakrishnan - have been *advaitic* in orientation (3). Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahansa is often cited as experiencing God through various traditions but 'Ramakrishna was a Hindu, brought up in a completely Hindu environment, a devotee of various Hindu deities and imbued with the basic Hindu philosophy. Hindu philosophy is monistic' (4). And a monistic position, paradoxically, lends itself most easily to the acceptance of plurality (5). For if the Ultimate Reality is without any qualifying attributes and if 'the human mind is limited and finite, it cannot comprehend the nature of the total reality' so that all formulations of it must be forever partial (6).

That Hindu catholicity is grounded in an *advaitic* understanding, however, seems to be a misunderstanding. This becomes clear if the philosophical, the historical and the statistical aspects of this understanding are analysed closely.

Those who regard *advaita* Vedānta as undergirding the Hindu tolerance of religious plurality to a certain extent misrepresent the system itself. It is often not realized that even *advaita* Vedānta sometimes looks upon itself within the Hindu framework as a system of Hindu philosophy - as participating in that plurality rather than accounting for it. That Hindus in general look upon Brahman as a formulation of the Ultimate is quite obvious from the theistic prayer which

includes even the 'Buddha of the Bauddhas' and 'Arhat of the Jainas' in its adoration and mentions Brahman alongside Śiva, Viṣṇu, and so forth (7). Not only that, even the Advaitins themselves show an awareness of it - the great Advaitin Śaṅkara shows an awareness of this. In his Aitareya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya he quotes a *Smṛti* text: 'Some speak of it as Agni, some as Manu, Prajāpati, some as Indra, others as Prāṇa, yet others as the eternal Brahman' (8). Thus even when the Advaitin regards *nirguṇa brahma* as the Ultimate - it is, firstly, only ultimate as a formulation, and, secondly, even then it can be argued that it is strictly a case of *primus inter pares* (9). It is as a mere formulation of the Ultimate that it is an ultimate formulation but inasmuch as the Ultimate cannot be ultimately formulated - only experienced - there cannot really be an ultimate formulation (10). Only the Ultimate can really be. Thus *advaita* shares Hindu plurality, it does not supervise it. Indeed, even in the theistic schools it is stated that the glory of God cannot be described any more than the Brahman can be verbalized and the mystery of God is no less impenetrable than that of the Godhead. It is not just *nirguṇa brahma* which, on account of its being free from attributes, can play host to any attribute and be perceived in various ways. This holds for *saguṇa brahma* or Īśvara as well. In this second case, however, it is not the absence of any attribute but the pleroma of the qualities of God which accounts for this versatility. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa refers to God as *bahuguṇāśrayaḥ* (11) - the resort of many qualities. Madhva's characterization of God as *guṇapūrṇa* (12) suggests the image of a God certainly full of, perhaps brimming and even overflowing with qualities.

It appears that we have in Bhagavadgītā IX.15 the theistic counterpart to Ṛg Veda I.164.46. In this verse Kṛṣṇa declares that those who worship Him through the sacrifice of knowledge or wisdom (*jñāna yajña*) 'worship Me as One and yet as Manifold, in many a guise with face turned every way' (13). The theistic orientation of the passage is obvious, and more so when it is glossed thus: 'As one - identifying himself with the All-Formed - the Advaitic view. As *distinct* - making a distinction in essence between the Lord and himself - the Dualistic view. As *Manifold* as various divinities Brahmā, Rudra, etc.' (14). Finally, K.N. Jayatilleke cites this Gītā verse in a context which seems to enhance its significance even further. After concluding on the basis of external evidence from Buddhist sources and internal evidence from the Hindu texts that the thinkers of the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads were not propounding one theory but a multiplicity of contradictory theories about the nature and destiny of man in the universe,

he quotes this Gītā verse and concludes, 'As far as the Vedic Scriptural tradition went, an idealistic monistic theory was apparently *considered to be on the same footing* as the materialistic pluralist theory' (15). This opinion, developed above in the light of recent scholarship on the Indian sub-continent, is further confirmed by Western scholars, many of whom 'acquainted with the ancient Indian religious-philosophical texts are quite convinced that they do not express a single consistent viewpoint, but that they express a very rich diversity of experience and reflection upon it' (16). Thus the two main streams of Hindu thought, absolutism and theism, can *both* be quite congenial (17) for the tolerant Hindu attitude to religious plurality.

Historical evidence also tends to undercut the position that *advaita Vedānta* provides the foundation on which the capacious structure of Hinduism is founded. It is well-known that the standard mode of cultic absorption in Hinduism is through the *avatāra* doctrine, yet the *avatāra* doctrine forms an almost neglected chapter in *advaita* (18). On the other hand, the theistic schools developed elaborate *Avatāric* theologies (19). Moreover, *advaita* as a school of Hindu philosophy may have preceded Śaṅkara but it came into its own and became intellectually dominant - if that word 'dominance' is not an exaggeration - only after him. Yet Hindu tolerance long precedes him. Indeed, the seeds of *both* theism and absolutism, 'which germinate and grow to huge proportions in later Hinduism' are there in the Ṛg Veda (20).

Finally, another aspect of the issue must be considered. In one sense Hinduism, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith says, is 'the religion of the Hindus'. That is to say, the statement that Hinduism is a tolerant religion really means that Hindus are tolerant. Now if most Hindus were *advaitins* then a *prima facie* case could be made out that as most Hindus are tolerant and they are also *advaitins*, ergo Hindu tolerance is rooted in *advaita Vedānta*. Yet what is the reality in the 'field' in this case? 'George Grierson, a pioneer scholar in Indian Bhakti estimated that Bhakti is an essential element in the religion of 90 per cent of the Hindus' (21). Even if such statistical precision in the case of non-quantifiable variables such as Jñāna or Bhakti must be taken with a pinch of salt there can be little doubt that the

simple Hindu peasant may never have heard the name Śaṅkara and has no real understanding of the very sophisticated system of metaphysics which Śaṅkara devised, but he understands the doctrine of salvation through faith and devotion, which, he has heard at his mother's knee, conveyed through beautiful religious songs sung in his regional language (22).

And it is because in these songs he has chanted or heard chanted the names of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, and in later times of Íśvara and Allah (23) in the same breath that he leans towards tolerance - and not because he has conceived of the Ultimate Reality as Impersonal or has experienced it in Nirvikalpa Samādhī.

Thus to maintain that Hindu tolerance of religious pluralism is essentially *advaitic* is bad philosophy, bad history and even bad theology.

III

At a very different level it has been further suggested that it is the caste system which constitutes the basis of the Hindu attitude of tolerance. The point is made that if everyone can have his own religion, so to say, then what holds all the individuals together as members of a single social unit? The answer is caste. A contrast is then drawn between the semitic religions which combine doctrinal rigidity with social flexibility and Hinduism which combines doctrinal flexibility with social rigidity. It is as if there is a trade-off - flexibility in one field being attained at the cost of inflexibility in the other (24). It is as if societies must choose between doctrinal openness or social openness, they cannot have both for otherwise the situation would become anarchic if members of a social group both thought as they pleased and acted as they liked - without any constraints at any level. A comparison is sometimes instituted, such that while 'Hindu openness intellectually has been counterbalanced socially with a stable, not to say rigid, religio-social order', 'Americans counterpoise theological irresponsibility, or at least individualism, by relying on a social order called "the American way of life", a virtually absolutized national structure' (25).

This view, which grounds Hindu tolerance socially in the caste system, seems to be more cogent to begin with than the view which philosophically grounds Hindu tolerance in *advaita*. The caste system seems to have been on the Hindu scene for about as long as Hindu tolerance of plurality (26). But on closer inspection even this view seems to represent a misunderstanding.

In order to see this it is important to bear in mind that the *rigidity* of the caste system is of the essence here - for it is this rigidity which constitutes the polar opposite to the doctrinal flexibility of the Hindu religious tradition.

The ineluctable question then which must now be faced is: how rigid was and is the so-called caste system?

At this point in the discussion we encounter a problem of terminological exactitude, namely: what is caste? And what is the caste system? Careful scholars have pointed out that it is difficult to pin the term caste to any sociological reality (27). This, of course, does not mean that there is no social reality at all corresponding to 'caste', but rather that 'the same term has been pinned to too many social entities - endogamous group, a category of such groups, a system of social organisation', etc. Sifting through the various uses of the word one soon discovers that the phrase, the caste system, has been used in at least three senses. It has been used to refer primarily to:

1. the system of Jāti as characterizing the Hindu social order (28);
2. the system of Varṇa as characterizing the Hindu social order (29);
3. the idea 'that most social relations should be hierarchically arranged' (30).

The concept of the caste system as representing a hierarchical arrangement of society in a general sense is easily understood. Varṇa and Jāti are technical terms and require some explication. The term Varṇa refers only to the fourfold division of Hindu society into Brāhmaṇas, etc. The word Jāti refers to smaller units one is born into which are distinguished by endogamy, commensality and craft-exclusiveness.

Our inquiry now naturally breaks down into three parts, for we must now inquire into the degree of rigidity of caste in each of these three connotations (31).

IV

The question of Jāti in India has been a complex one. Nevertheless it can be established that the degree of rigidity one is wont to associate with it under the influence of what has been called the 'official view of caste' (32) is hardly warranted by facts. For one thing, the number of these Jātis seems to have varied from the time of Manu, through Muslim rule, down through the British period to our own times (33). For another, they have often been as much determined occupationally as congenitally. Even Manu states that the Jātis 'may be known by their occupation' (34). And the contemporary mobility of Jātis is a widely documented fact (35). Equally interesting is the fact that this historical mobility

of the Jātis of which scholars are aware is something of which the members of the Jātis themselves show an awareness, albeit mythically. Thus the 'origin legend of the tribal Konds conveys a message which is duplicated in the origin myth of many lower *jātis*' (36). The Konds believe that they 'belong to the same community as the rulers; Konds are a dominant caste; they have fallen because they are a little stupid and unlucky, and have had to come and live in the jungle, but in origin they are warriors and the associates of kings' (37).

Thus the mobility of the Jātis seems to be a fact of both objective observation and subjective realization (38).

v

Next, we turn to the Varṇas. Now 'castes rise and fall in the social scale, and old castes die out and new ones are formed, but the four great classes are stable. They are never more nor less than four; and for over 2,000 years their order of preference has not altered' (39). Maybe the social rigidity which is said to correspond to Hindu doctrinal flexibility is to be found here in the Varṇa system rather than in the Jāti system.

A closer look at the Varṇa system, however, shows that elements of flexibility have not been wanting in this system either. This becomes clear once the scriptural evidence, the literary evidence, the historiographic evidence, the epigraphic evidence, and the general historical and sociological evidence on the issue is examined.

The scriptural evidence often cited to establish the rigidity of the Varṇa system consists of the *Puruṣasūkta* (a *śruti*) and the *Manu Smṛti* (a *smṛti*). The classic scriptural statement on the Varṇa system, which has been called 'the charter of Caste' (40) is *Ṛg Veda* X.90.12. Along with this, however, one must also consider another classic Hindu statement - which is looked upon in neo-Hinduism as virtually the charter of Hindu tolerance. It occurs in *Ṛg Veda* I.164.46 (41). The relation between these two classic utterances would reflect to a certain extent the relation between the Varṇa system and Hindu tolerance. The problem is that it is difficult to determine the nature of the Varṇa system in the *Ṛg Vedic* age (42). In any case, it is unlikely that it had achieved the degree of rigidity one is wont to associate with it now. If it be maintained that it did, and further that the *Puruṣasūkta* mentions the fourfold division for the first time, then a problem arises. The *Puruṣasūkta*

occurs in the Xth *maṇḍala* of the Ṛg Veda (43) and both the 1st and the 10th books are later than the 'family books'. The association of Hindu tolerance with the Varṇa system must be regarded as tenuous because already in the family books - which are earlier than both the 1st and the 10th *maṇḍalas*, images clearly anticipatory of Hindu tolerance - 'cows which are of varied hues yield the same white milk' (44) - have started appearing.

Not only is the historical connection between the Varṇa system and Hindu tolerance slight; the etiological link between the Varṇa system and the Puruṣasūkta itself is not completely sustained within the Hindu religious tradition which offers several optional myths to account for the Varṇa system (45), implying varying degrees of flexibility.

It is generally accepted that by the time of Manu the Varṇa and Jāti systems had become more rigid than they might have been in Vedic times, though there is no unanimity on this point. What is striking about the Manu Smṛti, however, is that apart from maintaining the metempsychotic prospect of change of Varṇa, it refers to the reduction of Kṣatriyas to the status of Śūdras; to the emergence of the Kṣatriyas from the Brāhmaṇas, and to the possibility of change of all Varṇas from one to the other through hypergamy or hypogamy in seven generations (46). And in one case such downward mobility of status is visualized as occurring within one generation on account of neglect of duties (47). That such mobility was not a mere pious fiction is illustrated by the example of the Ābhīras.

They were a Central Asian tribe that entered India during the confusion caused by the invasion of Alexander the Great in 326 B.C. (Tarn). In the *Mahabharata* they are regarded as untouchable *sūdras*. The *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali (150 B.C.) shows that there was a slight improvement in their social position, for they were regarded as touchable *sūdras*. In the third century A.D. an Abhira tribe ruled in the Maharashtra country. Earlier Manu *Samhita* (200 A.D.) looked upon them as Kashatriyas. Later, when they associated themselves with the Gopala-Krishna cult they won honour and devotion from the vast follows of the Vaishnava sect (48).

Literary evidence provided by popular Indian literature, concerning the lives of ordinary Indian people, further confirms the conclusion that the rigidity ascribed to the Varṇa system may often reflect hieratic presuppositions of the authors of the texts rather than actual facts. There are inklings of this in Sanskrit drama, which, in spite of its formal

commitment to the hieratic world-view, also gives glimpses of social reality which belie it. Thus in the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, for instance, Śūdraka presents 'characters who are not provided for by the tidy classifications of the *Dharmaśāstras*, for it is in the cities that the neat system of four classes and four stages of life most visibly breaks down into a diversity of castes and a multiplicity of types' (49). But Sanskrit drama is still 'highbrow' - it is when we get to popular folk-literature of the kind embodied in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* that the rigidity of the *Varṇa* system becomes seriously questionable, at least at some level of society. In order to see this it has to be borne in mind that the kingpin in ensuring the rigid sense of the *Varṇa* system is endogamy. As Manu says: 'In all castes [*varṇa*] those [*children*] only which are begotten in the direct order on wedded wives equal [*in caste and married as*] virgins, are to be considered as belonging to the same caste [*as their fathers*]' (50). In other words, matrimonial purity is the firm basis of *Varṇa* rigidity - one must not marry outside one's *varṇa*. Yet the *Kathāsaritsāgara* is replete with instances where girls choose husbands on their own without any regard to *Varṇa* (51). Indeed this non-conformity to the norm gets highlighted in those cases in which the father asks the daughter: 'Out of which of the four *Varṇas* should I find a suitable match for you?' (52). What is more, the author seems to approve of inter-*Varṇa* marriages if the poetic beauty of the language he uses to describe such unions is any indication of his own reaction.

When one turns next to historical accounts of ancient India by foreign observers one is struck by a salient fact - that they are not struck by the existence of a *Varṇa* system. Megasthenes makes no reference to the *Varṇa* theory, and sees the society as divided into seven classes, which were endogamous and hereditary (53), and one has to wait till the time of Al-Bīrūnī to find a mention of the *Varṇa* theory. But in Al-Bīrūnī's case, he is presenting India through *Indian* eyes. (54).

Epigraphic evidence confirms this lack of *Varṇa* rigidity and provides proof of inter-*Varṇa* marriages of both *anuloma* and *pratiloma* types. To cite only a few instances, a fifth-century inscription records how a *Brāhmaṇa* of a respectable family, Soma by name, had married a *kṣatriya* lady 'in accordance with the precepts of Śruti and Smṛti' (55). Similarly the *Brāhmaṇa* *Vākāṭaka* king Rudrasena was married to *Prabhāvatīgupta*, who was a *Vaiśya*, and the *Kadamba* rulers, who were *Brāhmaṇas* married their daughters into the *Vaiśya* *Gupta* family (56). Such instances could be multiplied (57).

Finally, some stark historical facts need to be faced. Did the Varṇa system as depicted in the scriptural texts actually prevail? A quick look at ancient India indicates that the Varṇas hardly kept to their indicated vocations. The question of the origin of the Maurayas is controversial but the Sātvāhana kings were Brāhmaṇas (58) - they should have been Kṣatriyas - so it seems were the Śuṅgas (59). Śūdra kings are known in the Mahābhārata and the Peshwas were Brāhmaṇas, while Shivājī's varṇa status was dubious to the point where he had difficulty in obtaining the services of orthodox pundits to perform his coronation (60). In other words, the facts of Indian dynastic history do not conform to the view that only the Kṣatriyas should rule (61).

It is clear, then, that the Varṇa system hardly seems to have possessed the rigidity which can be regarded as a quid pro quo for the doctrinal flexibility of Hinduism. This view is confirmed when the sociological evidence is taken into account. Scholars have examined 'the manner in which the influential concept of varṇa successfully obscured the dynamic features of caste during the traditional or pre-British period' (62). The main features of this 'influential concept of varṇa', 'of caste as embodied in varṇa' have been the beliefs that '(1) There is a single all-India hierarchy without any variations between one region and another; (2) that there are only four varṇas, or, if the Harijans, who are literally "beyond the pale of caste", are included, five; (3) the hierarchy is clear; and (4) it is immutable' (63). It is such a rigid model of Varṇa which is popularly regarded as balancing the flexibility of Hindu thought - but the validity of such a model is to be seriously questioned, especially in the case of feature (4) which is the key feature from the point of view of this paper. In this respect the process of Sanskritization, 'the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently "twice-born" caste' (64) has undercut the notion of the immutability of the Varṇa system. The applicability of the concept of Sanskritization was demonstrated early in the case of the Coorgs and it is now believed that

Sanskritization has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history and it has occurred in every part of the Indian subcontinent. It may have been more active at some periods than at others, and some parts of India are more Sanskritized than others, but there is no doubt that the process has been universal (65).

It is clear, therefore, that it is logically hazardous

to connect the rigidity of the caste system understood as Varṇa with Hindu doctrinal flexibility.

VI

Earlier on, three understandings of the expression caste system were identified - 1. that it refers to the Jāti system; 2. that it refers to the Varṇa system; and 3. that it refers to a hierarchical orientation of social organization. The extent of the rigidity in the first two of these understandings has now been examined; it remains to examine the element of rigidity in the third understanding which refers not so much to social institutions as to a social ethos. It will now be contended that the elements of rigidity in this understanding of the term caste system have also been exaggerated. In order to show this it will be pointed out that Hindu thinking is not as devoid of equalitarian as opposed to hierarchical concepts as is usually imagined.

It is often not recognized that Hindu social thought has manifested an equalitarian streak which finds expression in the recognition of the primevality and the desirability of one caste.

The Hindu theory of the four Yugas is fairly well-known. What is not equally well-known is that 'all the people of the world were of one caste during the first age or Kṛita Yuga. This caste was called Haṁsa. But through successive ages separate castes came into existence owing to the progressive degeneration and immorality of mankind' (66). It should be noted that the pristine purity of Dharma here is associated with one caste, or in other words, with castelessness, and that the emergence of several castes is associated with the deterioration of *dharma*!

But is what was good in that remote period good now? Opinions differ - but there is the definite opinion that castelessness continues to be desirable - for reasons both human and divine. The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is quite clear and articulate on this point:

A father has four sons. All the sons, naturally, must belong to the same caste. God is the father of all people. Then where lies the difference of caste?

The fruits of a tree are alike in colour and shape and alike in touch and taste. Human beings are the fruits that grow on God's tree. How then can we make distinctions as between the fruit of the same tree?

If you call this body as that of a Brāhmaṇa, how can you ask if one part of him or all of him is a Brāhmaṇa? If one part is known as a Brāhmaṇa, then the Brāhmaṇahood will end with the cutting off of that part. If the whole body be a Brāhmaṇa, then a person who performs the last rites will incur the sin of killing a Brāhmaṇa.

A horse can easily be told apart from a herd of cows, but a Śūdra cannot be regarded as distinct from a twice-born (67).

It is clear, therefore, in view of the evidence adduced here that it is dangerous to posit an exclusively hierarchical approach to social organization on the part of Hinduism (68). It may be pointed out here that it is not the argument of these sections that the caste system as understood in the triple sense may not have had elements of rigidity; the argument is that it had elements of flexibility to a degree which make a compensatory or complementary connection between Hindu doctrinal flexibility and caste rigidity misleading. The weakness of this connection is highlighted if it is pointed out that it is possible to flip the argument around completely and argue, perhaps even persuasively, that religious catholicity and the varṇa system were two approaches tried hand in hand to resolve the question of pluralism - both doctrinal and social - encountered by the Aryans. So that it is not so much that one is a trade-off against the other, rather that both doctrinal and social acceptance went *together*. Various religious ideas were accepted as manifestations of the same Reality and various new peoples were funnelled into the four varṇas as the Aryans came in contact with them as part of a single integrated process. On this view the varṇa system would originally be a conduit which later on got clogged. It can further be argued that periods of *maximum* religious catholicity in Indian history have coincided with those of *minimum* social rigidity! Then the intellectual openness of the Mantra period could be paired off with the probable flexibility of the caste system; the growth of Vedic ritualism with a deterioration in the position of the Śūdra (sometimes exaggerated) (69); the openness of the Upaniṣadic speculation with renewed signs of lack of caste rigidity (70); the Hindu opposition to, rather than acceptance of, Buddhism with the rigorous restrictiveness of the Smṛtis (71); the Hindu abhorrence of Islam with stricter orthodoxy (72); the later Hindu openness (73) to Islamic influences with Bhaktic attacks on the caste system (74); and the Hindu responsiveness to Christian ideas with the reform of Hindu society (75). The historical rhythm which emerges from this

survey is the opposite of what one would expect from the thesis that there is a trade-off between doctrinal flexibility and social flexibility, in the sense that one can only have more of one at the cost of the other.

VII

To conclude: the Hindu attitude towards religious plurality is not just *advaitic*, it is Hindu, and the caste system does not seem to constitute a logical and perhaps not even a historical corollary to the Hindu attitude. Doctrinal flexibility and social rigidity are not two sides of the same coin. In fact they perhaps do not even belong to the same mint, and the Hindu approach to religious plurality, on a correct understanding, must not be identified with a particular school of Hindu philosophy or with a particular type of Hindu social institution but with Hinduism itself per se - with Hinduism qua Hinduism. What then is Hinduism? The word Hindu has been used in this paper as an adjectival form for Hinduism and by Hinduism is meant:

the civilization of the Hindus (originally, the inhabitants of the land of the Indus River). Introduced c.1830 by English writers it properly denotes the Indian civilization of approximately the last 2000 years, which gradually evolved from Vedism, the religion of the ancient Indo-European peoples who settled in India in the last centuries of the second millennium B.C. Because it integrates a large variety of heterogeneous elements, Hinduism constitutes a very complex but largely continuous whole and since it covers the whole of India, it has religious, social, economic, literary and artistic aspects. As a religion, Hinduism is an utterly diverse conglomerate of doctrines, cults and ways of life (76).

In arguing that a Hindu tolerance of religious plurality is not based either on *advaita* Vedānta or the caste system, these two aspects of the level of ideation and social reality in conventional accounts of Hinduism are not being rejected; what is being contested is the argument that they constitute the ancilla to the Hindu tolerance of religious plurality. The explanation of this must be sought in the total reality of Hinduism. To try to be crystal-clear - the Hindu tolerance of plurality is not an iridescence arising from the photic interplay of some of its facets; it is not an aspect but an *ingredient* of the 'substance' itself.

NOTES

- 1 A.L. Basham, 'Hinduism', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago: William Benton 1973, Vol. 11 p. 507. Among historians who accept this proposition one can think of Toynbee; among sociologists G.M. Carstairs and Milton Singer; among scholars of religion R.C. Zaehner and S. Radhakrishnan. There are more critical views. N.C. Chaudhuri, f.i., *The Continent of Circe*, London: Chatto and Windus 1965, p. 39: 'If the familiar words about tolerance and capacity for synthesis of the Hindus were true, one would be hard put to it to explain why there are such deep divisions and enmities among the human groups of India, why there are endemic outbursts of murderous ferocity, two of the worst of which swept two large provinces of the country recently'. Even those who accept the basic proposition that the Hindu attitude to religious plurality is tolerant sometimes point out its limitations such as historiographic (see Creighton Lacy, *The Conscience of India*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1965, p. 7); historical (see P.D. Devanandan, *Preparation for Dialogue*, Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society 1964, pp. 52, 57-9, etc.); social (see J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, London: Faber and Faber 1968, pp. 61-2); even doctrinal (see R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, London: Oxford University Press 1962, p. 5).
- 2 For the clarification of earlier misunderstandings, actual or anticipated, see S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1939, pp. 313-14, wherein the possible allegations of cynicism, expediency and indifference are dealt with. In addition to regarding the Hindu attitude as cynical, merely expedient or indifferent, it could also be regarded as patronizing, a criticism anticipated by Vivekānanda for *advaita vis-à-vis viśiṣṭādvaita* (see Claude Alan Stark, *God of All*, Cape Cod, Mass: Claude Stark 1974, p. 35, n. 29).
- 3 See T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*, Bombay: Chetana 1960, p. 220: 'Having gained the transcendent experience of the supreme Spirit, Śrī Rāmakrishna came down to the plane of relativity and turned to the practice of alien faiths such as Islam and Christianity. *The Advaita-realization he had had enabled him to look upon all faiths as but different roads leading to the same destination*' (emphasis added). The same is hinted at by Lal Mani Joshi, 'Minds of one Accord', in Claude Alan Stark, *God of All*, op. cit., p. 207. For Vivekānanda see Claude Alan Stark, op. cit., pp. 128-31;

for S. Radhakrishnan's preference for *advaita* Vedānta see Robert A. McDermott, 'Introduction', pp. 15-16, in Robert A. McDermott (ed.), *Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, Bombay: Jaico 1972.

- 4 Per Helsing, 'Śrī Rāmakrishna from a Christian Perspective', in Claude Alan Stark, op. cit., p. 202.
- 5 T.M.P. Mahadevan, op. cit., p. 250; also see Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Honolulu: East-West Center Press 1969, p. 11 and Chapter I passim.
- 6 For an eloquent elaboration of the point see Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism*, New York: Harper and Brothers 1958, pp. 178-9.
- 7 The verse is quoted in Latin characters in T.M.P. Mahadevan, op. cit., p. 198. Also see the *Yogavāśiṣṭa* wherein Brahman is put on a par with the *Pumān* of the *Saṅkhyas*; the *Śūnya* of the *Śūnyavādins*; the *Bhāsaka* of the sun-worshippers and the *Vijñānamātra* of the *Vijñānavādins*. All these are regarded as 'many names given to the Absolute' (see S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, op. cit., p. 318).
- 8 See Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya* on *Aitareyopaniṣad* III.1.3.
- 9 *Advaita* Vedānta seems to alternate between the assertion of the Brahman as the ultimate formulation and the realization that ultimately the Brahman is only a formulation. In the collection of sayings of *Rāmakṛṣṇa* culled by Huston Smith usages indicative of both these attitudes are present. At one place the anecdote related by *Ramakṛṣṇa* ends with Śiva saying: 'I, by assuming this dual aspect, tried to convince thee that all gods and goddesses are but various aspects of one Absolute Brahman' (Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper and Row [Perennial Library] 1965, p. 88). At another place *Rāmakṛṣṇa* is quoted as saying: 'As one and the same material, water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third aqua, and another pani, so one Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Jehovah, and by others as Brahman' (ibid., p. 86). This double usage of the word Brahman and what it stands for is present in Śaṅkara himself. To see this his gloss on *Aitareyabhāṣya* III.1.3 referred to in the previous footnote - wherein Brahman is referred to in relative terms - may be compared with his gloss on *Brahmasūtra* IV.1.15, wherein he refers to the Brahman as Absolute and according to some scholars to his own realization of it (see T.M.P. Mahadevan, op.cit., pp. 142-3). For the authenticity of these *bhāṣyas* as Ādiśaṅkara's see Paul Hacker, 'Śaṅkācārya [sic] and

Śaṅkarabhagavatapāda', *New Indian Antiquary*, Vol. IX, Nos. 4-6, April-June 1947, pp. 175, 179.

- 10 'Strictly speaking, Advaita is not a system in the sense of a set of "closed" doctrines. Its primary aim is to break through all limited views of reality and to lead the aspirant to the plenary experience of the Absolute which is limitless' (T.M.P. Mahadevan, op. cit., p. 141, n. 4).
- 11 *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* III.32.33. For the simultaneity of the effability and the ineffability of God see Nammālvār, *Tiruvāyamoli* 1.3.4. I am indebted to Katherine Young of McGill University for this reference.
- 12 See Mangalācaraṇa śloka in Anandatīrtha, *Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya*.
- 13 R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969, p. 280.
- 14 Swami Swarupananda, *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gītā*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashram 1909, p. 206. This represents a traditional understanding; for modern critical understanding see W.D.P. Hill, *The Bhagavadgītā*, London: Oxford University Press 1928, p. 184, fn. 3.
- 15 K.M. Jayatilleke, *The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions*, Ceylon: Public Trust Department 1966, p. 6 (emphasis added).
- 16 Eliot Deutsch, op. cit., p. 5.
- 17 It may be noted that *both* can, on occasion, be quite uncongenial too. The missionary zeal of the Caitanya movement in this respect (see Edward C. Dimock, Jr., 'Doctrine and Practice among the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal', *History of Religions*, 3, 1963, p. 122) may be compared with the triumphalism of Ānandagiri's Śaṅkaravijaya.
- 18 Perhaps because *avatāra* implies a personal aspect of Brahman whereas *advaita* Vedānta is more concerned with the impersonal aspect, see J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Utrecht: N.V.A. Oosthoek Uitgevers Mij 1954, pp. 126-7. For the role of Avatāric ideas in Hindu synthesizing, see V. Raghavan, 'Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture', *Introduction to the Civilization of India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1957, pp. 384-6.
- 19 Śrīnivāsadāsa, *Yatīndramatadīpikā*, passim.
- 20 See Ṛg Veda X.129.
- 21 Ted J. Solomon, 'Early Vaiṣṇava Bhakti and Its Autochthonous Heritage', *History of Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 1, August 1970, p. 32.
- 22 A.L. Basham, 'Hinduism', in R.C. Zaehner, ed., op. cit., p. 239; see also Milton Singer (ed.), *Krishna - Myths, Rites and Attitudes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1971, passim.
- 23 Consider the favourite *bhajan* of Mahātmā Gāndhi:

Raghupati Rāghava Rājā Rām
Patita-Pāvana Sītā-Rām,
Īśvara Allā tere nām

Saba ko sanmati de Bhagvān. (quoted in T.M.P.

Mahadevan, op. cit., p. 274.)

- 24 P.D. Devanandan, op. cit., pp. 46-8; Creighton Lacy, op. cit., p. 259.
- 25 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Religious Atheism? Early Buddhist and Recent American', *Milla wa-Milla*, The Australian Bulletin of Comparative Religion, December 1966, p. 27; see also Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, 'The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology', *History of Religions*, Vol. 10, No. 4, May 1971, p. 275; E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System in Northern India*, London: Oxford University Press 1931, Chapter XIV etc.
- 26 Even when the origins of Hinduism are traced back to Indus Valley Culture, this association with the caste system is not completely negated. The highly organized nature of the Indus Valley Culture has led scholars to suggest its likely prevalence even in that remote period; see R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Vedic Age*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1965, p. 391. Also see K.M. Sen, *Hinduism*, Baltimore: Penguin 1961, p. 26, n. 1.
- 27 David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, Vol. I, Berkeley: University of California Press 1970, p. 29; H.L. Stevenson, 'Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System', *Journal of The Royal Anthropological Institute* (84), 1954, p. 49. Also see Robert O. Tilman, 'The Influence of Caste on Indian Economic Development', in Ralph Braibanti and Joseph L. Spengler (eds), *Administration and Economic Development in India*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 1963, p. 203; Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1960, pp. 3-10.
- 28 See J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, London: Oxford University Press 1961, p. 2 and passim; E.A.H. Blunt, op. cit., p. 10 and passim.
- 29 W.D.P. Hill, op. cit., pp. 291, ff.; Creighton Lacy, op. cit., p. 18 and passim; Louis Renou, *Religions of Ancient India*, New York: Schocken Books 1968, p. 96 and passim; W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1963, p. 34 etc. Many writers subsume both the senses under the term 'caste' explicitly; see G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay: Popular Book Depot 1950, passim; Barton M. Schwartz, *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities*, San Francisco: Chandler 1967, p. 5 and passim; K.M. Panikkar, *Hinduism and the Modern World*, Allahabad: Kitabistan 1938, passim.

- 30 David G. Mandelbaum, op. cit., p. 29, who so epitomizes a position developed by Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1970, passim. The word is also used in this sense by Robert O. Tilman, op. cit., p. 204.
- 31 In this paper the question as to what determined caste - birth or 'worth' - has not been examined. Most neo-Hindu writings on the subject adduce evidence to establish the fact that there was a substantial body of opinion, also consequential in practice, which regarded caste as based on qualities (or character or conduct) rather than birth. It is obvious that to the extent caste is based on 'worth' it is not rigid but mutable. On the basis of the evidence, K.M. Sen remarks that 'when an orthodox Hindu suggests that the caste-system as we know it' - as rigidly birth-ascribed - 'is an integral part of Hinduism, he is ignoring a substantial part of India's religious literature' (op. cit., p. 31). Similarly, attention cannot be fully drawn within the span of this paper to those aspects of Hinduism wherein caste considerations recede or disappear belying the rigid model, e.g. the irrelevance of caste in some aspects of Bhakti or Saṃnyāsa; to its blurring during festivals such as Holī; or relaxation during times of stress.
- 32 Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds, *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research 1968, p. 15.
- 33 *Manu Smṛti*, Chapter X, passim; also see G. Bühler, *The Laws of Manu*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1967, p. 409, fn. 31; Tavernier 'ascertained from the most accomplished ...priests' that there were 72 castes; vide Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, op. cit., p. 6; H.H. Risley worked on census data and identified 2000-odd castes; ibid., p. 16. J.H. Hutton talks of '3,000 or more' Jātis (op. cit., p. 2).
- 34 *Manu Smṛti*, X.40; see G. Bühler, op. cit., p. 411.
- 35 See McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, passim; for instance, a weaver jāti in Bengal succeeded in becoming a Brahmaṇa varṇa in twenty years (1911-31); vide Nirmal K. Bose, 'Some Aspects of Caste in Bengal', *Journal of American Folklore*, July-September 1958, pp. 405-6; see also Robert O. Tilman, op. cit., p. 210, fn. 29.
- 36 David G. Mandelbaum, 'Family, Jāti, Village', in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, op. cit., p. 39.
- 37 Frederick G. Bailey, 'Closed Social Stratification in India', *European Journal of Sociology*, 4(1), 1963, p. 161.
- 38 An aspect of the relationship between Jāti and Varṇa (see Iravati Karve, *The Hindu Society: A New Interpretation*,

Berkeley: University of California Press 1960, *passim*), which has not yet been explored would revolve around the following question: to what extent, if any, was the Varna system an attempt to evolve a coherent scheme out of the diffuse Jāti system?

- 39 A.L. Basham, *op. cit.*, p. 149. These four classes are, of course, those of the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras; vide *Manu Smṛti*, X.4, etc.
- 40 J.N. Farquhar, *A Primer of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1912, p. 25, note.
- 41 'Truth is one, sages call it by various names', a text cited so often in Hindu circles that Agehananda Bharati remarks about its having been 'milked for all it's worth!' ('The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns', *Journal of Asian Studies*, February 1970, p. 282). Curiously enough, it is hardly referred to at all by another set of scholars (e.g. by J. Gonda in the course of his vast and varied Vedic studies; see *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, The Hague: Mouton 1965; *Notes on Names and the Name of God in Ancient India*, Amsterdam: North-Holland 1970).
- 42 'The extent to which caste had developed in the age of Rig Veda Saṁhitā has formed a subject of keen controversy among scholars' (R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Vedic Age*, Bombay; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1965, p. 388). For a concise statement of the points involved in the controversy, see *ibid.*, pp. 387-92.
- 43 X.90. It should be noted, however, that though what subsequently came to be called the four varṇas are mentioned in this Sūkta, the word varṇa does not occur in the Sūkta and though the word occurs in the Ṛg Veda, 'Yet in the Rig Veda the word "varṇa" is never applied to any one of these classes. It is only the Arya varṇa or the Aryan people, that is contrasted with the Dāsa varṇa. The Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa, on the other hand, describes the four classes as four varṇas' (G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 47).
- 44 The full quotation runs as follows: 'The Upaniṣads declare that just as cows which are of varied hue yield the same white milk, all the different paths lead to the same goal' (T.M.P. Mahadevan, *op. cit.*, p. 17). T.M.P. Mahadevan cites no reference. The idea, however, or rather the imagery seems to be present in Ṛg Veda VI.72.4 (also see I.62.9 and X.49.10).
- 45 For a summary presentation of the highly diversified speculation on this point, see B.R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?* Bombay: Thacker 1947, Ch. II.
- 46 *Manu Smṛti*, IX.335; X.42; see G. Bühler, *op. cit.*, pp. 401, 412; *Manu Smṛti*, X.41; see G. Bühler, *op. cit.*,

- p. 412; *Manu Smṛti*, IX.320; *ibid.*, p. 399; *Manu Smṛti*, X.64.65; *ibid.*, pp. 416-17.
- 47 *Manu Smṛti*, II.172; *ibid.*, p. 61.
- 48 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and G. Srinivasachari, *India: A Historical Survey*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers 1966, p. 231. They also cite a tradition, recorded in the *Harivams* (sic. 300 A.D.) of how 'the sons of one Nagabhagaristha, belonging to the Vaisaya group, became Brahmanas'.
- 49 J.A.B. Van Buitenen, *Two Plays of Ancient India*, Columbia University Press 1968, pp. 7-8.
- 50 *Manu Smṛti*, X.5; see G. Bühler, *op. cit.*, pp. 402-3.
- 51 See C.H. Tawney, *The Kathā Sarit Sāgara*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1968, Vol. I, pp. 63, 103, etc.; Vol. II, p. 226, etc.; also see N.M. Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. I, London: Chas. J. Sawyer 1924, pp. 87-8.
- 52 *Kathāsaritsāgara* 53. 108. A.S. Altekar states that this happens 'often' (*The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1962, p. 76).
- 53 See R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Accounts of India*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay 1960, pp. xviii-xix.
- 54 See Ainslie Embree, ed., *Alberuni's India*, New York: W.W. Norton 1971, pp. xi-xiii. Al-Bīrūnī discusses the Varṇas in Chapter IX of his book (see *ibid.*, pp. 99-104). It is interesting that after describing the four Varṇas according to the traditional Hindu understanding he adds: 'Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings' (*ibid.*, p. 101).
- 55 *Archaeological Survey of Western India*, Vol. IV, London 1883, p. 140.
- 56 Dines Chandra Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. I, University of Calcutta 1965, pp. 436, 478.
- 57 See H. Krishna Sastri and Hirananda Sastri, eds, *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. XVIII, Bombay: British India Press 1925-6, p. 88, etc.; see also R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, *The Vākātaka-Gupta Age*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1967, pp. 342-8; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1965, pp. 422-4; A.S. Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-7, etc.
- 58 Gautamīputra Śātakarṇī is not only described as being a unique Brāhmaṇa (ekabrāhmaṇa) in the Nasik inscription but is also called *kṣatriyadarpamānamardana* (the destroyer of the pride and conceit of the Kṣatriyas); *vide ibid.*, p. 197, but also see fn.1.
- 59 See E.J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1922, p. 518.
- 60 A.L. Basham, *op. cit.*, p. 145; Grant Duff, *History of*

- the *Mahrattas*, Vol. I, Calcutta: R. Cambray 1918, p. 311; see Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons 1929, pp. 209-10. I am indebted for this reference to Alaka Hejib of Harvard University. See *Manu Smṛti*, I.88.91; X.74.80; G. Bühler, op. cit., pp. 24, 419; but also see *Manu Smṛti*, X.81.117; G. Bühler, op. cit., pp. 420-7.
- 61 Brāhmaṇas are supposed to officiate at sacrifices, teach the Vedas, accept gifts, etc., according to the traditional account of their duties (vide *Manu Smṛti*, I.88) and yet 'in 1913, 40 per cent of the posts carrying salaries of Rs 200 a month and over held by non-British officials, were held by Brahmins' (Ralph Braibanti and Joseph J. Spengler, eds, op. cit., p. 22).
- 62 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman 1972, pp. 2-3.
- 63 Ibid., p. 3.
- 64 Ibid., p. 6. Also see M.N. Srinivas, 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, August 1956, pp. 481-96.
- 65 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, p. 23; also see M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of Southern India*, London: Oxford University Press 1952, passim.
- 66 Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World*, Vol. I, New York: Frederick A. Praeger 1968, p. 201. According to the Mahābhārata, 'There is no difference of castes; this world, having been at first created by Brahmā entirely Brahmanic, became (afterwards) separated into castes in consequences of works'. For details, see John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and History of the People of India, Their Religion and Institutions*, London: Trubner 1872, pp. 139-42.
- 67 Bhaviṣya Purāṇa I.41: 45.45-6; 46.49-51; I.40: 20; translation by Raj Kumar Arora, *Historical and Cultural Data from the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, New Delhi: Sterling 1972, pp. 99, 100.
- 68 From this point of view a perusal of John Muir, op. cit., passim is a useful corrective to Louis Dumont, op. cit., passim.
- 69 See Ram Sharan Sharma, *Śūdras in Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1958, Chapter III.
- 70 See K.M. Sen, op. cit., p. 30, n. 1.
- 71 Benjamin Walker, op. cit., pp. 171-2.
- 72 See R.C. Majumdar et al., op. cit., p. 396; Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, New York: John Day 1946, pp. 237-42.
- 73 See R.C. Majumdar et al., op. cit., p. 574; Jawaharlal Nehru, op. cit., pp. 237-42.

- 74 See 'India and the Cult of Bhakti', in Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, New York: Asia Publishing House 1959, pp. 1-31.
- 75 D.S. Sharma, *Hinduism Through the Ages*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1961, pp. 248-9; P.D. Davanandan, op. cit., Ch. 6, etc.
- 76 *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton 1974, Vol. 8, p. 888.

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