jnanadeepa

PUNE JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Volume 1, No. 1 January 1998

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Pune Journal of Religious Studies

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Jnanadeepa (="Light of Wisdom" pronounced as *Jñānadīpā*) is a biannual journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

Jnanadeepa is published biannually in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned. They could be sent (preferrably as a text file) in a computer diskette or through E-mail.

All correspondence (requests for subscription, manuscripts, books for review, exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

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Country	*Subscription Rates*	
	For one year	*For three years*
India, Nepal, Bhutan	Ind. Rs. 80	Ind. Rs. 200
Bangladesh	Ind. Rs. 85	Ind. Rs. 240
Sri Lanka	Ind. Rs. 140	Ind. Rs. 400
Pakistan	US $ 12	US $ 30
Other Countries (Air Mail)	US $ 20	US $ 55

Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or Demand Draft. For cheques add Rs. 10/- as encashment fee. From other countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries it could also be sent by British Postal Order. All payments are to be made in the name of ***Jnanadeepa Journal.***

Printed at Amit Printers, Pune-14 (Tel: 681216) and typeset at JDV Computer Centre. Published by Kurien Kunnumpuram for Jnana Deepa Publications.

Editorial

There is a growing awareness among people today of the need for an integrated approach to life and reality. Fragmentation of knowledge is a great danger in our time. Disciplines are getting more and more specialised and tend increasingly to *p*ursue their research in isolation from other disciplines. In this situation *Jnanadeepa* seeks to provide a critical, creative and interdisciplinary approach so that the major questions of our times can be studied from various perspectives. It will address the issues that confront the Church and the country from philosophical, theological and social science perspectives. It will also draw on the rich cultural heritage of India, thereby endeavouring to develop an Indian Christian perspective on them.

In the 50th year of our Independence, things are not going well in our country. According to some observers of the contemporary scene, the Indian Republic is heading towards disaster. As Mr. Chandra Shekhar remarks: "What is happening is: We are falling apart. We are in a mad rush towards disintegration."[1] This is certainly an exaggeration. All the same, it is true that the country is passing through a critical period. Signs of the crisis are many and varied: the decay of national institutions; the polarisation of political parties; the growth of communalism and regionalism; the discontent of the poverty-stricken masses; growing violence; rampant corruption; and so on. What is very unfortunate is the fact that the forces of disintegration receive support and encouragement from greedy and power-hungry politicians. They unscrupulously exploit religion, caste, ethnic diversity and economic disparity for political mobilisation. All this adversely affects the all round growth of the nation.

As has been pointed out:

> Modern India faces a stark choice – it can accept divisions of its society which will lead to continuing poverty and undermine social progress, or it can work to integrate the concept of nationhood and build a prosperous future.[2]

It is against this background that the first issue of *Jnanadeepa* has chosen as its theme: *Our Commitment to a United India.* The unity we envisage is a unity in diversity which is consonant with the composite culture of this land. As communalism threatens to tear apart the very fabric of the nation we begin with an empirical study of this phenomenon. The different religious traditions of India can make a significant contribution to national unity. Hence we highlight the possible contributions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Other papers deal with

the problems and challenges which arise from the experience of the tribal people as well as the Dalit Christians. In the multi-religious context of the country the founding fathers opted for a secular state. What does secularism mean? One of the articles discusses the nature of secularism.

The writers of the papers make no claim to completeness and definiteness. They seek to explore the possible pathways to the future. What they have said, they hope, will stimulate further reflection leading to action.

Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ

1. Chandra Shekhar, "The Real Untouchable Is not the BJP, It Is Me", *The Times of India*, Mumbai, December 19, 1997, p. 17.
2. Srichand P. Hinduja, "Our 'Hindu' Identity: A Vision for the Millennium", *The Times of India*, Mumbai, December 11, 1997, p. 13.

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Communalism in India
An Empirical Investigation

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India is known as the cradle of world religions. Four world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism were born here, and two others, Christianity and Islam, came to this country already in the first century of their existence. Indian civilisation is a product of the dynamic interplay of different religious traditions, with their diverse creeds, codes, and life-styles. The Indian way of life was traditionally characterised by tolerance and respect for religious faiths other than one's own.

The British rule with its 'divide and rule' policy generated mistrust and antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims. Communal clashes began to occur in different parts of the country with increasing frequency. Not surprisingly, India's freedom from the colonial rule on August 15, 1947 was marked by unprecedented communal violence and bloodshed. The nation-builders hoped that the constitution of India as a sovereign, secular, democratic republic would usher in a new era of peace and harmony among its religious communities. Their hopes, however, were belied. The first decade after independence was virtually free of communal disturbances, but communalism raised its ugly head again in the sixties. Since then communal conflicts have been taking place with greater frequency and virulence. What is worse, inter-religious conflicts, which were largely confined to the urban centres in the past, have now begun to spread to rural areas too, involving not only Hindus and Muslims, but also other communities like Christians and Sikhs.

The spectre of communalism stalks the cradle of world religions today. Communalism is the gravest threat to India's unity and integrity as it enters the third millennium. It is against this background that the II B.Th. students of 1996, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. Pune, chose Communalism as the topic of their field study[1] and reflection. In the design and execution of this study the students were assisted and guided by the members of the staff of the Faculties of Theology and Philosophy. The study was financed in part by a grant from MISSIO, Achen, Germany.

From time immemorial religions without exception have preached love, unity and fellowship as their central message. Yet, paradoxically, religions appear to be the most potent divisive force in the world today. They teach peace, but create strife. How do religions become agents and instruments of hatred and violence? What are the factors that precipitate and orchestrate

communal conflicts? What kind of measures are likely to be effective in combating the menace of communalism? These are some of the questions this study sought to address.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, communalism was defined as 'a complex of negative perceptions, hostile feelings and aggressive behaviour of the members of one religious community towards another, which is assumed to pose a threat to its interests'.

Our investigation focused, among others, on the following aspects of communalism:

- issues, agents and dynamics of communal conflicts;
- communal stereotypes;
- correlates of religious intolerance;
- perspectives on certain communally sensitive issues.

The study was conducted in October 1996 at the following locations, where violent communal clashes had taken place in the recent past: Bhagalpur, Banaras, Delhi, Bhopal, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Tuticorin, Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Kozhikode. The conflicts in Banaras, Bhagalpur, Bhopal, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kozhikode were between the Hindus and the Muslims, while in Tuticorin and Kollam it was between the Hindus and the Christians. The conflict in Delhi involved the Hindus and the Sikhs, and in Thiruvananthapuram the clash was between the Muslims and the Christians.

Structured interview was the principal method of data collection. In addition to direct questions that elicited the respondents' views on how and why the conflict in question erupted and escalated, the interview questionnaire also contained composite indices designed to measure, among other things, religious intolerance, religious fundamentalism, conventional religiosity, and knowledge about other religions.

A pilot study was conducted in the city of Pune to pre-test the questionnaire. Four hundred and seventeen respondents from different communities were interviewed as part of this pilot project.

In order to ensure probability and minimise bias, a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling strategy was adopted in the selection of respondents. At each venue of the study, the investigators first mapped out the areas that were affected by the conflict in question. Some of these areas were then randomly chosen for investigation. In each designated area, a certain number of households were first selected, and from each of these households an adult member was chosen as the respondent. At each stage, the sampling units were chosen according to the method of random selection. The sample was stratified in order to ensure adequate number of respondents from the two communities involved in the conflict.

One hundred and ten trained investigators were involved in the data collection, which was done in the second half of October 1996. In all, 6507 interviews were completed. On the average an interview lasted an hour.

Profile of the Sample

Region

As already indicated, the sample for this study was drawn from ten locations in India, where communal clashes had occurred in the recent past. Table 1 presents the region-wise distribution of the sample.

Table 1: ***Distribution of the Sample by Region***

Region	Count	Percent
Banaras	664	10.2
Bhagalpur	641	9.9
Bhopal	571	8.8
Delhi	746	11.5
Hyderabad	630	9.7
Kollam	753	11.6
Kozhikode	709	10.9
Mumbai	550	8.5
Thiru'puram	473	7.3
Tuticorin	764	11.8
Total	**6501**	**100.0**

Missing cases = 6

Religion

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were Hindus, thirty percent Muslims, seventeen percent Christians and six percent Sikhs. Six of the ten conflicts we investigated were between Hindus and Muslims. Of the remaining four, two were between Christians and Hindus, and one each between Muslims and Christians, and Sikhs and Hindus. The distribution of the sample by the communities involved in the conflict is given in Table 2.

Table 2: ***Distribution of Sample by Communities in Conflict***

Communities	Count	Percent
Hindu-Muslim	3752	57.7
Hindu-Christian	1517	23.3
Hindu-Sikh	756	11.6
Muslim-Christian	473	7.3
Total	**6498**	**99.9**

Missing Cases = 9

Sex, Age, Marital Status

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were male, and thirty-eight percent female. Thirty-four percent were between 16 to 30 years of age, forty-five percent between 31 to 50 years and twenty percent above 50 years. The median age was 38 years. Seventy-four percent were married, twenty-two percent single and four percent widowed or divorced.

Education and Economic Status

The distribution of respondents by education level is given in Table 3 below. Compared to the national average, the education level of our respondents is quite high. While only thirteen percent had no schooling, nearly a third of the sample had college education.

Table 3: ***Education Level***

	Count	Percent
No schooling	828	12.8
Primary school	841	13.0
Middle school	932	14.5
Secondary	1054	16.4
Higher secondary	803	12.5
Graduation	1317	20.4
Post-graduation	669	10.4
Total	**6444**	**100.0**

Missing cases = 63

In terms of economic status, almost half (47%) of the respondents were from the lower middle class. About a third belonged to the upper middle or upper class; the rest came from the lower class.

Conventional Religious Practices

Table 4 gives a picture of the religious practices of the four communities in our sample. The Muslims are clearly different from the others in this respect. They are more likely to frequent places of worship, pray privately, read/recite from the Scriptures, and give religious instruction to their children. The Sikhs and the Christians are quite alike in the observance of conventional religious practices. Of the four groups, the Hindus are least likely to engage in these religious practices on a regular basis. It should be borne in mind that the frequency of religious practices varies according to the prescriptions specific to each community; therefore, inter-community comparisons on this basis can be misleading. Furthermore, conformity to conventional religious practices is not necessarily a measure of a person's religiousness or spirituality.

Personal Loss

A large number of the respondents had personally suffered as a result of the conflict. One out of every ten reported that one or more of their family members were killed in the riots. One fifth of them said that they or their family members suffered physical injury; and nearly one third of them had their property destroyed in the conflict.

Table 4: ***Frequency of Conventional Religious Practices by Religion (Percent responding 'regularly')***

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Go to place of worship	20.5	51.2	34.7	37.7
Pray privately	23.8	48.4	29.5	30.8
Read/recite from Scripture	8.3	33.8	15.3	13.1
Instruct the young in religion	14.2	38.9	20.3	14.8

Dynamics of Communal Conflicts

Deliberately Instigated

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (86%) stated that before the conflict erupted the relationship between the two communities was harmonious. And the majority was of the view that the conflict did not break out spontaneously or accidentally. Fifty-six percent felt that the conflict was pre-planned and deliberately orchestrated by certain vested interests. Twenty-three percent did not share this perception, and the rest were unsure. The Muslims, in general, are more likely to believe that communal conflicts are instigated deliberately. In Delhi, almost all the Sikh respondents (91%) felt that the attack against them, in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, was a pre-planned affair.

The majority of the respondents held religious communities and/or political parties responsible for initiating the conflict. Sixty-six percent thought that religious communities were involved in the instigation of violence. While forty-six percent singled out one religious community, usually the outgroup, twenty percent felt that both the communities were responsible for precipitating the conflict.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents blamed the political parties for instigating the violence. Both the major national political parties, the Indian National Congress (Congress I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are seen to be involved in fomenting communal conflicts. While the Muslims and the Christians are far more likely to point an accusing finger at the BJP, the Hindus say that the Congress (I) is equally guilty of exploiting communal passions. Understandably, the Sikhs held the Congress (I) squarely responsible for the pogrom in Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Immediate Provocation

Political and/or religious issues are cited by the majority of the respondents as the immediate provocation for the conflict. Sixty-three percent indicated that the first incident that provoked the riot was political in nature and fifty-three percent felt that the precipitating factor was related to religious sentiments. Less than a third of the respondents suggested that economic issues had a role in triggering the conflict. Other factors like caste rivalry and government policies were mentioned marginally. Only in Tuticorin the caste issue was a dominant factor. Here, two castes, the Nadars and the Paravas, have an ongoing hostile relationship with each other.

Aggressors and Victims

It is not surprising that the respondents generally looked upon their own community as the victim rather than the aggressor in the conflict. An exception to this pattern is the Hindu-Sikh conflict in Delhi where almost all the respondents, Hindus as well as Sikhs, felt that the Sikhs were the victims. In general, the minority communities are more likely to see themselves as victims than the majority community. In the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, for example, while fifty-six percent of the Muslims felt that their community was on the receiving end, only thirty-six percent of the Hindus indicated that their community suffered more in the conflict.

Motives for Inciting Conflict

As indicated above, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that communal conflicts are deliberately instigated by vested interests. What are the factors that motivate them to incite communal violence? Table 5 presents the responses of the four groups to this question.

Nearly two-thirds of the sample identified party-politics as the motive behind communal violence. Compared to the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims are somewhat more likely to suspect political motives behind communal conflicts. However, the Christians in our sample feel differently. They see retaliation as the main motive. Nearly

Table 5: ***Motives Behind Violence by Religion (%)***

Motives	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	All
Party Politics	64.5	71.3	45.2	75.1	64.4
Retaliation	50.8	44.9	71.9	65.3	53.3
Economic Gain	38.1	42.6	40.8	54.9	41.2
Subjugation	29.7	40.8	43.1	47.3	36.6
Humiliation	26.4	29.3	41.6	49.3	31.4

two-thirds of the Sikhs, too, cite this as a reason. A substantial number of the respondents view communal conflicts also as a clash of economic interests. Other motives like subjugation and humiliation of the other community were indicated as possible motives by about a third of the respondents. As might be expected, the minority communities are more likely to look upon communal conflicts as attempts to subjugate them.

Response to Violence

Nearly eighty percent of the respondents from the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities acknowledged that the members of their community retaliated violently when they were attacked. However, only twenty-seven percent justified this 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' attitude. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) disapproved of their community's violent reaction, while another twenty-seven percent were non-committal on the issue. The Sikhs are an exception to this pattern. The vast majority felt that their community did not react to the violence committed against them. And a third of them said that their community should have taken a more aggressive stance.

It is comforting to know that the majority in all the four communities do not favour violent retaliation even when their community is under attack. What is disconcerting is that it is the will of a minority, who believe in repaying in same coin, that often seems to prevail.

Escalation of Conflict

Table 6 below gives the perceptions of our respondents about the agencies involved in the escalation of communal violence.

Table 6: ***Agents Escalating Violence (%)***

Political Leaders	72.0
Police	60.2
Criminals	55.4
Religious Leaders	37.0
Business/Landlords	22.7
Trade Unions	8.2

Once again the politician emerges as the villain of the piece in the sordid drama of communal violence and destruction. As Table 6 indicates, nearly three-fourths of our respondents have little doubt that the political leaders play a sinister role in the escalation of communal violence. Paradoxically, the police, the custodians of law and order are next in line, with sixty percent of the respondents pointing the finger at

them for the escalation of communal violence. The criminals are not far behind. The sad spectacle of the police, the guardians of the public, joining hands with criminals to perpetrate violence on innocent citizens is symptomatic of the contradictions that beset our society today. Taken together, these findings suggest that the majority of our respondents suspect that a *politician-police-criminal nexus* is behind the proliferation of communal conflicts in India.

Significantly, the minorities have virtually lost trust in the integrity of the police force. Seventy percent of the Muslims, sixty-two percent of the Christians and ninety percent of the Sikhs hold the police guilty of escalating communal strife. In contrast, only forty-nine percent of the Hindus are critical of the role of the police in communal conflicts

Relatively fewer respondents felt that the religious leaders were themselves involved in the escalation of violence.

Table 7 highlights some of the other factors that contribute to the escalation of conflict. Most often communal conflicts are exacerbated by false rumours about sacrileges of sacred places and atrocities committed against the members of one's community. About half of the respondents suggested that meetings, processions and *Morchas* organised during the conflict, and inflammatory slogans raised in them serve to aggravate the conflict.

A substantial number of the respondents were of the opinion that the newspaper reports also contributed to the escalation of violence. In fact, when asked if the newspaper reports of the conflict were objective, two-thirds of the respondents replied in the negative.

Table 7: ***Factors contributing to Escalation of Violence (%)***

False Rumours	69.3
Meetings	53.9
Inflammatory Slogans	53.5
Processions and *Morchas*	49.7
Biased Reports in the Print Media	40.5
Posters and Handbills	25.3

Present Situation

At the time of this study, the situation was more or less peaceful at all the field locations. In Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Tuticorin the overwhelming majority of the respondents gave credit to the local religious leaders for taking the initiative to restore peace, whereas in Bhagalpur, Delhi and Mumbai the majority view was that the conflict was resolved by the intervention of government agencies. The initiatives of the voluntary organisations and government agencies were seen to be equally instrumental in bringing about peace in Banaras, Bhopal and Hyderabad. Only in Kozhikode, political leaders were reported to have played a role in resolving the conflict.

As Table 8 reveals, the vast majority of the respondents from Banaras, Bhagalpur, Hyderabad, and Kollam characterise the present relationship between the two communities as 'harmonious'. Opinion is divided in Bhopal,

Mumbai, Delhi and Tuticorin, with about half of the respondents indicating that the relationship between the two communities continues to be disturbed or tense. In Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode the situation is still volatile according to the vast majority.

Table 8: ***Perception of the Present Situation by Place (%)***

Place of Conflict	Present Situation	
	Harmonious	Tense/ Disturbed
Banaras	68.8	31.2
Bhagalpur	81.0	19.0
Bhopal	56.4	43.6
Delhi	47.2	52.8
Hyderabad	76.5	23.5
Kollam	75.3	24.7
Kozhikode	27.8	72.8
Mumbai	56.5	43.5
Thiru'puram	5.7	94.3
Tuticorin	42.1	57.9

A large number of respondents from Banaras (43%), Bhopal (42%), Hyderabad (43%), Kozhikode (59%), Thiruvananthapuram (42%), and Tuticorin (45%) expressed the fear that a fresh conflict may break out at any time. In fact, there was already recurrence of violence in Kozhikode.

Thus, although overt conflict has ended in these places, the peace that exists appears to be very fragile. The majority of our respondents were of the view that impartial law enforcement and the intervention of religious leaders are most likely to help establish a more enduring peace.

Communal Stereotypes

Stereotyping is an important aspect of communal consciousness. Much scholarly work has been done on how stereotypes distort perception and influence behaviour. Stereotypes are a set of characteristics, positive or negative, which are assumed, without evidence, to fit an individual or a group. Such simplistic and unwarranted generalisations are an important source of prejudice. Gordon Allport has defined prejudice as "a feeling, favourable or unfavourable towards a person or thing, prior to or not based on actual experience."[2] Communal stereotypes undoubtedly play a key role in promoting and perpetuating antagonistic attitudes and behaviour between communities.

Our study attempted to ascertain the extent to which communal stereotypes have been internalised by the four communities under discussion. Table 9 below reveals the stereotypes the Hindus have about the Muslims, and Table 10 portrays the picture the Muslims have about the Hindus. Space does not permit us to discuss the stereotypes of the other communities here.

The data in Table 9 clearly reveal strong negative prejudice among the Hindus towards the Muslim community in India. That a significant majority of the Hindus in India do not hesitate to affirm, without adequate evidence, that the Muslims in general are fanatic, violent, and oppressors of women is certainly disconcerting. It is instructive to note that only one-fourth or less of the Hindu respondents expressed disagreement with these unwarranted generalisations about their Muslim brethren.

Table 9: ***Hindu Stereotypes About Muslims (%)***

The Muslims:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
are not loyal to India	41.4	27.5	31.1
are prone to violence	61.1	25.2	13.7
are fanatic	72.5	14.0	13.5
engage in antisocial activities like smuggling	41.8	22.4	35.8
oppress their women	60.4	15.8	23.8

Table 10 shows that a sizeable number in the Muslim community have internalised negative stereotypes about the Hindus. However, a comparison of the data in the two tables reveals that the Hindus have greater prejudice against the Muslims than vice versa.

Education was generally found to be inversely correlated to negative stereotyping of outgroups. This relationship, however, was not uniform in the two groups. The impact of education on prejudice was much stronger among the Muslims than among the Hindus.

Table 10: ***Muslim Stereotypes About Hindus (%)***

The Hindus:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
are not trustworthy	32.2	47.4	20.5
have no respect for the Muslim way of life	42.8	38.2	19.0
are against the progress of Minorities	46.3	34.5	19.2
are prone to violence	31.7	39.8	28.5

Correlates of Religious Intolerance

An index of religious intolerance was constructed for each of the four religious groups by aggregating their responses to a number of positive and negative statements about the community with which they were in conflict. Agreements with negative statements or disagreements with positive ones were taken as indications of religious intolerance.

Education

As might be expected, education appeared to be one of the most consistent predictors of attitudes to religious outgroups. The lesser-educated respondents in all the groups displayed significantly higher levels of intolerance towards the members of the other religious community.

Fundamentalism

Conventional wisdom has it that fundamentalism and religious intolerance go hand in hand, i.e., the greater the fundamentalism, the stronger the prejudice against other religious communities. In order to test this hypothesis, a composite measure of fundamentalism was constructed using the items in Table 11.

Table 11: ***Fundamentalism by Religion (Percent Agreeing)***

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
My religion is the only true religion	21.9	44.3	45.4	25.1
What is written in the Holy Book(s) is literally true	51.4	86.6	65.6	66.7
Never question the teachings of religious leaders	26.1	36.1	34.9	34.4
Inter-religious marriages should be encouraged	60.2	40.0	57.3	51.7
Children should be taught prayers of all religions	73.3	71.3	69.0	46.1

One clear indication of religious fundamentalism is the insistence that one's religion alone is true. Against this criterion the Hindus and the Sikhs are seen as least fundamentalist and most open to the truth of other religions. As we may expect, the Christians and Muslims are both more fundamentalist in this respect.

A fundamentalist attitude is also seen in the unquestioning acceptance of what one's religious leaders teach. Here too only one fourth of the Hindus agree that this is how it should be, whereas more than a third of the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs subscribe to this notion.

A literal interpretation of the Sacred Books is another sign of a fundamentalist position. An overwhelming eighty-seven percent of the Muslims believe in the literal interpretation of their Holy Book. While two thirds of the Christians and Sikhs endorse this notion, only half of the Hindus subscribe to it.

Fundamentalists generally tend to be exclusive in their relationships. They are unlikely to approve of inter-religious marriages. On this criterion, the Muslims are the most fundamentalist, and the Hindus the least. The Christians and the Sikhs occupy the middle position.

On a more positive note, all the communities favour the teaching of prayers of other religions to their children in schools. Strangely, the Sikhs score lowest here, with less than half of them in favour of it.

We found a strong association between religious fundamentalism and intolerance of outgroups. The higher the level of fundamentalism, the greater the degree of religious intolerance. It should be noted that the index of fundamentalism was used only for within-community comparisons and not for between-community comparisons. That is to say, the more fundamentalist Hindus were compared with the less fundamentalist Hindus, the more fundamentalist Muslims with the less fundamentalist Muslims, and so on, in order to see the effect of fundamentalism on religious intolerance.

The better-educated persons in all the communities were less fundamen-

talist than the less educated ones. However, the relationship between fundamentalism and religious intolerance persisted even after controlling for the effects of education.

Knowledge about Other Religions

Does knowledge about the beliefs and practices of another religion make one more tolerant towards the members of that religion? In order to investigate this, questions were framed to discover how well informed the different communities are about the religious teachings and practices of the community with which they were in conflict. It was reassuring to see that the majority of our respondents were knowledgeable about the gods, feasts, holy books and holy places of the other religious communities. Information about the teachings of the other religions, however, was relatively low.

The data indicate that the respondents who were better informed about other religions were significantly more respectful and tolerant towards other religious groups.

Conventional Religiosity

Another question we studied is the relationship between conventional religiosity and communalism. Are those who faithfully conform to the practices of their religion more or less tolerant of other religious communities? In order to investigate this, a composite index of conventional religiosity was constructed by aggregating the responses with regard to the frequency of worship, private prayer, reading or recitation from the Scriptures and religious instruction of the young. Since the type and frequency of conventional religious practices vary according to the norms of particular religions, this index was used only for within-group comparisons, that is, to compare less religious Muslims with more religious Muslims, less religious Hindus with more religious Hindus, and so on.

Our analysis showed that conventional religiosity, as measured by conformity to conventional religious practices, was not related in any manner to a person's level of religious tolerance. In other words, the faithfulness to one's religious practices does not make one more or less tolerant of other religious communities.

Perspectives on Sensitive Issues

Babri-Masjid or Ram Mandir?

The Babri-Masjid at Ayodya, the birth-place of Ram, was for long a disputed structure. The Hindus claimed that this Masjid was built over a Ram temple that was destroyed by the Muslim invaders. The BJP had been spearheading a movement to pull down the Masjid and to rebuild the Ram temple in its place. To some the Babri-Masjid stood as a symbol of India's commitment to secularism, to others it was an enduring affront to the majority Hindu community. The ruling Congress party pledged to protect it, the leading opposition party, BJP, promised to demolish it.

On December 6, 1992, a frenzied mob demolished the Masjid, triggering Hindu-Muslim conflicts in several parts of the country. In an address to the nation on that fateful night the Congress Prime Minister pledged to rebuild the

Table 12: ***Perspectives on Ayodhya Dispute by Religion (Percent Agreeing)***

	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs
Build a Ram Temple at the site of the Masjid	36.9	9.1	14.0	8.8
Rebuild the Masjid at the very same site	NA	53.4	38.7	12.8

NA= Question was not asked

Masjid in the same place. Table 12 above presents the perspectives of the different communities on this sensitive issue.

It is often claimed that the vast majority of the Hindus in this country would love to see a Ram Mandir built at the site of the destroyed Babri-Masjid. Not so, says our data. Just over a third of our Hindu respondents share this view, with nearly half (47%) rejecting it. As might be expected, very few Muslims are in favour building the temple at the site of the Masjid. Over three-fourths (76.2%) are opposed to the idea. Here the Christians support the Muslim position. Two-thirds of them (66.6%) oppose the building of the temple, and a bare fourteen percent support it. One-fifth of the Christians (19.6%), however, preferred to stay clear of the controversy.

Should the Babri Masjid be rebuilt on the very same site, as the then Prime Minister promised in his broadcast to the nation on the night of the demolition? As the Table indicates, more than half of the Muslims are in favour of restoring the Masjid at the same site. What is surprising is that as many as thirty-six percent of the Muslims themselves are against the idea, while ten percent declined to take a stand. Christians are more or less evenly divided on this issue, with thirty-nine percent percent in favour and forty percent against. A substantial twenty-one percent of the Christians had no firm opinion on the issue. The vast majority of the Sikhs are opposed to both the Temple and the Masjid.

Communal Political Parties

India is a secular democracy. The constitution of the country prohibits the canvassing of votes on the basis of caste, creed or race. Yet there have been political parties who have a clear communalist bias like the Muslim League and the BJP. Should these parties be banned? The responses of the different communities to this question are given in Table 13 below.

As the Table indicates, the vast majority of the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are in favour of banishing the BJP from India's political landscape. As for the Muslim League, less than a half of the Hindus would support such a ban. One-fifth of them were against it, while a third remained unsure. The Christians are as opposed to the Muslim League as they are to BJP.

Table 13: ***Perspectives on Communal Parties by Religion (Percent Agreeing)***

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Bharatiya Janata Party should be banned	NA	60.7	59.3	77.1
Muslim League should be banned	46.9	NA	64.3	NA

NA = Question was not asked

Status of Women

Another communally sensitive issue is the question of a uniform civil code for India. Traditionally, different religious communities have been following their own code as dictated by their religion in matters related to marriage, succession, inheritance, etc. It has been alleged that these codes discriminate against women and therefore they should be replaced by a uniform civil code under which all men and women of India will be treated equally, irrespective of their religion. The minorities, especially the Muslims, have by and large opposed the introduction of such a uniform civil code. Thus the question of the status of women has some bearing on the relationship between communities in India. We sought the opinions of our respondents on this question. Table 14 presents the views of our respondents on the status of women in religion.

As the Table reveals the majority in all the four communities are in favour of granting equal status to women in religion. The Sikhs are most emphatic in supporting the cause of women, with the Hindus not far behind. A third of the Muslims and the Christians, however, are opposed to granting equal status to women in religion.

Table 14: ***Women Should be Given Equal Status in Religion (%)***

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
Favour	75.3	64.7	59.1	81.3
Oppose	18.5	29.6	30.4	9.3
Not Sure	6.2	5.7	10.5	9.3

Conclusion: Policy Implications

In the light of the findings discussed above, I would now like to suggest some policy initiatives that are likely to help combat the menace of communalism.

- *Education for Tolerance*

Education seems to be the best antidote for the communal virus that has infected our country. The data have consistently shown that the better educated in all the communities have greater tol-

erance towards other religious communities. Education was also found to be inversely correlated to fundamentalism, a strong predictor of communalism.

- *De-communalisation of Politics*

Appealing directly or indirectly to communal loyalties and interests for electoral gains seems to be the single most important factor responsible for the rising tide of communal clashes in our country. Electoral reforms that would effectively disallow all forms of political mobilisation on communal basis are imperative to defeat the forces of communalism.

- *Know Thy Neighbours' Religion*

As we have seen, those who are more familiar with the teachings and practices of other religions have greater tolerance of and respect for those religions. If the teachings and practices of all the religions of India are made a necessary component of the syllabus in our schools and colleges, there will no doubt be greater peace and harmony among the religious communities in our country.

- *Professionalisation of the Police*

Our respondents have made it amply clear that the police often contribute to the escalation of communal conflicts instead of combating them. And the majority was of the opinion that effective law enforcement is the key to maintaining communal harmony in India. A more professional police force, which is capable of rising above partisan considerations and enforcing law and order efficiently and dispassionately, is an urgent need for a united India.

- *Affirmative Action by Religious Leadership*

Although religions preach love, compassion and fellowship, religious loyalties are easily exploited by unscrupulous elements to spread the seeds of mistrust, hostility and hatred among communities. As we have seen, those who practice their religion faithfully do not seem to be any different from those who do not, in their attitudes and behaviour towards other religious communities. This clearly indicates that traditional religiosity has failed to inculcate the values of universal brotherhood and respect for all. Religious leaders appear to have become helpless spectators as politicians and criminals hijack religion to promote their vested interests. It is time for the religious leadership in this country to eschew complacency and initiate concerted action to ensure that religions serve the cause of peace, not strife.

Notes

1. Five years ago, the Faculty of Theology of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth introduced the field study programme as part of the theological curriculum in an innovative attempt to make theological studies more experience-based and reality-centered.
2. G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, New York: Doubleday, 1958, p. 413.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 19-30

Bhagavad Gītā's Contribution to the Future of India

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The *Bhagavad Gītā* is the Hindu Scripture that is most widely known and accepted in the world. As part of the threefold scriptural corpus (*prasthānatraya*) *Gītā* has been placed high among the holy scriptures of the Hindu heritage and hence this book has a uniquely representative character. The *bhakti* movements, which had a wide popular appeal and prophetic thrust, as well as the major philosophical schools, which shaped the patterns of Indian thought, found in the *Gītā* an authentic source of inspiration. Over the last two hundred years *the Gītā* has considerably influenced the sages of the Indian renaissance and the leaders of the Freedom Struggle. For Mahatma Gandhi, the *Bhagavad Gītā* has been like a consoling mother and guiding teacher; he found in the *Gītā* "the essence of *dharma*, the highest knowledge that evolved out of experience."[1]

Beyond the frontiers of India and the bounds of Hinduism, the *Gītā* has been globally accepted as a spiritual classic of humanity. One reason for this fascination is that the *Gītā* offers to all seekers a spirituality of personal integration and social harmony. The rational and the emotional, the conscious and the subconscious, the mental and the intuitive, the social and the ecological aspects of the spiritual evolution of a person are brought together in a holistic process of transformation. This process of spirituality evolves through a threefold path (*mārga*): *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *karma*: contemplative perception of reality, loving self-surrender to the divine Lord and greedless work for the welfare of all. The *Gītā* does not describe them as three separate ways of spirituality independent of each other as if a seeker could pursue only one of these ways. Rather it offers a threefold path of spiritual integration. All the three are constituent elements of a liberative spirituality.[2] *Jñāna* enlightens *bhakti* and *karma*; *bhakti* enlivens *jñāna* and *karma*; *karma* actualises *jñāna* and *bhakti*. These are correlative dimensions interwoven in the one integral growth process. We shall examine this threefold path in the first section and explore its relevance for the future of India in the second section.

1.1. *Jñāna*- mārga

There are two types of knowledge: that of the mind (*manas*) and that of the intuitive faculty (*buddhi*). Mind objectifies everything and analyses reality within the I-thou/it framework; mind grasps reality through conceptualisation and articulates this understanding through words. It is a fragmentary encounter with reality. What takes shape

through this mental process is *vijñāna*, informative knowledge. *Buddhi* is the faculty of a deeper perception. Through the *buddhi* one perceives reality as part of the subject; the perceiving subject finds itself as part of the totality of reality. Mind pursues the logic of things, while *buddhi* intuits the mystery of reality. Mind speculates on the horizontal plane; *buddhi* dives vertically into the sacred depth of reality. *Buddhi* perceives reality through participatory contemplation and expresses this insight through poetic and mythical symbols. What evolves through this intuitive process is *jñāna*, transforming wisdom.[3]

Integral perception of reality according to the *Gītā* is a combination of both *jñāna* and *vijñāna* (6:8, 7:2, 9:1). One has to acquire objective knowledge through an analytical process of the mind, and for this Scriptures and teachers, customs and traditions are of vital importance (4:34, 16:23-24). The genuine seeker cannot do away with them because through them one is inserted into the living heritage of humanity. The information communicated through the senses are inevitable for the acquisition of objective knowledge and in this process the senses are really 'noble' (3:42). However the information received through the senses and the mind is assimilated in the spiritual evolution of the person through *buddhi*. Thus *jñāna* offers depth and perspective to *vijñāna*. *Jñāna* is ultimately the inner awakening to the divine dimension of reality within and around oneself. According to the *Gītā jñāna* has two aspects:

a. To see the Self in the self through the Self (6:20,13:25). *Jñāna* is the intuitive perception of the divine Self within oneself, and of oneself within the divine Self. It is an experience of total transparence at the core of one's being. *Buddhi* is enlightened by 'divine grace' (10:10, 18:73) and the human person is enabled to look at reality with a 'divine eye' (11:8). The 'light of wisdom' (10:11) shines forth in the *buddhi* whereby the seeker perceives unity at the core of reality (13:12). It is the inner awakening to the 'light of lights hidden in the heart of everything' (13:18). It is the awareness of the personal self (*ātman*) becoming totally transparent to the divine Self (*Atman*) (7:18-19).

b. To see the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self (6:29). In the *jñāna* experience one perceives and even 'tastes' the divine presence in every bit of reality (4:35, 7:8, 13:28). The entire universe is perceived as the 'body of God' (11:13) and the 'temple of the Lord' (13:3). All beings are permeated by the Divine (9:4) as their 'beginning, middle and end' (10:20), 'source of life, nourishing ground and ultimate goal' (9:17-18, 15:4). The whole universe is within the Divine (8:22) and the Divine is 'within the heart of all' (15:15): 'the immutable seed' (7:10) and 'the inner light' (13:18). It is an experience of the universal theophany. *Jñāna* is an expansion of consciousness that enables the human person to see reality holistically. One feels one's personal self resonating with the totality of reality (4:35). With this integral vision *jñāna* offers 'the most powerful means of self-purification' and the 'surest way to ultimate liberation' (4:36-39).

1.2. *Bhakti-mārga*

Bhakti is basically the attitude of sharing oneself totally with the Divine. It is the experience of having a share in divine life. At the level of the mind *bhakti* is expressed through cultic symbols, ritual performances, offerings and chanting (9:14, 26). The *Gītā* acknowledges the abiding value of these external religious expressions of *bhakti* (18:5). The *bhakta* cannot ignore them because they bind the individual with the community. However, *bhakti* has to be deepened through a process of inner self-surrender to the divine Lord, who is at work within and around oneself. *Bhakti* too has therefore two aspects:

a. Surrender to the Lord within oneself. The divine Lord of the *Gītā* invites the devotee (*bhakta*) 'to fix the mind on the Lord, anchor the psyche on Him and open the *buddhi* towards Him (9:34, 6:14, 12:8-12). The *bhakta* has to 'take refuge in the Lord with the entire being' and 'surrender oneself unconditionally to the Lord within' (18:56, 62, 66). *Bhakti* consists not in surrendering oneself to an alien God, but to the divine Self within oneself. God meets the devotee from within the core of the latter's being and consequently the devotee is graced with the experience of 'residing in the Lord' and even 'becoming one with the divine Self' (4:10, *madbhāva*). This experience of mystical union does not mean the annihilation of the individual self (6:30, 9:31), but the indwelling of the self in the divine Self: 'I am in them, and they are in me' (9:29).[4]

b. Surrender to the Lord in the world. In the wake of the expansion of consciousness through *jñāna, bhakti* too takes on a cosmic dimension. When the universe is perceived as the body of the Lord, the devotee understands work as worship. One encounters the divine Lord in all beings and in all situations of life. 'One worships the Lord present in all beings as their source of life' (9:13,10:8). The devotee experiences a deep 'union with the Lord present in all beings' (6:31) and consequently an all-embracing 'concern for the welfare of all beings' (12:4). Under the impact of being loved by the Lord (4:3,11) a person cannot hate anything, but 'be compassionate and friendly towards all beings' (12:13). Concern for the integral well-being of all becomes a 'passion' (*rati*) for a person who worships the Lord present in the world (5:25, 10:20). Every bit of reality becomes sacred to him, for everything communicates to him the loving presence of the Lord. With this integral attitude to reality *bhakti* becomes the primary means of 'justifying the sinner' and the salvific way accessible to all irrespective of caste-based divisions (9:30-32).

1.3. *Karma-mārga*

Karma mārga is the spiritual path of action.The *Gītā* does not advocate a spirituality of inaction at all. Through *karma* human persons participate in the work of God who goes on working for maintaining the universe in being and order (3:22-24). Hence *karma* is an inevitable factor of the process of life (18:59). One's attitude to *karma* is determined by the spiritual perspective which one develops. At the level of the extrovert mind *karma* consists in pursuing the ordinances given by scriptures

and masters, authorities and social customs. The *Gītā* finds them necessary for determining one's specific duty (*svadharma*) in society (2:31-32, 16:24). These external helps are needed for social integration. However, the spiritual person has to deepen his motives and strengthen his motivations. For this the *Gītā* offers the spirituality of *karmayoga*, which has two aspects:

a. *Niṣkāma karma*: work done with an inner freedom from greed. In the wake of the intuitive perception of *jñāna* and the inner self-surrender in *bhakti* one develops a deeper subject consciousness: I am not truly the subject of my actions (*nir-ahaṁkāra*), nor am I the real enjoyer of the fruits of the actions (*nir-mama*, 2:71, 12:13); God in me does his works and I am only an instrument in God's hands (3:15, 18:56-57). With this attitude one is progressively liberated from the compulsive and possessive drive of greed (*kāma*, 3:37-43). Action with this inner freedom is *Niṣkāma karma*. The *Gītā* does not advocate that one should give up one's works, but demands that one's duty has to be done with diligence and skill, responsibility and equanimity (2:47-50, 6:1,2:38). For this it is important that one 'surrenders all one's actions to the divine Lord' (9:27, 12:10) who is the ultimate doer and enjoyer of all actions (9:24), and who impels the person from within to get engaged in action. As in the case of *bhakti* one surrenders one's actions not to any alien force but to the inner divine agent of all liberative actions.

b. *Lokasaṁgraha*: working for the integral welfare of the world. Since the universe is the body of the Lord, works done in surrender to the 'word of the Lord' (18:73) is participation in the divine work. The *Gītā* describes this divine work in terms of reinstating *dharma*: integration in all realms of life (4:8, 14:27). Human participation in this salvific divine work thereby gets a new motivation: work becomes liberative only if it is fulfilled with a concern for bringing about the integral welfare of the world (*Lokasaṁgraha*, 3:20,25; 4:23). This would mean an active commitment to the promotion of love and harmony, freedom and equanimity.(5:18, 6:9, 12:13). *Karmayoga* means also 'a passionate concern for the well-being of all realities', not only humans (5:25, 12:4.). According to the ecological vision of the *Gītā,* the Creator Lord wants humans to 'nourish the life-sustaining powers of nature' (*devas*). Promotion of this vital interdependence between nature and humans is *yajña*, which alone 'makes human action liberative' (3:9-13). *Karmayoga* is therefore active commitment to the integral welfare of all and to the promotion of harmony between human society and nature.

With this threefold path the *Gītā* offers a spirituality that integrates the intellectual, the emotional and the intuitive aspects of the individual's life by tuning it with the all-embracing love of the divine Lord felt in human relations as well as in the relationality with nature. It is a spirituality with personal, interpersonal as well as cosmic dimensions of transformation. Generations of seekers found in this spirituality a source of strength and inspiration. Since the *Gītā* is a normative Scripture of Hin-

duism, the integral spirituality of the *Gītā* is a significant contribution of the Hindu spiritual heritage to the future of India, and of humanity at large. The *Gītā* raises also a strong critique of some of the recent developments on the religio-cultural landscape of India. We shall reflect on them in view of discerning the significance of this spiritual classic for the future of this country.

2.1. Ambivalent Religiosity

Indians are known to be a very religious people. The attitudes of an average Indian to life and work has been considerably shaped by religious symbols and values. Colourful and noisy forms of religious expression in rituals and ceremonies, feasts and festivals, temples and shrines, customs and traditions characterise the life of the people. In recent years there is a tremendous revival in popular religious celebrations, growing interest in pilgrimages and mass appeal for religious discourses. Houses of worship are being expensively renovated and massive new ones are being built all over the country. Communities of believers are being powerfully organised on political patterns, and structures of discipline are strengthened. With all this a powerful religious culture is created in the country with all its ambivalence. There is, however, an immanent danger of the objectification of the Divine: reification of God in concrete symbols and structures which tend to become idols. Once the religious symbols lose their transparent character and transforming power, they become easy prey to political manipulation and commercial exploitation. Religion gradually becomes a commodity misappropriated by the elite and consumed by the people. God is reduced to a product of the religious system.

The *Gītā* has been very critical of this idolisation of the Divine through ritualism, structuralism and elitism. It reminds the seeker that the Divine is the incomprehensible mystery that cannot be possessed through finite words and rituals (8:9, 13:16, 12:3). The religious men who go about 'with flowery words' preaching the 'letter of the Scriptures' and performing 'elaborate rituals' promising to the devotees favours of 'enjoyment and power' are called 'greedy persons' in the *Gītā* (2:42-44). They forget the truth that the divine Lord is the real 'priest and enjoyer' of rituals (9:24), and they misuse religion for amassing wealth and power for themselves (16:15). The *Gītā* does not tolerate the performance of religious rituals in view of personal gain. The soul of ritual is single-minded devotion (*bhakti* 9:26) and genuine faith (*śraddhā*, 7:21-22) that liberates the person or community from greed (*kāma*). Hence a genuine seeker will constantly call in question the validity of religious expressions in the 'divine light of *jñāna* experience' (10:11). This has been the powerful inspiration of the Upanishadic heritage too. A constant critique of religion through spirituality has to be an essential factor of the spiritual growth process in the life of the individual as well as of the community. Ultimately religious rituals and structures have to contribute to the liberation of human persons and the integrity of nature. The *Gītā* corrected the traditional ritualistic meaning given to *karma* and elaborated

karma in terms of *yajña*: works done without greed and out of a holistic experience (*jñāna*) lead the person to integration (*samagram*, 4:23). What is sacrificed in *yajña* is the enslaving sense of I-and-mine (3:9, 4:33). Hence genuine *yajña* opens the individual to others and binds him with the life-giving powers of nature. The ritual forms of sacrifices and religious structures of social life have meaning only in so far as they contribute to the integral liberation of the individual from greed (*kāma*) and the insertion of the individual into the social and ecological process of harmony (*dharma*). This perspective of the *Gītā* has great significance for the future of religions in India.

2.2. Religious Fundamentalism

A serious consequence of the politicisation of religion is religious fundamentalism, which is on the increase in practically all religious communities in India. This has become a menace to national integration and communal harmony. A major cause of this phenomenon seems to be the reactionary character of religion in the midst of the turmoils of today's secular culture. With the onslaught of international media and secular ideologies, with the emergence of democratic patterns of the state and participatory processes in society, people tend to lose their sense of security within the traditional matrix of religion and experience a massive breakdown of their cultural identity. Frightened by the chaos and meaninglessness which they experience as encroaching upon their lives, they seek their religio-cultural roots in the mythical golden age which is a romantisation of the past heritage. Frantically they take refuge in religious cults and sects which give them a sense of belonging and security. Old myths are colourfully reenacted and ancient rituals restored. Scriptures are given a fundamentalist interpretation through which the identity and superiority of every religious sect is established over against the others. Out of fear and suspicion in relation to others thick walls are put up around every religious community in order to create a sense of security. Into this scenario of communalism political parties and communal forces enter and manipulate religious sentiments and structures in order to safeguard their own vested interests. The overall consequence is that established religions get profaned by being driven by the enslaving forces of greed (*kāma*) and thus lose their true role of liberating the believers from *kāma*, the 'all devouring enemy within' (3:37). At the time of the composition of the *Gītā* there seems to have been an upsurge of fundamentalist sects in India.[5] The Samkhya preachers propagated an ideology of withdrawal into the seclusion of forests as the only means of liberating the spiritual particle from the grips of matter. Advocates of Vedic ritualism upheld the need of elaborate cultic practices for attaining heaven (*svarga*). The remnants of the Upanishadic circles ended up as elitist groups. Faith in God was fragmented into sectarian movements through idolised symbols. The *Gītā* confronts this divisive thrust of religions with the message of a radical spirituality that goes beyond religious divisions. What is decisive in spirituality is *śraddhā*: single-minded attentive-

ness and total surrender to the divine Lord who meets the person from within the core of his being. Religious symbols are only means to evoke this faith and love: "In whatever way devotees come to me, in that same way do I accept and love them; in diverse ways human persons follow my path" (4:11). "Whatever form any devotee endowed with faith wishes to worship, that very faith in him do I make unswerving and steady. With that faith he worships God in that particular form; but he receives the favours ultimately from Me" (7:21-22). The devotee becomes transparent through *śraddhā* only when he is free from greed (7:20). Hence no religious symbol or structure can be a divisive force in the fabric of society, nor can one's religious belief be normative for others. On the contrary, true religion would unite believers beyond all boundaries of religion into a common process of spiritual pilgrimage. In this process all are endowed with the perspective of equanimity, tolerance and genuine concern for one another (6:9, 14:24). The *Gītā*'s emphasis on the Divine as absolute mystery (10:12, 11:18) opens an infinite horizon for a culture of tolerance and dialogue among believers of diverse religions. The effective antidote to the malaise of religious fundamentalism and communalism is to revitalise the genuinely spiritual dynamics at the core of each religion; this would enable believers of each religion to be really seekers of truth through a culture of compassion. The truly religious person of the future will be an interreligious person, in the sense that deeply rooted in one's authentic spiritual experience he would branch off to others for enrichment and critique. Believers of all religions are 'spiritual pilgrims opening themselves genuinely to one another and thus to the Divine'.[6] Creative tolerance, the noble characteristic of the Indian religious psyche, is the antidote to religious fundamentalism.

Another form of reactionary revival is found in re-establishing the traditional patterns of social stratification, in which people felt a sense of security and belonging. In India this takes place through a renewed interest in the divisions based on colour (*varṇa*) and birth (*jāti*). The consequence is that millions of Dalits are marginalised in social life and a minority of the social elite take in their possession resources, power and administration. What has been the *Gītā*'s response to this social malaise?[7] The *Guṇa*-theory proposed by the *Gītā* (4:13, 18:41-45) has been found helpful by Mahatma Gandhi, ineffective by Dr Ambedkar. Over the centuries the *Gītā* has been interpreted by the social elite of India to justify their status as 'ordained by God' (4:13); on the other hand, *Gītā* has also inspired mystics and *bhakti*-poets of the lower strata of society to protest against discrimination and assert their rights. What is significant in this regard is the egalitarian spirituality that the *Gītā* tries to unfold. The *Gītā* teaches in unambiguous terms that all are equal before the divine Lord (9:29, 18:61). But the Lord has a special love for those 'who surrender their lives to Him in genuine love' (*bhakti*): 'they are in him and he is in them' (9:29, 18:64-65). This relation of *bhakti*, however, is not conditioned by birth-bound or caste-bound divisions in social life. In fact it is expressly mentioned that

'those of the so-called inferior birth are dear to the Lord'(9:32).Genuine *bhakti* raises the status of the persons of lower strata and makes them even saints (*dharmātmā*, 9:30-31). A truly spiritual person therefore would not look at others in terms of the caste divisions based on social prejudices. He would rather view 'in the selfsame way' friends and foes, sinners and saints, Brahmins and outcast people' (6:9, 5:18).It is a matter of an integral perspective (*jñāna*) that gives rise to an attitude of 'one's being part of all others' (*bhakti*) and motivates one to work for the welfare of all (*karma*) irrespective of caste and creed. The *Gītā*'s message of equanimity (*samadarśana*) explodes all sorts of sectarian and elitist patterns of thinking and living. This can have lasting consequences in shaping the integrity of social life in India.

2.3. Ambiguities of Modernity

Humanity moving to the third millennium is going through a radical process of change under the impact of globalisation of economy and culture. The world is shrinking into a global village where every one knows everyone else through the proliferation of the media. The whole world is becoming one single market controlled by a few economic power groups at the international level. There is 'no salvation outside the market!'. All countries, especially the economically poor nations, are forced to adapt their policies according to the trends of the global market. Over the last few years India has been drawn into this complex process of globalisation. India's economic policies and educational system, political strategies and cultural patterns are all getting increasingly attuned to the demands of the market of world capitalism. Even religion has been tragically hijacked by mammon. We have almost come to a point of no return.

The basic value of this global economic culture is greed. All are forced to work beyond their capacity and produce commodities which are to be consumed beyond normal need. This compulsive drive to produce and the sickening hunger to consume create a society with deep-rooted alienation: alienation not only from the others but also from one's own true self. The influx of powerful international media right into the intimate spheres of personal and family life accentuates this process of alienation. One of the most affected areas of this malaise in India is the educational system. Efficiency through competition is the cardinal value that is being injected into the children right from the pre-school phase. Since competition is the driving force of the capitalist economy, the educational system that supplies human resources is forced to make this into the axis of the entire educational process. Natural resources and even human persons are reduced to objects of analytical exploration in view of exploiting them as goods for production and consumption. In this educational and technological process there is an overemphasis on the head-level pursuits at the cost of the emotional and intuitive aspects of growth. Education has become an exercise in amassing information and not a process of integral transformation. A monstrous mind-culture (*manas*) evolves without rootedness in intuitive perceptions through *buddhi*.

Mind objectifies and fragments reality while *buddhi* perceives reality in its totality and interdependence.

In the educational heritage of India there has been an integral approach to the formation of the person. The *Gītā* picks up this vision and offers a holistic spirituality in terms of *jñāna, bhakti* and *karma* for the transformation of human individuals. The counterculture perspectives of the *Gītā,* however, are diametrically opposed to the dominant values of the economic policies and educational systems of world capitalism.

At the time of the composition of the *Gītā* there was a dominant culture of arrogance and consumerism. In strongly cynical language the *Gītā* describes the thought pattern of greedy persons who are a prototype of today's consumeristic culture: "Insatiable desire (*kāma*) is the driving force in them; full of hypocrisy, excessive pride and arrogance, clutching at false calculations through delusion, they work with impure motives. Obsessed with innumerable cares they live with no other aim than the gratification of their greed. Bound by hundreds of fetters emerging from desire, impelled by the possessive and angry drive of the mind, they strive to amass hoards of wealth by unjust means (*anyāyena*) to satisfy their *kāma.* They speculate under the delusion of their ignorance: "This have I gained today, this desire I shall satisfy; this wealth is already mine, and more too will be mine soon. He was an enemy and I have already killed him; and many others too I will kill. I am the sole authority and I take my pleasure as I will. I am rich and powerful; I am born in an upper caste family. Who is there like unto me!..." (16: 10-15). These greedy people end up in 'foul hell' (16:16). To escape from this tragic end they try to 'perform rituals and sacrifices', which again are nothing but 'ostentatious forms of a religious *kāma*' (16:17). Thus the sacred landscape of religion too is contaminated by the consumeristic culture. In order to check this destructive development the *Gītā* proposes a countercultural spirituality.

The spiritual antidote to consumerism is asceticism. The opening verse of the Isa Upanishad has a powerful message: enjoy the world through renunciation! The basis for this perspective is that the 'entire reality is permeated by the divine Lord' (Isa Upanishad, 1:1). The *Gītā* pursues this ascetical line of the Upanishadic spirituality. The world belongs to the divine Lord and hence human beings have no right to take possession of anything in the world (*aniketa*, 12:19, *aparigraha*, 6:10). The experience of *jñāna* conveys this cosmic vision that liberates the person from any possessive drive (4:23). Through *bhakti* one surrenders oneself totally to the Lord and through *karma* one participates in the divine work of integration (9:27). This spirituality liberates the person from the consumeristic attitude of *kāma* and integrates him within the totality of the process of *dharma* (18:66). The actions of such a person will be characterised not by competition but by compassion (12:13); the axis of his involvement in the world is not ego-centredness (*ahaṁkāra*) but Self-centredness (*ātmabodha* 6:29); the motivation for work is not accumulation of wealth but the integral well-being of

the world (3:20). The actions guided by the extrovert mind (*manas*) will be constantly nourished by a contemplative introspection of the intuitive faculty (*buddhi* 2:50). A holistic vision of reality will accompany all activities, internal and external.[8] As a result material nature and human persons will not be reduced to objects of manipulation, but they will be looked upon as 'particles of the Divine', as 'reflections of the Self' (15:7, 6:32). The overall consequence is an all-embracing world-view: 'seeing the Same in everything', 'seeing God in all' (6:29-31), 'worshipping the divine Lord in all' (10:8).

Unless such a holistic world-view is communicated through the educational process in India, the future generation will end up in despair and resignation. In order to withstand the onslaught of the manipulative media and consumeristic powers human persons have to experience their rootedness in the Divine within them and their relatedness with all beings in the universe. To come to such a holistic experience there is need of asceticism and discipline, silence and contemplation, in the process of education. The purpose of education is not merely the expansion of the storehouse of the mind but also the sharpening of the intuitive faculty of *buddhi*. It is in *buddhi* that spiritual experiences unfold and ethical values come to blossoming. For this a critical and creative pursuit of myths and folklore, stories and poems, spiritual classics and lives of sages, sacred scriptures of world religions and the major works of art, should become an integral part of the educational system. Ethical values cannot be communicated just in the classroom context; students have to be sensitivised to look deep into themselves and discover the deeper levels of consciousness. The *Gītā* 's idea of intuitive integration (*buddhiyogam*, 10:10, 18:57) and ideal of a person of steady wisdom (*sthitaprajña*, 2:55-72) are substantial contributions to a countercultural educational process.

2.4. Ecological Crisis

Another problem that has taken global dimensions today is the ecological crisis. This is felt acutely in all realms of life and development in India. As long as human beings continue to look at nature only as an object to be appropriated and used, subdued and 'developed', there is the danger of manipulation of nature, destruction of the environment, poisoning of the earth and pollution of the air space. An aggressive approach to the resources of nature would force the human agent to make a machine out of everything, and reduce himself to a slave of these machines. A mechanistic outlook on the environment dominated by a one-sidedly rational perception is the root cause of the ecological crisis. The antidote to this malaise would consist in a holistic worldview that helps human beings to look at nature as an integral element of human subjectivity. One would then look at the earth not as inert matter, but as the extended form of one's body; the human body is transformed earth: earth waking to consciousness (*pṛthivī*). The air that fills the universe and the air that permeates my body is the same vital energy (*prāṇa*). The water that flows in the river and the water that fills my body is the same water. The warmth of life in

my body is the heat energy (*tapas*) that emanates from the sun. With all living beings I live in fellowship in the one common home feeding on the vital sap of mother-earth and energised by father-sky. This experience of deep oneness with all has been the core of the Vedic world-view and of the Upanishadic mysticism. The *Gītā* pursues this contemplative vision of reality and develops an integral spirituality of eco-concern.

In the *Gītā* 's worldview there is no dichotomy between the material and the spiritual dimensions of reality. The spiritual person endowed with *jñāna* perceives the entire reality as emerging out of the divine womb, sustained by the divine life and returning to the divine state (9:18, 10:20). The world is the home of the Divine, the field (*kṣetra*) of his creative work (13:3). Hence human activity should not in any way exploit nature as if it were an objective reality open to exploitation, but only nourish the life-giving powers of nature. The *Gītā* understands this relation as a sacred relation for it is a participation in the divine work of *dharma* (4:8, 14:27, 8:7). Through *bhakti* one surrenders oneself in love to the Lord present in nature and deals with the things of nature with 'compassion and concern' (12:4,13). *Karma* means active commitment to bring about the 'integral welfare of all beings', not only human persons (5:25, 12:13).

In 3:9-13 the *Gītā* speaks specifically of the ecological consequence of an integral spirituality. The key terms there are *yajña* and *deva*. *Yajña* means sacrifice: what is sacrificed is the greedy passion (*kāma*) of the mind, the possessive drive of the person (*ahaṁkāra* 3:9, 4:23); the inner freedom with which human persons should deal with the resources of nature is the heart-beat of *yajña*. *Devas* are the cosmic powers performing different functions in the cosmos, the life-sustaining powers of nature through which the living presence of the Divine shines through (*div*=shine through).[9] The *Gītā* is not a handbook of cultic spirituality, and hence the terms *yajña* and *deva* cannot be interpreted to mean rituals and deities. In fact, the *Gītā* is critical of ritualism and advocates a cosmic spirituality according to which the integration between human beings and the powers of nature is the dynamics of spiritual growth.[10]

The purpose of creation is attained only through a 'mutually nourishing relationship' between human beings and the powers of nature. The Creator Lord has given this precept built into the matrix of human reality: you should nourish the powers of nature (*deva*) and they in turn will nourish you; thus mutually nourishing you will attain supreme well-being (3:10-11). Human persons have the responsibility to take care of the natural resources. This relationship is *yajña*. It means freedom from *kāma* (*muktasaṅga*, 3:9) and promotion of the presence of the divine in all the five elements of nature (7:4). The presence of the Lord shines through the earth as its fertility power (15:13) and through water as its sapidity (7:8); in fire the divine glance shines through (15:12) and in the air the vital energies of the Divine vibrate (7:9); the divine presence fills the entire cosmic space (7:8, 9:6). Worshipping the Lord present

in nature (6:31) would then mean developing a sense of sacredness in one's relationship with the resources of nature. Instead of that, if a person thrives on a consumeristic and exploiting attitude to natural resources, he thwarts the purpose of creation and destroys the harmony of beings; the *Gītā* calls him a 'thief who steals away the gifts of nature without giving them in return' for the sustenance of natural resources (3:12), a 'sinner who cooks food only for himself and eats verily nothing but sin' (3:13). A spiritually integrated person would 'only eat what is left over in *yajña*' (3:13); one can use gifts of nature only after making sure that the life-sustaining power of natural resources is preserved. Human activity in relation to nature can be liberative only in so far as it is 'free from greed, rooted in the holistic cosmic perception and fulfilled in the sense of *yajña*' (4:23). A spirituality that lacks eco-sensitivity is no spirituality at all!

Notes

1. M.K. Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Orient Paperbacks, 1972, p. 9.
2. Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gītā*, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 26-35.
3. In determining the meaning of the terms *vijñāna* and *jñāna* I follow the interpretation of Rāmānuja and Radhakrishnan. For a discussion on the diverse interpretations cfr. Robert M. Minor, *Bhagavad Gītā, An Exegetical Study*,New Delhi, Heritage Publishers, 1982, p. 141; S.S. Raghavachar, *Sri Ramanuja on the Gītā*, Mangalore, Ramakrishna Ashram, 1979, pp. 82-84.
4. R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, London, Oxford, 1969, pp. 232-235.
5. G.S. Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā*, Bombay, Somaiya, 1969, pp. 42-46.
6. Pope John Paul II, *Address at the Assisi Meeting of Religions*, 1986; *Address at the Meeting with Religious Leaders at Madras*, 1986.
7. F.X. D'Sa SJ, "Caste: Symbol or System?" in S. Kappen, ed., *Negations*, Madras, 1982, pp. 17-21.
8. Sebastian Painadath SJ, "Mukti, the Hindu Notion of Liberation," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *World Religions and Human Liberation*, New York, Orbis, 1992, pp. 66-75.
9. R. Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, London, Darton, 1977, p. 875.
10. "God and goddesses symbolise the forces of nature ... *Vijñāna* is something that is done for the good of others" M.K. Gandhi, *Gītā*, pp. 76-77.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 31-44

The Future of India
A Buddhist Contribution

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On August 15, 1947 from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi the national tricolour flag fluttered over independent India. We had made 'a tryst with destiny' then.[1] We celebrated the golden jubilee of that moment this year. The Independence of India and her citizens is young – only half a century compared to the long history of our culture and civilization. Our past evokes mixed feelings in us of nostalgia and nausea. Our future too makes us enthusiastic and cynical. We gaze from the same ramparts of the Red Fort and look to the horizon ahead of us. We need to make up our minds about the future of a free, sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic.

Destiny has enacted our golden jubilation of Independence at the threshold of a new millennium. The third millennium is a metaphor of the future. It evokes in us, citizens of this land, images of what our past has been and what our future will be. Our land is 'a cradle of great religions' that have moulded the lives of its inhabitants, given a texture to their stories and a horizon to their dreams and aspirations.

We had dreams. We are awakened by nightmares. We dare to dream of a new horizon, a future better than our past or even our present. All that has been was possible because our leaders in the freedom struggle dared to dream. Independence without violence was Gandhiji's dream. He wrote in the *Harijan* in reference to 15 August 1947 "... as for myself I only ask whether the dream of my youth is to be realized in the evening of my life." Gandhiji was not in Delhi that momentous night of August 15, 1947. He was awake with the nightmare of the Hindu-Muslim violence in Calcutta.

Nehru spoke of his dream for free India. "The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."[2] He resounded with the echo of Mahatma Gandhi's dream, "The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye."[3]

Independent India realized early one of her dreams. A despicable Mahar, wrote Dhananjay Keer, biographer of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, was made Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the new Indian Constitution – to define the will, aim and vision of India.[4] He dared to dream of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Our dreams have urged us on. Our nightmares have rudely awakened us.

The more rude ones among them being the wars with China and Pakistan.

We were jolted and awakened on June 25, 1975 by the nightmare of the Emergency. It was almost the loss of our dream of freedom itself.

We are a young nation. We have a long way to go. We dare to dream not of the ancient glory of India, but the glory of her future. We have a dream not of the ignominy of caste, that's hardly a thing to boast about. We have a dream of the new nation rooted and grounded in liberty, equality and fraternity. We have a dream of a new tryst where in God's name all will love and serve every person as brother and sister, as honourable children of our Motherland. We have a dream where we will care for *Bhārat-Bhūmi* as our cosmic mother.

Indeed, the texture of our dreams has had a wide variety of hues and strokes. Understandably so, given the diversity of our land, culture and people. We are now awakened from the idealism of our founding fathers[5] and the aftershocks of other tremors that gripped the minds of our national heroes: Gandhian decentralism, Nehruvian secular democratic socialism, or M N Royian radical humanism.[6] Perhaps, realism is what looms on the horizon of our Independence jubilation. Nehru was quite right when he cautioned the nation that 'ostrich-like policy of ignoring real issues is bound to end in disaster'.[7] Realistic pragmatism is a light to our paths to shade the colours of our dreams of the future. Influenced as he was by the vision of the latter philosophy or economic theory, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, points a finger in that direction. There lies our future. That's the way to go. If we dare!

Our way to the new horizon of liberty, equality and fraternity meanders through a terrain that has a long history. Though our secular democratic state has wisely declared equal respect for all creeds and equidistance from all of them, we are painfully aware that it may not be the only possible interpretation of the secular character of the Constitution of India. Down the lane of history those who ruled India have imprinted the character of their own faith and creed on this nation and people. It has embellished India's character, whether we care to acknowledge it or not. If it had not happened perhaps the past of this nation would have shaped itself differently. As a consequence the future then which is our present now would have been different.

The Gupta period of the Magadha Empire has a rightful role in shaping at least a part of the history of this land and its people. Asoka who came to be known as *devānaṁ piya*, literally, 'dear to the gods' or 'His Sacred Majesty' left his own mark on his empire. The polity that he shaped for the governance of his empire drew directly from the teachings of the Buddha. Much of it is available to us in the varieties of Edicts that he promulgated throughout the land. That is evidently the ancient glory of Buddhism's past. Does Buddhism have a future in the land of its origin? Can one religion alone claim to do all to shape the future of our Motherland?

Can any one religion and the state shape the horizon of our future?

This article does not aspire to answer all the questions that arise in this context. Each of them provides adequate scope for further research in the socio-political and religious dimensions of Indian polity.[8] This is an attempt to assess an aspect of realism and the tone of pragmatism in the conversion and orientation of Dr B.R. Ambedkar to Buddhism. We can then seek to assess if Buddhism, as interpreted by him, is capable of making a contribution to the future of India.

1. Symbols of the Past

The quest for the future begins by reclaiming symbols which in the past have urged our men and women to look to a future. In the Constituent Assembly Debates we read about the creation of one such symbol - the Indian national flag, the Tricolour. Its significance for the future could not have been more graphically expressed than was done by Shri Thirumala Rao:

> ... We have rightly selected, Sir, the Chakra as our emblem as the historic reminiscence of the period of Asoka. Describing the meaning of this Chakra, Rhys Davids, the famous orientalist has said that this Chakra is intended to send rolling the Royal Chariot wheel of the universal empire of truth and righteousness. If any country which (sic) departs from the essential moral principles on which it professes to stand it has no future. But this country in keeping with the ancient traditions and ideals has rightly chosen that Chakra which is called the Dharma Chakra of Asoka and Mahatma Gandhi has blessed this Chakra.[9]

The polity of Asoka has evoked in the Fathers of the Indian Constitution a vision of what the future of this land could be. Reclaiming that same symbol in our times clearly highlights the significance of such a polity for this nation's future. His Sacred Majesty, Asoka, had proclaimed his new policy in a Minor Rock Edict (I)[10] that gods who had not earlier associated with human beings were now doing so as the result of his reforms, and he calls on the small and great of his kingdom to follow his example. Asoka had reformed his administration under the influence of his new convictions: responsibility for the welfare of his subjects and the whole of humanity, which seem to be properly grounded, after his conversion, on Buddhism. He manifests pride in the social services that he inaugurated. These comprised free medical care; free supply of potable water along the roads to make travel more pleasant. His reforms of law aimed to make the legal system more just and less oppressive. In the Twelfth Rock Edict he advocated an ecumenical attitude and tolerance of other sects. He desired the prosperity of all citizens whom he regarded as 'my children' (Kalinga Edicts I).

Evidence of Asoka's critique of the religion prevalent then and after his conversion is also quite telling of another aspect of the role of religion and its influence on society in general. In Edict IV of the Fourteen Rock Edicts we read:

> As for many hundred years before has not happened, now at this present, by

reason of the inculcation of the Law of Piety (*Dhamma*) by His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King, have increased abstention from the sacrificial slaughter of living creatures, abstention from the killing of animate beings, seemly behaviour (or "courtsey") to relatives, seemly behaviour to Brahmans and ascetics, hearkening to father and mother, hearkening to elders. Thus, and in many other ways the practice of the Law has increased, and His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King will make such practice of the Law increase further.[11]

Elsewhere too, Asoka has spared no effort to instruct his 'children' on the true nature of *Dhamma*. In Edict IX of True Ceremonial he points to the different ceremonies which people tend to perform and how little fruit they in fact bear.

> ... on the other hand, to wit, the ceremonial of piety[12] bears great fruit. In it are included proper treatment of slaves and servants, honour to teachers, gentleness towards living creatures, and liberality towards ascetics and Brahmans. These things and others of the same kind are called the Ceremonial of Piety....[13]

Evidently, in the powerful symbol of the Asoka Chakra the Fathers of the Indian Constitution envisaged a universal empire of truth and righteousness. In it they saw the future of India. There is little doubt that the symbol comes from the realm of Buddhism. Emperor Asoka gave that symbol a non-sectarian perspective. Thus, in a land of many religions and sects, the Chakra has a rational appeal for a reasonable order of society founded on essential moral principles.

2. Religion in Modern Polity

Dr B. R. Ambedkar accords a positive role to religion in modern society. The nature of his thought on religion and its place in human life and in national life manifests that he regarded religion as a social institution. Therefore, in his polity, he did not choose to ignore this powerful social institution, which was not the case with Nehru, for example, who seemed to believe that the temples of modern India would be its manufacturing plants. The Nehruvian secular democratic socialism was more influenced by the Russian model of polity which had a secret hope that religion would die a natural death of neglect in the modern society. Dr Ambedkar was of the contrary opinion. He had critically assessed the *realpolitik* of the manner in which Brahmanical Hinduism had shaped the India of yesteryears, and the reforms that Buddhism had brought to revivify a decadent Hindu society. Religion for Dr Ambedkar was the "propounding of an ideal scheme of divine governance, the aim and object of which is to make the social order in which men live a moral order."[14] True religion, he believed, was the foundation of society with its values of individual freedom, social equality and fraternity. In April 1955, Dr Ambedkar spoke at the Siddharth College, Bombay, on the role of religion. He affirmed that religion alone could establish equality in human societies, and is essential for establishing equality and democracy.[15] Through his critical studies he assessed that Hinduism was founded on inequality and discrimination. He did not envisage a future for India if it is not liberated from

the oppressive ideology of Hinduism. He seems convinced of the above position as we read in his introduction to the *Riddles in Hinduism*:

> But the time has come when the Hindu mind must be freed from [the hold] which the silly ideas propagated by the Brahmans, have on it. Without this liberation India has no future. I have undertaken this task knowing full well what it involves. I am not afraid of the consequences. I shall be happy if I succeed in stirring the masses.[16]

He was keenly aware that Asoka had made religion, albeit non-sectarian Buddhist *Dhamma*, the bedrock of his own reforms for his empire. In our age where secularism is sickening, God is dead and Marx is dead, Buddhism is alive and affecting other traditions with its *modus vivendi*. There is something in the way and the teaching of the Buddha that appeals to the deepest human aspirations. It is not merely confined to India where Buddhism was not in its most vivacious form. The phenomenon is evident in the West turning East, and frankly, turning to Buddhism.

Dr Ambedkar did not place his faith in the Buddhist traditions merely because they are old and have come down to us through many generations, as we have the warning in the *Kalama Sutta*, but he perceived that the millions of oppressed people could attain equality and fraternity if they embraced Buddhism. He perceived in Buddhism and in its polity a challenge to religion and society. He would not engage himself in the task of reforming Hindu society, as we shall see later, but highlight the liberating subaltern perspective in Buddhist polity as the right kind of religion needed for the future of India. He found in Buddhism the right way to awaken human society in India. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is a significant achievement in Dr Ambedkar's efforts at reclaiming that polity through his own hermeneutics of Buddhism for contemporary Indian society. It is rightly regarded as "an important literary foundation for the new Buddhist movement".[17]

3. Assumptions of a New Hermeneutics

From a sociological perspective the assumptions in the process of a new hermeneutics of tradition could be twofold, at least, namely, to bring about structural-functional reformation, or basic new communities. The structural-functional reformation assumption suggests that the goal of the process of a new understanding is to bring about changes in the functions within the given organizational structure to ensure greater efficiency. Max Weber and others have analyzed this as the paradigm at work in institutions of the capitalist market economy. Structural adjustments would necessarily be made in those institutions for the sake of the greater efficiency, in this case, profitability, of the market economy.

The assumption of the new hermeneutics to bring about basic new communities addresses itself to what is old and traditional and challenges institutions and traditions to make room for the new. In fact, reinterpretation is primarily utilized, in this perspective, to establish a new form of community

or institution with new principles and values.

The purpose of a new hermeneutics makes us aware of the identity of those for the sake of whom such an exercise is undertaken. In the structural-functional paradigm money market clientele is in focus and the underlying attitude is reformation for efficiency. In the basic new communities paradigm the target is the people seeking an end of the old, oppressive form of community and desiring to usher in the new. Dr Ambedkar had analyzed the old Hindu tradition and found it wanting. The focus of the Fathers of the Indian Constitution to reclaim the more liberative Asokan *Dhamma Chakra* as the symbol rather than the Charkha of Mahatma Gandhi is indicative of a new hermeneutics. Dr Ambedkar's conversion and reclaiming of the Buddhist tradition from a subaltern perspective, that is, from the vantage point of the millions of deprived and marginalized people, compels us to understand that Buddhist process going back to Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, who had set in motion the Wheel of *Dhamma*.

4. Siddhartha Gautama and Subaltern Hermeneutics

The whole quest of Siddhartha Gautama, revered as the Buddha, the Awakened One, was fundamentally of the nature of a new understanding of religion and society. Buddhism, that reveres the Buddha as its founder, "shows us how fallacious it is entirely to separate Buddhism from Brahmanism".[18] It has its own history. It originated in the milieu of Brahmanical Hinduism.

Religious Brahmanical Hinduism is the heritage that was handed down to Siddhartha Gautama as a young man born and bred in his familial Hindu culture and religion. Hindu tradition is the context in which the Buddha 'lived, moved, and had his being', at least, till he perceived that the old traditions did not provide answers to his new questions. Buddhism, as we know it, is an on-going and radical hermeneutics that began with his critique of Hinduism. The single most crucial question that Siddhartha Gautama pursued relentlessly was not about the predicate but the subject of reinterpretation. It was his quest to scrutinize the kind of community that the Hindu tradition and its interpretation was imposing on all and sundry. The question confronted by him was to identify those for whom the new understanding was intended.

5. The Social Context of the Buddha

The subaltern perspective for the Buddha was a society held in bondage by the interpreters and reinterpreters of the Hindu tradition. His new hermeneutics was to create a new society where the principle of equality of all human beings was clearly laid out. The new community or society was to replace the inequality of its members prevalent in the old dispensation. In the *Vasala Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta* it is indicated in no uncertain terms that birth is not the determiner of a human being's

status in society.[19] That is a new understanding indeed of the Hindu tradition where birth is the sure criterion of one's status. So the new hermeneutics, as far as the Buddha is concerned, has its origin in the social context of Hinduism.

Buddhism manifests a great variety of interpretations of the vision of the Buddha. The variety is seen in the reality of the various sects or schools of Buddhist thought. Beginning with the Buddhist Council at Vaishali in the first century after the Mahaparinibbana of the Buddha, Buddhist history is a continuous quest for a relevant, contextual understanding of society. Such a history continues even to this day. The phenomenon called Neo-Buddhism in modern India is a contemporary attempt at a new hermeneutics by Dr Ambedkar.

6. Dr Ambedkar: Religion and Society

He presents the Buddha as a rationalist humanist. This is quite evident from the three criteria put forward by Dr Ambedkar in *The Buddha And His Dhamma*[20] to determine the authentic words or teachings of the Buddha in the Buddhist scriptures (*Tipiṭaka*).[21] The whole work of the Awakened One is interpreted as meant to awaken the society of the subaltern to its own identity[22] and dignity. Hence, the purpose of a new hermeneutics has a clear goal in the emancipation of the marginalized. He seeks to understand the identity of the outcaste, the Mahar in Maharashtra. In his works, *Who were the Śudras?* and *The Untouchables*[23] he has tried to trace the history of the native inhabitants and how they were turned into a group, initially regarded as *Śudras* and eventually despised as Untouchables, as outcastes.[24] He has even ventured to propose that the Mahars are descendants of the Nagas, their historic town being Nagpur, and that they were rulers while being followers of Buddhism. Hence setting them aside as an outcaste was an exercise in branding a religious community different from one's own as outcaste.[25]

As a consequence of this search for his own identity Dr Ambedkar was aware that religion is one of its conditions. In 1935 at Yevla in the Nashik District, he declared his resolve to change his religion. At a massive Mahar conference in Bombay held on May 30-31, 1936 he spoke of the need for conversion.[26] He stated then that the "Hindu religion is not the religion of our ancestors, but it was a slavery forced upon them".[27] He went on to declare:[28]

> To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom. We have nothing to do with anything else. If we can gain our freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion? And why should we sacrifice our strength and property for that? None should misunderstand the object of our movement as being Hindu social reform. The object of our movement is to achieve social freedom for the Untouchables.[29] It is equally true that this freedom cannot be secured without conversion.

The process of liberation pursued by Dr Ambedkar is to be understood as Prakritization. It takes the Untouchables back to their indigenous iden-

tity and dignity, in this case, through Pali, the Prakrit of the Buddhists in contrast to the discriminatory social system resulting from the process of Sanskritization.

It is not the social context of the Hindus that Dr Ambedkar set out to reform. He is clear that the purpose of his new hermeneutics is "social freedom for the Untouchables". The decision to embrace Buddhism was arrived at after considering the manner in which Hinduism and Islam breed social stagnation, and the fact that Christianity does not manifest "sufficient organised national and social concern".[30]

After Dr Ambedkar lost the election in 1952, he considered yet another aspect of his hermeneutics of society, namely, political organization. He established the Republican Party of India (RPI). He desired that the RPI would become the collective voice of the Untouchables, the marginalized, in the political democracy and much more in the social democracy of India. In the Constituent Assembly he had reiterated that "[w]e must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life".[31]

7. *The Buddha and His Dhamma*[32]

This is a major work of the hermeneutics of Buddhism by Dr Ambedkar. In the Preface[33] to the work it is referred to as the Sutta of Buddhism.[34] That is a deliberate attempt to accord canonical, scriptural status to the work of interpretation by Dr Ambedkar.[35] It enjoys, in the oral tradition among the converts to Buddhism, the status of being the Bible of the Indian Buddhists. Even the day of his death is revered as the day of Dr Ambedkar's *Mahāparinibbāna*, that is, the state of final emancipation from life, rebirth and even death.[36]

The aim of the revival of Buddhism is to bring about a Kingdom of Righteousness[37] to be a reality on earth. Dr Ambedkar interprets the purpose of religion according to the Buddha to be threefold, namely, to help human beings attain the Kingdom of Righteousness by righteous conduct in relation to others; to train the human mind, instincts and dispositions; and to infuse courage to stand, even alone, if necessary, by what is right.[38]

While summing up the variety of opinions about what the Buddha taught, Dr Ambedkar enquires if the Buddha had no 'social Message'.[39] It is common knowledge that the Buddha taught *Ahiṁsā* (non-violence) and peace. Dr Ambedkar's hermeneutics of the Buddha's teaching highlights its social message of justice, love, liberty, equality and fraternity,[40] which, he maintains, has been 'buried by modern authors'.

The Buddha's teaching is presented as *Dhamma*, (religion) *Adhamma* (non-religion) and *Saddhamma* (true religion).[41] He states forcefully the need to cultivate the social virtues of Buddhism, namely, *Maitri* or love for living beings, *Karuṇā* or compassion for all, *Pradñyā* or think-

ing aright, and *Śīla* or acting aright. The purpose of such an enterprise is to make the world a Kingdom of Righteousness. It is to be a reality on earth. It is to be attained by human beings by their righteous conduct in relation to others.[42] Such a Kingdom of Righteousness on earth that the Buddha taught, Dr Ambedkar believes, is what distinguishes the Buddha's religion from all other religions with their notions of the kingdom of heaven.

Dr Ambedkar is conscious of three main concerns that religion must address, if it is to be a true religion. For *Dhamma* (religion) to be *Saddhamma* (true religion), he points out, it must pull down all social barriers between human beings. *Chaturvarṇa* (the four castes/ classes) as a model for an ideal society was indeed regarded as a social barrier by the Buddha for it upheld social inequality. So, for *Dhamma* to be *Saddhamma* it must teach that worth and not birth is the measure of a human being. In the *Vasala Sutta*, mentioned earlier, the Buddha teaches that one is not high (*Brahmin*) or low (*Vasala*) by birth. By one's own actions does one become high or low. Finally, for *Dhamma* to be *Saddhamma* it must promote equality between human beings. Dr Ambedkar concludes his hermeneutics of *Dhamma* and *Saddhamma* with the affirmation that the Buddha argued that a religion which does not preach equality is not worth, and that the Buddha's religion "which promotes the happiness of others simultaneously with the happiness of oneself and tolerates no oppression" is better than others. Such a religion is capable of making a contribution to create a new society. Thus, Dr Ambedkar's hermeneutics from a subaltern perspective incorporated the vital role of true religion to bring about justice, love, liberty, equality and fraternity in independent India.

8. Critique of Dr Ambedkar's Buddhist Movement

Perhaps the somewhat hasty criticism of Dr Ambedkar's attempt of a new understanding of the Buddha's teaching came from the Bhikkhu Sangha in India. Dr Ambedkar saw the mission of the Buddha after his awakening/enlightenment as devoted to the cause of the emancipation of the people. Having been awakened to the suffering of the masses his concern was to show the way out of suffering. D. C. Vijayavardhan in *The Revolt in the Temple* (1963:53) affirms the Buddha as the greatest social reformer. It is the hermeneutics of the Buddha, the social reformer, that Dr Ambedkar sought to make the paradigm for his new hermeneutics of the Awakened One's message and praxis. So he advised "the younger generation of the Buddhist countries to pay attention to the actual teaching of the Buddha".[43] In the same address to the Fourth Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists at Kathmandu, Nepal, he cautioned that :

> If I may say so in conclusion if any peril arises to the *Dhamma*, in a Buddhist country the blame shall have to be cast upon the *Bhikkhus*, because I personally think that they are not wholly discharging the duty which devolves on them. Where is the preaching? The *Bhikkhu* is living in his cloister taking his meal, one meal

no doubt and sitting quietly probably he is reading, and most probably I find them sleeping, and in the evening having a little music. That is not the way of propagating religion. My friends, I want to tell you, I do not want to criticize anybody, but religion, if it is to be a moral force for regeneration of society, you must constantly din it in the ears of the people.[44]

Such a critical view of the *Bhikkhus'* failure to propagate the Buddha's actual teaching earned the ire of the traditional monks on Dr Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism in *The Buddha And His Dhamma*. In *The Maha Bodhi*,[45] the journal of the Buddhists in India, appeared a three-pronged rejoinder:

i) *The Buddha And His Dhamma* was a dangerous book; Ambedkar's interpretation of the theory of *Karma*, the theory of *Ahiṁsā* and his theory that Buddhism was merely a social system, constituted not the correct interpretation of Buddhism but a new orientation. Indeed, the whole of the book ... explained the hatred and aggressiveness the neo-Buddhist nourished and displayed.

ii) The title should be changed from *The Buddha And His Dhamma* to that of *Dr Ambedkar and His Dhamma*; for Dr Ambedkar preached non-*Dhamma* as *Dhamma* for motives of political and social reform.

iii) Ambedkar's Buddhism is based on hatred, the Buddha's on compassion. It would seem more important to be careful what we accept in Dr Ambedkar's book as being the word of Buddha.[46]

It is evident that Buddhist monks in India had accepted at the time of Dr Ambedkar's interpretation a traditional *pabbajjā*, that is, going forth from the world (renunciation), as their paradigm. Buddhist monks elsewhere in Myanmar and Sri Lanka have since reappropriated the essence of the Buddha's going forth, namely, going forth for the welfare of all, for the happiness and well-being of the entire world.[47] They have found in such a hermeneutics the reason for their active involvement in, and commitment to, the struggles of the oppressed people. There are some of the oppressed people, the Dalits, at least, who have tried to follow Dr Ambedkar's vision of Buddhism for a new society.

9. Dalits and Dr Ambedkar

"Dalits awaken to a new political consciousness" was a headline in one of the English language newspapers recently.[48] A couple of days earlier "9 Dalit groups merge into a unified RPI" made front-page news as well.[49] While assessing the manner in which the Dalits appropriate the method and message of Dr Ambedkar the splintered RPI may be a crucial indicator.[50] Dalit leaders in the RPI have made themselves bargaining pawns for political office rather than be trailblazers for social democracy. Since the Independence of India some Dalits have experienced upward economic mobility into the middle class. They seem to want to have still more for themselves and their families, particularly through political office.

Disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of the RPI, but inspired by the Black Panther Movement for social and racial justice and equality in the United States of America, Dalit youth of

Maharashtra began a radical revolutionary Dalit Panthers Movement in 1972. By then Dr Ambedkar was seen as the champion of the Mahars, one of the Untouchable groups to which he belonged by birth. There were other groups that were Untouchables and who had not embraced Buddhism. While Dr Ambedkar had tried to work out his radical social reform with a Buddhist method without getting the bloody revolutionary Marxist Communist one, the Dalit Panthers were more strident.

The Dalit Panthers stated the identity of a Dalit in their Manifesto as:

> Members of scheduled castes and tribes, Neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion.[51]

The Dalit awakening to a new political consciousness says it all. Unity of the Dalits is essential to speak in one voice of the hermeneutics of the marginalized half a century after the Independence of India. Certainly the new identity as proposed in the Manifesto goes beyond the identity given to the Dalit by embracing Buddhism. It broadens its perspective to identify the Dalits as those suffering the social, economic, political and religious exploitation, and includes the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and women. In the quest of some Dalits and Dalit leaders for quick political and economic gains for themselves mainstream political parties have accorded them 'a symbolic role in the political arena'. The great majority of the Dalits, however, still dream of the social democracy that Dr Ambedkar sought to bring about through his hermeneutics of the Buddhist tradition.

10. Conclusion

In the context of contemporary India and the efforts at a new hermeneutics of its traditions with a subaltern perspective, Dr Ambedkar was seized by the paramount importance of the purpose of such an exercise. He did not claim any originality to it, but a conscious appropriation of the heritage of the Buddha awakened to the suffering of the marginalized human beings. He reinterpreted Buddhist tradition as was done earlier by Emperor Asoka to challenge Indian society to create a new community, the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth. The insight into reclaiming the symbol of the Asoka Chakra is to incorporate religion, a social institution, into the modern polity of India. He hoped that reappropriation of such a tradition would give to India a new identity as a community, culture and country. He had a dream to make liberty, equality and fraternity a reality for every citizen with the dawn of Buddhism again on the horizon of India's future.

Notes

1. Jawaharlal Nehru to the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947. See J. Nehru, *Before and After Independence: A Collection of Speeches*, n.a., Vol. II, p. 432.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 432.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 432.

4. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1990, p. 397.
5. Mahatma Gandhi is the prime example of them. His writings could be found in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1983.
6. See "Six Paths to India's Future" in *Sources of Indian Tradition* compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary et al. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 877-931. Dr Ambedkar does not figure among those six paths. That leaves us with an area to explore which is new to the known paths to India's future.
7. J. Nehru, *Recent Essays and Writings*, pp. 76, cited in Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 896.
8. For the contribution of Buddhism towards building up a society far from communalism, see Noel Sheth, "Buddhism and Communalism" *Religion and Society* 34/4 (December 1988), pp. 44-66.
9. See The Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Report, Vol. X, 22nd November 1949, p. 820. The quote above has been reproduced in Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 13, Bombay: Education Department, The Government of Maharashtra, 1994, p. 1183.
10. Translation of the texts of the Edicts cited in this study are from Vincent A Smith, *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1920, chapters IV & V, pp. 149 – 230. See also Radhagovinda Basak, ed., *Asokan Inscriptions*, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1959, for the critical text and translation of the Inscriptions.
11. V. A. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
12. In Pali it is *Dhammamangala* and in Sanskrit rendered as *Dharmamangala.*
13. Perhaps we would have to refer to the most well-known of all Edicts, the Bhabru Edict or Second Bairat Rock Edict to comprehend the deep influence of Buddhism on the perspective of Asoka. In it he refers to seven passages of the Pali Buddhist Scriptures which he recommends that monks and nuns as well as laity, male and female, should frequently hear and meditate on. See V. A. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-157.
14. Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 3 (1987), p.6.
15. Cited by M. S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Dr Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993, p. 251.
16. Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 4 (1987), p. 9.
17. B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Dr Ambedkar", in *Dr Ambedkar And The Neo-Buddhist Movement*, T.S.Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, eds., Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1972, p. 66.
18. W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Medieval Times*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960, p. 176.
19. For more details, see Noel Sheth, "The Buddha's Attitude to Caste," *Negations* 1:4 (October-December 1982)
20. Book IV, Part II, Section V.
21. A critical assessment of those criteria could be a topic for further research to explore Dr Ambedkar's assumptions in reinterpretation.
22. D.P. Pattanayak in posing the problem of Identity (*Seminar* No.387, 1991) states that

the Hindu tradition created 4000 Jatis, each with a distinct identity, out of the four Varnas. According to his view, a 'twin process of Sanskritization and Prakritization' is at work to change the face of identity. Dr Ambedkar's process seems to be a strong case for Prakritization.

23. Both works are available in a single volume (Number 7) of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Bombay: The Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990.
24. For other valuable details about the identity of the Mahars of Maharashtra, see: R.W. Taylor, "The Dr Ambedkarite Buddhists", in *Dr Ambedkar And The Neo-Buddhist Movement*, T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, eds., p. 141; Robertson, *The Mahar Folk*, Calcutta: YMCA, 1938; J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India* Bombay: Oxford, 1951; R.E.Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*, II, 3 Vols. Bombay: Government Central Press, 1920-23.
25. Dr Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, pp. 311-317.
26. The English translation of that speech can be found in Dr Babasaheb B. R. Ambedkar, *Why Go For Conversion?*, Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1987.
27. Dr Ambedkar, *Why Go For Conversion?*, p. 18.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 15. A little earlier in the same address he had identified the Untouchables as *Mahar-Mangs*.
30. B.A.M. Paradkar, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
31. Quoted by Justice V.R.Krishna Iyer while considering 'Dr Ambedkar's Contribution to Indian Social, Political and Constitutional Thought in Indian Polity' in *Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Future*, p. 32.
32. It was first published in 1957, and is now available as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 11, *The Buddha And His Dhamma*, Bombay: The Education Department, The Government of Maharashtra, 1992.
33. The Preface is written by Justice R.R.Bhole to the second edition of B.R.Ambedkar, *The Buddha And His Dhamma*, Bombay: Siddharth Publication, 1974.
34. It was first printed for private circulation as *The Buddha And His Gospel*, and later changed to the present title. See, Dhananjay Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: Life And Mission*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962, p. 486.
35. R.W.Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 145, refers to Dr Ambedkar's posthumous work as Dr Ambedkar's Buddhist Canon.
36. Ambedkar is aknowledged to be a Boddhisattva too.
37. D. Keer, the biographer of Dr Ambedkar, is aware that his subject sought to interpret Buddhism on account of its revolutionary social message as a revolutionary religion. He writes that Dr Ambedkar tried "to give political form to Buddha's teaching" Keer, *op. cit.*, 490.
38. *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Book III, Part V, Nn. 31-33.
39. See *The Buddha And His Dhamma*, Book III, Part II.
40. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr Ambedkar enshrined three of these, liberty, equality and fraternity, in the Preamble to the Constitution of India.
41. See *The Buddha And His Dhamma*, Book III, Parts III, IV, V.
42. Dr Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, Book III, Part V, Section I para. 2.
43. Dr Ambedkar, "Buddha and Karl Marx" in *Thoughts on Dr Ambedkar: Selected Ar-*

ticles By Eminent Scholars compiled by Hoti Lal Nim, Agra: Siddharth Educational & Cultural Society, 1969, p. 7.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

45. December 1959, pp. 518-19.

46. The text as quoted by D. R. Jatava, *The Critics of Dr Ambedkar*, New Delhi: Bharatiya Shoshit Jan Utthan Parishad, 1975, pp. 57-8.

47. As narrated in the *Mahāvagga* section of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* of the Pali Canon. Its translation by T.W.Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg is published in *Vinaya Texts, Part I* in the Sacred Books of the East Series, Volume 13, Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprinted 1968, pp. 112-13.

48. Yogesh Vajpeyi, *Indian Express*, Pune, 28 December 1995.

49. *The Times of India*, Bombay, 26 December 1995.

50. I do not have exact figures of membership in the various factions of the RPI: Athavale, Gavai, Prakash Ambedkar, B.C. Kamble, Jogendra Kawade, T.M. Kamble and Khobragade. The last faction has not associated itself with the efforts at the RPI unity.

51. For the complete text of the Dalit Panthers Manifesto, Bombay, 1973, see Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal* Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991, pp.232-239. A useful resource for understanding the identity of the Dalits is James Massey, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits; Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1994. A valuable article in it is J. Massey, "Historical Roots," pp. 3-55.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 45-57

Muslim Identity in India
A Time for Re-discovery?

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This paper has a modest aim: to study the situation of the Muslims in India. It begins with a brief historical account of their life and destiny in the period before Independence. It goes on to examine their life and destiny in independent India and the factors that shaped their identity. It concludes by pointing out the steps they could take in order to make a significant contribution to the India of the future.

1. Historical Background

Asia was traditionally the land of the Muslim strength. It is the homeland of the Muslims whose name itself in the course of history became identified with Islam: the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks and the Malays. But Islamisation of two great peoples remained incomplete: the Chinese and the Indians. Traditionally, Asian Muslim minorities never knew the type of persecution to which their brethren were subjected in Europe.

Since the beginning of the 14th century A.D. the Osmanli Turks in West Asia and the Delhi Turko-Afghan Sultanate of the Khiljils, Tughlaks, Sayyids and Lodis in the heart of South Asia had established a powerful hegemony which gave Islam a commanding position in many lands. But, more particularly, when for about three hundred years – from the 16th to the 18th century AD – a great part of North Africa, West, Central and South Asia was dominated by the three great Muslim empires – the Sunni Ottomans of Turkey (1372-1919); the Sunni Mughals of India (1526-1858), and the Shia Safavids of Iran (1500-1722) – a sort of political Dar-ul-Islam (Land of Peace) existed in the consciousness of the people if not always in the consensus of the Ulema (Islamic scholars).

Muslim political consciousness during more than 800 years of its presence in India has passed through three major stages of historical evolution: from the politically dominant position which the Muslims had enjoyed as co-religionists of the Sultans who had ruled for 550 years (1210-1757) in the heartland of the sub-continent – the Indo-Gangetic plains – and later also in the Deccan; they were reduced to a colonial status under the British imperial authority in India for a period of about 200 years; and finally, from 1947 till today.

The Muslims were first actively discriminated against as the main enemy of the British raj for a period of about 150 years (1757-1905).[1] From around 1905 onwards, however, the British tried to use the two major com-

munities, Hindus and Muslims, against each other in pursuance of their policy of divide and rule.[2] In this latter phase, a distinct pro-Muslim bias was apparent in the British colonial policy in India, culminating in the partition of the country.[3]

The establishment of Pakistan left the Muslims of India in a weaker position. They were "a minority acutely blamed by the Hindus for the partition of the country, a minority regarded as representative of an anti-Indian, hostile, divisive, and subversive influence which had shattered the aspirations for national unity."[4] The sense of bitterness produced by partition was so great that even a person with such impeccable liberal credentials as Acharya Kripalani reportedly opposed, at the time of the first general elections, giving Muslims the right to vote.[5] At the popular level, partition in fact gave rise to the feeling that, having got a state of their own in Pakistan, Muslims had no grounds for complaining about their condition or talking of their interests in India.[6] Furthermore, the partition resulted in a reversal of status roles for the Indian Muslims. It necessarily entailed a major diminution in their power and influence, more than for any other ethnic group. For the Muslims, "partition marked the end of an era," with much of their established political leadership gone and "with no clear signposts for the future."[7] As Cantwell Smith has noted, in situations where the Muslim community's power is greatly reduced or totally destroyed, it turns from worldly to religious preoccupations, and the Ulema emerge as the custodians of its interests.[8] The politics of Indian Muslims has not changed much after Independence. The Muslims of India today are face to face with a situation more or less identical with the one they encountered after the First War of Independence in 1857. The victorious British then suspected them of having been mainly responsible for the 'revolt,' and in the flush of their victory they took full revenge. The Muslim leadership by and large was put to the gallows and eliminated. The community was left high and dry, without anybody to show them the way. All avenues of employment and economic advancement were closed to them, and the ruling power eyed them with hatred and suspicion. A mood of frustration engulfed them, and they withdrew into their shell, refusing to adjust themselves to the changing patterns.

2. Identity of Muslims in the Independent India

2.1. Social Factors

Like all socio-ethical groups, Islam has been constantly interpreted in every age and in every country where its impact was felt. Interpretation is an exercise to correlate the text with the context; the doctrine with the challenges of the times; the meaning with the situation; the thought-content with the available forms; and the abiding message with the space-time constraints. The Muslims, like the Hindus but unlike the Sikhs and the Parsis, are a fragmented community – fragmented regionally, linguistically, culturally and ethnically. Except for the bond of religion, and that too merely at the sentimental level rather than in specific

terms, if one remembers particularly the local variations of social customs, personal laws and historic myths and symbols among the Muslim communities, there is no other binding force to coalesce a so-called Muslim identity.

In India today, the Muslims are faced with a doctrinally new and socially radical situation. Speaking about the basic political challenge facing the community, Dr. Zakir Hussain, the former President of India, once said that in the past the Muslims had been either the rulers or the ruled, today in India they are co-rulers as joint sharers of national sovereignty. As an analogy it can be said that the problem before the Indian Muslims is identical to the basic problem of international living itself, namely, that of coexistence on a level of mutuality and reciprocity with other groups and sections of the people, united on the fundamental common objectives of democracy, secularism and the pursuit of socio-economic justice.

What provides novelty to the spirit of Islam in India is the fact that in no other place it had to encounter, and that too for more than a thousand years, a radically dissimilar and existentially resilient civilisation, like Hinduism, which was neither fully 'conquered' and 'assimilated' by Islam, nor 'conquered' and 'assimilated' Islam. Islam in India, then, is a typical Indian phenomenon in all its ramifications. But the orthodox mulla complains that Islam in India is not quite Islamic, and the innocent infidel holds that it is not sufficiently Indian. Predictably the one wants to Islamisize it, and the other to Indianize it.

The dominant Muslim quest in post-Independent India is to strike compatibility between their religion and the demands of nation-building. It is a quest for democratic participation and secular change. Within the framework of territorial national sovereignty, the major task is to work out a viable pattern of co-existence with other communities as co-sharers of national sovereignty. Their response to this fundamental challenge is determined not merely by the nature of contemporary Islam in India, but also by two other extraneous factors: the continuous counter-response of the Hindu society to the process of nation-building and the more powerful confrontation with the forces of secular modernity.

"Pan-Islamism is now completely dead," observes S. Abid Husain.[9] Consciousness of international Muslim identity has not adversely affected India's bilateral relations with most of the Muslim nations of the world. Subcontinental Muslim consciousness might increase the centripetal power in the region.[10] A new generation has come up, which had no hand in the creation of Pakistan. The secular character of India's basic law is beyond doubt, and secularism has now been accepted as the national creed. Each political party has been vying with the other to establish its secular credentials and in championing the cause of the minorities. But the real questions are: Do these new developments in the country really assure the Muslims that they along with the other sections of the people are called to shape the destiny of independent India? How far are the Indian Muslims conscious of their

importance as Muslims of India? As followers of a great religion and citizens of a great country, how far are their compatriots, who constitute the majority, conscious of the potential contribution the Muslims can make to enhance the greatness of the country? S. Harman pertinently asks, "Why, in spite of all legal rights, do Indian Muslims continue to be backward, miserable and estranged?"[11] If the Muslims are no more than second class citizens of this great country, can it play its destined role ? In other words, what time is it for the Muslims in Independent India? In the following analysis let us discuss the problems of their identity and autonomy, as also the interconnection of their well-being with that of secular India. We focus our discussion, first of all, on the political factors and secondly on the social factors.

2.2. The Political Factors

The political life of the Muslims in India has not changed much after Independence. As in the British days, Muslims are divided between a group affiliated to the ruling party and the other group which works on communal lines in search of protection. But Independence has brought about a vital change. Gone is the third party. The separate electorates, which were the basis for communal parties and communal politics, are also gone. But the political pattern of the Indian Muslims has not altered. There is the same politics of grievance, bargaining and recrimination.

The main complaint about the Muslims in India is that they are keeping themselves aloof from the mainstream of national life. According to many political analysts, the integrative revolution that started with the constitutional declaration of India as a secular state has failed to take full effect.[12] Like other cultural and linguistic minorities, they point out, the Muslims in contemporary India continue to face many problems as well as suffer from a variety of social and economic disabilities. And the political system has not been successful in resolving or removing them so as to facilitate their effective integration into the emerging Indian polity and society. It is necessary to enter into a discussion as to whether the problems, that the Muslims feel they are facing or their sense of disillusionment from the political system, are fictitious or real. The really important thing from the viewpoint of understanding Muslim political behaviour is that a large number of Muslims see themselves as being subject to social and economic disabilities and feel that the political system has failed to secure for them the position and privileges to which they are theoretically entitled. This feeling conditions their contemporary social and political attitudes and will shape their identity and destiny in the India of the future.

One of the main reasons for this sense of disillusionment with the existing state of affairs has been their preoccupation with politics. It is a matter of common knowledge that organised politics offers an effective avenue of grievance redressal to socially and economically under-privileged sections of society in a democratic political order. As a substantial religious minority, the

Muslims have naturally been prone to use this avenue to an increasing scale both for drawing the attention of administrators and politicians to their social and economic problems and securing advantages from the political system. Perhaps, it is this increased use of organized politics, as a mechanism for dramatizing their demands and grievances, which has often inspired the comment that organized politics is the life and blood of the Muslim ethos in India.[13]

The Muslims certainly display great interest in organized politics, but their approach towards political participation has not been the same throughout their history. It seems to have changed from time to time according to the changing political situations, their political perceptions and the success or failure of their political strategies. One can discern at least two distinct approaches to political participation amongst them since Independence. On the one hand, they have sought to participate in the political system by consolidating themselves in a communal pressure group and using their combined strength in the population as a basis for political horse-trading. The different Muslim political organizations such as the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat and the Muslim Majlis in Uttar Pradesh, the Anjuman-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen of Hyderabad, and the recently revived Muslim League in North India are essentially manifestations of this kind of approach to political participation. On the other hand, they have actively participated in 'secular' national political parties. This approach arose partly from an awareness that there was no place for separatist community-based political organizations within the changed context of post-Independence India. Partly it arose from the relatively sympathetic attitude of several political parties and their leaders towards the Muslims. This approach gave them better chances of securing social and political advantages through supporting political organizations and pressure groups. However, the experience of the Muslims over the years has led them to believe that neither of the above-mentioned approaches to organized politics is quite satisfactory from their point of view. These two approaches rested on the premise that the Muslims constituted a single homogeneous and unified community and could serve as a basis for political action or political mobilization by any particular party or group of parties. It is certainly true that the Muslims see themselves as a monolithic community and consequently consider themselves as facing a set of common social and economic problems whose solution requires their collective intervention. However, the Muslims of India do not constitute a single monolithic and unified community. They are horizontally and vertically divided into various regional and cultural groups on the one hand, and, into castes and classes, on the other.[14]

Due to this highly segmented character of their community and the presence of a number of distinct strata within it, each with its own specific problems and grievances, a third possibility for the Muslims to participate in the political system would be for each distinct strata to create a solidarity of social and economic

interests with corresponding segments in other religious communities, and to work for the solution of their common problems in a collective fashion. This approach would lead to the elimination of the communal cleavage which has characterized our political life for well over a century. Secondly, it would result in the secularization of the demands and thereby reduce the possibility of their outright rejection in a secular state. Finally, it would also enlarge the support base of their demands as all those who share the same problems would work with them.

A related issue is the myth that Indian Muslims are anti-national. Since they have no loyalties to this country, they should all go to Pakistan. The creation of Pakistan was the political outcome of a process first set in motion by the British and later raked up by several of the national leaders – both Hindu and Muslim. After Independence, the Muslims who migrated to Pakistan were generally the affluent classes as they saw no future or security in a predominantly Hindu country. Those who stayed behind were mainly poor Muslims, concentrated in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and other backward parts of the country. The affluent Muslims of Kerala, many of whom have sought temporary jobs in the Middle East, make sure that their earnings go back to their Motherland. It is the affluent NRIs – mainly Hindus – in the US and UK who crib and moan about the 'backwardness' of India and want a dozen assurances before they will send a dollar or a pound back to this country.

If the Muslims were disloyal, there would have been more Muslim spies than Hindu spies. And if they are conspicuously absent from the mainstream of Indian life, the fault is not theirs but that of the Hindu ruling class that has deliberately kept them out. Any political analyst would say that here is a community which has been deliberately kept out of the mainstream. For instance, the Minority Commission Report prepared by the late Gopal Singh demonstrates that in the Seventies, Muslims made up only two percent of the IPS, 2.86 percent of the IAS and 3.3 percent of state Class I employees. Even in private enterprises, they were grossly under-represented; Muslims accounted for only 4.08 percent of the jobs. In public sector banks, there is a conspicuous absence of Muslim directors. Such financial institutions as the State Bank of India, Bank of India, UCO Bank and Bank of Maharashtra have no Muslim directors.

Furthermore, the Muslims are among the most educationally backward communities in India. Despite the fact that the community constitutes 11.2 percent of the country's population, their children account for just 4 percent of those doing matriculation. Muslims have not benefited from government schemes, securing only 2 percent of industrial licences and 3.7 percent of financial assistance. In 1978, the Janata Party government set up a Minorities Commission. Two years later, a committee was set up to study the minorities' condition. In 1983, Mrs. Indira Gandhi unveiled a programme that promised more jobs and easier loans to the Muslims. No one bothered to find

out what this effort was achieving. S.M.H. Burney, former chairman of the Minorities Commission, says that despite a scheme, easy credit was never made available to the Muslims.[15] The Gopal Singh report of the Minority Commission was not released by the Government for six years. Surprisingly, the report noted that some employment exchanges, in fact, refused to register the Muslims. When the V.P. Singh government finally released the report, the Government could not take action on it.

The Government was, on many occasions, conspiring with the Muslim leaders who, it thought, could sway the vote. For example, when the Criminal Procedure Code was being amended in 1974 to provide maintenance for destitute women, Mrs. Gandhi specified that this need not apply to communities which already paid compensation. This was a reference to the Muslim Personal Law under which a woman, on marriage, is given the mehr as a kind of security in the event of being divorced by her husband. The mehr is usually a paltry sum, so Mrs. Gandhi's exemption from the amendment was of no help to the Muslim women. Post-Ayodhya riots brought in shocking reports from all over the country of how the police had acted in a biased fashion, lashing out at the minorities. Muslims were asking why not a single bullet was fired in Ayodhya while many Muslims fell to bullets in the Muslim-dominated areas of Bombay, Surat, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Kanpur. Many Muslims feel that this is because the police, especially the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), is largely Hindu dominated, and there are very few Muslim recruits. This common perception is borne out by official statistics. In the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Muslims account for just 5.57 percent, while their number in the Provincial Armed Constabulary is lower. Even in the much touted Rapid Action Force, which aims to be more representative of the minorities, including Muslims, the number is not more than 16 percent. Hindus still account for more than 80 percent of the force.[16] These issues have become essentially symbolic in character. They represent the Muslim community's search for self-respect, a hankering for recognition and for unmistakable evidence that the equation of power in the new polity of India does not exclude them. Lately, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have revived their campaign against the religious minorities of India. They claim that the special rights enjoyed by them in post-Independence India must be immediately scrapped. The RSS draws attention to the Muslim Personal Law and also to the Constitution (Article 370), which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim majority state. Both the RSS and the BJP demand an end to this provision in the Statutes. "The only time they chose not to talk about them was when Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed his 13-day government in 1996."[17] Certain symbols of "appeasement" such as the banning of Salman Rushdie's book, the Prophet's birthday being declared a holiday, mean nothing to the average Muslim. As K.R. Malkani, the BJP's vice-president (1993), admitted: "All that the common Muslim has got from the Government are mere lollipops."[18] The low economic status of the Muslims and their thin

geographical spread within India rule out in their case any separatist political ambitions. Contrary to the general assumption, Muslims have not voted *en masse* for any party in any of the elections.[19] The demands that sections of Muslims are now raising are for their self-confidence, so battered in the decades after partition. It is a kind of psycho-political settling down and seeking of a place in Independent India. It is the right of minorities to protect their cultural and political identities. But the measures taken by a community for the realisation of a distinct identity invariably arouse the suspicion of the power-wielding majority which tries to undermine the equal rights of the minorities.[20] It was this universal feature of the majority-minority situation that led the United Nations, for instance, to establish as early as 1947 the sub-commission for the prevention of discrimination and the protection of the minorities.

In view of these realities the Muslims deserve an institutional set-up which addresses their particular problems. This cannot be dismissed on the assumption that it will be violative of the secular principle of the Constitution. The word 'class' used in Article 16(4) includes communities, as pointed out by K.M. Munshi during the discussion on the clause in the advisory committee. He maintained that classes are also to be interpreted as minorities or religious communities. And the Muslims need affirmative action on this score.

2.3. Sociological Dimension

Sociologically considered, the minority status of the Indian Muslims is evidently a very significant factor for discussion. Among the minority groups in India the Muslims are singled out as those who alone cling to their respective traditions and dogmas, and who are violent and intolerant. If one sets out to analyse these factors it would seem that there are at least three reasons for it.

According to Saiyed, firstly, there is the problem of stereotypes, secondly, there is the inability of the vast majority of the Indian Muslims to participate in a materially modernistic life-style, and thirdly, the Indian Muslims' opposition to any changes in their Personal Law. The issue of Personal Law is, in fact, closely linked with the Muslim urge for identity. Our discussion is an attempt to unravel these issues connected with the Muslim Personal Law.[21] No single issue affecting the Indian Muslims is surcharged with as much emotion as that of the Muslim Personal Law. The exposition offered here is neither complete nor definitive; more rigorous theoretical and empirical efforts are needed to supplement the present explanation.

Muslim Personal Law and the Muslim Identity

The Muslim Personal Law or jurisprudence technically is the "canon law" of Islam, but is generally used to mean all the commandments of Allah concerning human activities. The Muslims in India have always been strongly against allowing the rulers to interfere in what they consider to be matters of religion. During the British Rule, when at the behest of Hindu social reformers, traditional Hindu law was changed through official enactments, Muslims

did not want the British to legislate for their community even when the situation indicated the need for some legislative action. They made organized efforts to secure the protection of the Muslim Personal Law through constitutional guarantees in the Government of India Acts of 1915 and 1935.

The present Muslim Personal Law in India is the product of a long evolution.[22] In its final form it is less than fifty years old. This law is based on Hanafi law which is one of the many schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It has been observed that the rigid Muslim Personal Law has been the main reason for their social backwardness. In some respects, Indian *Ulema* (Islamic scholars) and the Muslim leaders had taken a lead in the Muslim world in initiating a process of reform. India was one of the first countries which enacted, with the consent of the community, a law in 1939 granting the right of divorce to Muslim women in certain cases. In this respect the Muslims were ahead of the Hindus in the country. It was only after Independence that the movement of reform in the Muslim Personal Law stagnated and met with the growing resistance of the community. One of the main reasons why the community resists uniformity in civil law is to protect its identity. According to many Muslims, in some areas of the Personal Law, the community faces problems of harmonisation with universal human rights as we know them today. They relate to the rights of women and the minorities, criminal justice and the limits of freedom of the individual. If we look at the traditionally established mechanism for change in Islam, we find that the principle that customs, usages and norms of social life change has been generally accepted in Muslim jurisprudence. However, the socio-cultural milieu of the Arab society of the time did leave its imprint on the surface structure of Indian soil.

During the 1400 years long odyssey of Islam, Islamic laws have been changed from time to time and from country to country. There is no particular sanctity for the Muslim Personal Law enacted by the British Indian government in 1937 and 1939. It is time that the issue of reform in the Personal Law is restored to the top of the Muslim agenda. In particular, the question of divorce, polygamy and other provisions which discriminate between the sexes need to be re-evaluated in accordance with the spirit of the Quran, the Constitution of the country, modern requirements and the enlightened interest of the community.

Social and Educational Backwardness

A major aspect of the Muslim situation in India is the community's social and educational backwardness. This has historical roots, including the development of caste-like features in the Indian Muslim society. According to informed opinion, the Muslims in India are stratified along two distinct axes. The first is the axis of caste-like groupings which are based on descent and racial origin. Historically, the Indian Muslims have been grouped into two broad categories called ashraf and ajlaf. The other is the axis of occupation or political power according to which at least four broad social strata can be identified-upper class, middle class,

lower middle class and lower class. Even though these axes are quite distinct and separate and can be said to have existed side by side, there has always been a considerable degree of congruence and overlap between them. No attempt has been made to refine this oppressive system.[23]

Modernity and Muslim Identity

The Muslim community in India is stigmatised as a drag on the rest of the country in its march towards modernity. There is a common assumption that all world religious communities other than Islam have already changed and adapted themselves to the requirements of modernisation. In the following analysis let us discuss the phenomenon of modernity in relation to the Muslim community in India.

In his book, Modernisation Of Indian Tradition, Professor Yoginder Singh[24] has compared and contrasted Sanskritisation[25] among the Hindus with Islamisation among the Muslims. Both are forms of upward mobility, whereby lower sections of society seek to improve their status. But there the comparison ends. Prof. Singh notes two differences. First, "while revolt against hierarchy through Sanskitisation implies a withdrawal from tradition – an indirect release from its psychological contours – and might eventually accelerate modernisation", Islamisation, "as a movement of revivalism of basic virtues in the Islamic tradition..., might contribute to greater conservatism by increasing the hold of the religious elites on the population." Secondly, "the movement of Sanskritisation is in no way approved by the Brahmin priests, and yet it goes on. Islamisation, on the contrary, is not only engineered by the religious elites but results in an enhancement of their hold on the Muslim masses. It is thus a traditionalising movement par excellence."[26]

According to Girilal Jain there are two interrelated tendencies. First, the determined bid by Faraizis, Wahhabis, Al-Hadithis and Tablighis to remove Hindu influences and practices from the lives of the ordinary Muslims and to block Western ideas and ideals were part of one single movement and, as such, one programme could not be separated from the other. Secondly, the presence of Hindu elements in Indian Islam alone could make its modernisation possible by way of exposure to, and acceptance of, Western values; their elimination inevitably closed Indian Islam to modernisation.[27]

Since Independence the social life and behaviour of the Muslims have undergone considerable change. In the educational field, including female education, we see tremendous progress. Muslim children, particularly those from educated families, are attending cosmopolitan and secular non-Muslim schools in increasing numbers; women have come out of the *purdah* and wherever possible are taking up jobs. Discarding the *fez*, the *sherwani* and the trimmed and flowing beard, the present-day Muslims are allowing themselves to be drawn into modern professions and business. Muslim youths today participate in a common pub-culture and share with others in the country the common hopes and frustrations of their generation.

Though the centrality of the Quran and Hadith remains undisputed, various strands of thought and cultural patterns derived from indigenous ethnicity, westernisation, orthodoxy, revivalism and vulgar consumerism, shape the identities of the Muslims in the world today. In the midst of this diversity one can easily discern a pattern of shared beliefs, attitudes and mores. One of the roots of Islam's anti-modernist stance lies in Islam's encounter with Western colonialism. In India as in other Arab countries, anti-imperialists, including the Ulema, turned to nationalism which, in turn, made them anti-West in the period of their reawakening. Twentieth century political Islam owes its existence to this search for national identity against a hegemonic West. It has gained in stridency in the Arab countries because of the failure of the fusion between nationalism and socialism. In India this political anti-Westernism became identified with intellectual, cultural anti-modernity. It is the same hegemonic aspiration of the West that makes it perceive Islam as an "evil empire" in the making.

Most of the Hindu writers while talking about modernisation draw their inspiration and information from Western sources. The best way of understanding Islam and the Muslims of India will be through Indian Muslim sources. Perhaps Mr.Girilal Jain will agree with many scholars that the Indian Muslim community is the most resilient, creative and enlightened community in the Muslim world with a valuable heritage that can show light to the entire Indian society. However, there is a lack of communication between the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims, which stalls the creative process of thought.

But there is a stagnation of thought among the Indian Muslims because of *Ulema* orthodoxy. A few Muslim scholars have pointed out that behind the conservatism of the *Ulema* lies the traditional *madrassa* (seminary) system of *Ulema* education, which is the pivotal institution for the continuation of the Islamic tradition. In India, the training imparted in most Muslim *madrassas* has remained stagnant because of its adherence to what is known as the 'Nizami syllabus', whose content and style continue to be more or less the same as was formulated at the end of the 17th century by an Indian theological scholar, Mulla Nizamuddin (1679-1748). The outmoded education is strengthened by the idealization and legitimation of poverty in the ethos of the *madrassa*. This theodicy of poverty, which is anchored in several hadiths (extra-Quranic tradition), is continuously and rigorously reinforced by the *madrassa* and its psycho-social environment. It is sad, however, that while this system may give meaning to life in one context, it renders the same life meaningless in another context, namely that of change and modernisation.

An air of liberalism is now affecting the Muslim community. The days are over when the liberals were considered kafirs. This shift in Muslim opinion may well be the most important consequence of the Babri demolition. If carried to the end, it could usher in a period of Islamic reformation in India.

3. Conclusion

The Muslims in India in order to keep their identity will have to recognize the social and economic divergences within their own community and to understand their implications for political action, to look at their problems in a broad perspective, and to undertake a realistic re-appraisal of their new status in free India. One of the misfortunes of the Muslims in recent years has been that they have had more than their normal quota of politicians but few social reformers. Yet, their most pressing need today seems to be for a social reformer who can lead them out of their present mood of despondency. In India, Islam needs a contemporaneously relevant and situationally valid interpretation. There is also an urgent need for emphasizing the humanistic, secular and accommodative aspects of Islam. Indeed this is a challenge that has not yet been taken up seriously.

Hindus and other religious groups will have to accept Muslims as an integral part of the population, to recognize that certain segments of the Muslims actually suffer from social and economic disabilities which, so long as they continue to persist, will impede the effective integration of those strata into the polity and society, and to work collectively with them, at least for those common problems which some of their members also share with them.

The Muslim community has entered a new phase of purification and consolidation with a will to discover itself. Muslims are becoming aware that they are citizens of a great country, whose future depends also on their contribution. They were among the first to develop a composite culture that broadened the boundaries of Bharat from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari and from Kabul to Chittagong, and brought home the reality of a united and great India, in which the Himalayan border states were included for the first time. In view of these realities the Muslims should form an institutional set-up that not only addresses their particular problems but also the problems of independent Bharat. In future, too, they have a great role to play in preserving the multi-religious and multi-cultural character of this great land.

Notes

1. Cf. David Wines, "Indian Muslims: Fundamental Questions," *London Times*, Birmingham: January 1985, p. 10.
2. Cf. Ahmd Khan, *The Muslims in India*, Delhi: Ahmed Pub., 1978, p. 80.
3. Cf. Basheer Khan, *The Muslim Society*, Lucknow: Latif Pub., 1976, p. 76
4. Gardner Murphy, *In the Minds of Men: The Study of Human Behaviour and Social Tensions in India*, New York: Basic Books, 1953, p. 124.
5. See K.R. Malkani's Letter in *The Times of India*, Bombay, May 21, 1979.
6. Gardner Murphy, p. 127.
7. Gopal Krishna, *Contemporary Muslim Attitudes and Their Place in Indian Society*, Delhi: CSDS, 1977, p.11.
8. W.C. Smith, "The *Ulema* in Indian Politics," *Politics and Society in India*, C.H. Phillips,

ed., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963, cited in Gopal Krishna, "Framework of Politics," *Seminar* 106, June 1968, p. 33.

9. Abid Husain, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Bombay: The Asia Publishing House, 1965, p. 7.
10. Balraj Puri, "Identity and Autonomy of Muslims in India," *Islam and the Modern Age*, Vol. X No. 2, May 1979, p. 12.
11. S. Harman, *Plight of Muslims of India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1975, p. 56.
12. See Muhammad Asad, *The Spirit of Islam*, Ahmed Khan, *The Muslims of India* The same idea is also found in David Wines, "Indian Muslims: Fundamental Insights".
13. Ali Khan, *Muslims and Changes in India*, Patna: Trimurti Publications, 1987, p. 97.
14. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Indian Muslims: A Study of the Minority Problem in India*, Delhi: Ajanta Publicatiaons, 1985, p. 1.
15. Burney in his private circular remarks on the ambiguity of the Minority Commission's Report, see *Cultural Forum*, 1972.
16. For details see "Aligarh Riots: Study Team's Findings," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (46) (18 November, 1978), pp. 1882-85. Also Beg Nasirulla, "Rights of Minorities Under Indian Constitution," *Mainstream* 14 (510), (21 August, 1976), pp. 11-14 provides valuable information. Further one can also consult C.P. Bambhri *et. al.* "Voting Behaviour: a Comparative Study of the Majority and Minority Communities," *Indian Journal of Political Science* 35 (11) (Oct-Dec 1974), pp. 332-339.
17. *Indian Currents*, July 14-20, 1997, p. 1.
18. *India Today*, January 31, 1993, p. 44.
19. The voting pattern of the Muslims can be seen in Asghar Ali Engineer, "Do Muslims Vote as a Block?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 (11) (12 March 1977), p. 458. Further, it is enlightening to see Habib Irfan *et. al.* "Problems of the Muslim Minority in India," *Social Scientist* 4 (11) (June 1976), pp. 67-72.
20. S.M.H. Burney speaks very openly of the drawbacks of this programme See "An Analysis of the Minority Commission", Delhi: Leaflet, Preeti Publication, 1993, p 10
21. A.R. Saiyed, "Othodoxy," *Seminar* 240 (1979), p. 24.
22. Tahir Mahmood, though a staunch Muslim, critically analyses the validity of and the need for change in the Muslim Personal Law. See *Semina* 240 (1979), p. 27.
23. Malika B. Mistry further elaborates this issue with the help of statistics taken in the city of Bangalore She concludes that the Muslims are seen backward not only in terms of education and employment but also in terms of occupational status and income. She further says that a general welfare as well as special programmes aimed at reducing socio-economic backwardness of Muslims should be undertaken See *Socio-Economic Backwardness of the Muslims in India*, Bombay: Institute of Indian Studies, Occasional Papers No. 5, Vol. 7, May, 1991.
24. Delhi: Thomson Press, 1973.
25. *Ibid*, p. 54.
26. *Ibid*, pp. 80, 201.
27. *The Times of India*, Mumbai: February 25, 1993, p.12.

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Tribals in India: A Challenge to Theology

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After studying the same set of Indian tribals twice, the first time in the 1940s and again three decades later, the Austrian anthropologist Haimendorf[1] was stunned by the difference thirty years had made to them. During the first study these communities were self-reliant, their economic status was better than that of many of their Hindu neighbours, and women among them enjoyed more freedom than their high caste counterparts did. But by the 1970s, they required poverty alleviation programmes. So the scholar asks: "Why do these communities that were self-reliant till recently need poverty alleviation programmes today? Why have women among them suffered more than the rest?"

One can ask similar questions about other recent events like the Narmada Bachao Andolan's efforts to create public opinion against a project that will deprive over a lakh persons, two thirds of them tribals, of their livelihood,[2] the Jharkhand movement in Chotanagpur,[3] the anti-land alienation agitation in the South, the Bodoland struggle in the Northeast and similar conflicts elsewhere.

These and other struggles have brought into focus the impoverishment of Indian tribals through deforestation, displacement and other types of dispossession. They have come to symbolise many other struggles elsewhere in India against the type of national development that dispossesses the tribals and other eco-system dependent communities. They pay the price of national development whose benefits reach another class. Even the benefits of the poverty alleviation programmes that are planned after impoverishing them reach only the money-lenders and the middlemen. The struggles also symbolise the tribal search for a new identity at a time when they are feeling alienated from their habitat because of the threat to the natural resources around which they had built their cultural, economic, social, religious and political structures.

Their marginalisation as well as struggles are a challenge to the Indian theologian if theology is understood as a search in the footsteps of Jesus who exercised His ministry in Galilee, considered the land of the despised, barbarous, gentile people.[4] In the present paper, therefore, we shall make an effort to study this search for a new identity in the context of the ongoing dispossession of the tribals, and reflect on it in a spirit of faith.

1. Forests and Tribals

The first feature of tribal culture is that their communities are natural resource, or more specifically, forest dependent. A large number of them lived

in a culture of community property resources (CPRs), not individual *patta* land. Around 90% of the 70 million Indian tribals are forest dwellers. This habitat of theirs has, for centuries, met most of their food, medicinal, fodder and other needs. To ensure its renewability and protection, they developed a culture of sustainable forest and other natural resource management. Their customs, myths and social control mechanisms were geared to keeping a balance between human needs and ecological imperatives. Their natural resource management system attended both to intra-generational and inter-generational equity.[5]

In theological terms, this culture symbolises respect for and preservation of the creation of God, to the benefit of all His people, not for the overconsumption of a few as is the case today. Their impoverishment is also a witness to the fact of environmental degradation being an integral part of today's unjust national and international economic order.[6] Their marginalisation, that ensues from this order, turns the tribal issue into an ethical challenge.

This change began with the colonial Government declaring forests State Property. This legislation deprived the forest dwellers of all legal rights over their livelihood and over their habitat of several centuries. It turned forests into a source of revenue for the State and of timber for the railways and ship building. This process of alienation of their livelihood has got intensified after independence in the name of national development. While continuing to be a source of revenue for the State, forests became a raw material for industry to produce consumer goods for the middle class. In an industrialisation and GNP (Gross National Product) growth based pattern of development that downgrades social justice and the environment, the industrialist was provided all possible subsidies. Little attention was paid either to the tribal or to the forest.[7] Its result is that between 1952 and 1980, India's forest cover came down from around 70 million hectares to about 35 million hectares. Today all the forest and non-forest tree cover is put at around 13% .[8]

Thus began the vicious circle of tribal impoverishment, indebtedness, land alienation, bondage and destructive dependence on the forest. Since forests were their habitat, before the arrival of the commercial elements the tribals were not adequately in contact with the world outside, and were not equipped to encounter the "mainstream" formal economy. Some of their communities belonged to the first generation of a monetary economy. As such, they were unable to cope with the sudden change that descended on them with the industrialist entering their area. So their encounter became one between power and powerlessness.[9] They thus came to be indebted to the money-lenders and merchants who accompanied the industrial agent. In many cases they lost, and, in others, mortgaged their land to the money-lenders.[10]

A large number of them became bonded labourers. Consequent upon their marginalisation, many resorted to destructive practices such as cutting trees for sale as firewood or for timber

under contractors. There has thus been an enormous increase in the number of families depending on the sale of firewood for a living. For example, in our study in Orissa, in a sample of 272 families, the number depending on the sale of firewood had gone up from 18 in the early 1960s to 77 in 1983. Similar were our findings in Chattisgarh in Eastern Madhya Pradesh.[11] According to estimates, there are over five million headloaders in the country.[12] To the tribals who had developed a tradition of sustainable development, such a destructive measure is the last survival option in the absence of any other.

2. Tribals and Development-Induced Displacement

Displacement for development projects like dams, mines, industries and wild-life sanctuaries is the second major source of ongoing tribal impoverishment and marginalisation. They live in resource rich regions. Around 90% of minerals like coal, bauxite and uranium, and around 40% of iron and copper ore are in the areas they inhabit.[13] India's industrialisation drive depends on the exploitation of these resources. In other cases, they live in the catchment or submergence areas of major and medium dams.

Its consequence is displacement for development projects. No official information exists on the numbers displaced (DPs) or those deprived of their livelihood without being physically displaced (PAPs). According to research estimates their number exceeds 300 lakhs,[14] at least 40% of them tribals.[15] In other words, around 20% of all Indian tribals have been displaced at least once, fewer than a quarter of them resettled partially. The rest have been impoverished and have often become bonded labourers. Besides, a much bigger number of PAPs is deprived of their livelihood through the acquisition of the CPRs that are considered State Property. As such, the tribals get no benefit from the project that deprives them of their livelihood, not even compensation.[16]

According to our study in Orissa about 15 lakh persons have thus been displaced or otherwise deprived of their livelihood between 1951 and 1995, in that State alone. Of them, 42% are tribals. Only around 32% of all the DPs and fewer than 25% of tribal DPs have been resettled partially.[17] Besides, forest and other land taken over for development projects runs into hundreds of thousands of hectares. For example, over 23.62 lakh acres have been taken over for all the projects in Orissa, 1951-1995. Around 30% of it, or 7.13 lakh acres are forests and about 20% or 6.61 lakhs revenue land. Much of it is tribal livelihood.[18] According to one estimate,[19] around 4.5 million hectares of forest land have been acquired for development projects since 1951. Since the colonial law, that is still in vogue, denies CPR dependants all legal rights over their livelihood, they are deprived of them for an as yet undefined public purpose, without any compensation.[20]

The two units of the National Aluminium Corporation in Orissa are examples of the immensity of this injustice. In the first, situated in upper caste dominated Angul, only 18% of the land acquired was common, mostly roads,

schools and tanks. In the second unit at Damanjodi in the tribal majority Koraput district, about 60 per cent of land acquired was CPRs. Besides, being administratively neglected, the tribal areas are considered backward. As a result, they get a very low compensation for the little *patta* land they own. For example, in Angul the land owners received an average compensation of Rs. 25,000 per acre while at Damanjodi it was Rs. 2,700.[21] Similar examples can be given from other tribal areas too.

Equally important is the fact that often their habitat is chosen in preference to upper caste dominated regions, apparently on the assumption that being powerless, tribals are unable to resist their displacement. That, for example, is the case of the proposed Military Test Firing Range at Netarhat. It was to be located in Gaya where an already existing smaller base was to be expanded. But the big farmers of the region, some of whose land would have been taken over for it, resisted it. The Range was, therefore, shifted to Netarhat in tribal Jharkhand. The official reason given was that Gaya has many places of religious and historical importance and that it would displace many people. The assumption seems to be that the tribal places of worship are not of much significance and their history does not matter. Besides, Netarhat has a population of 238,000 of which 80% of them tribals. Their powerlessness seems to be the main reason for this decision.

Apart from the injustice of being displaced without their consent, a result of low compensation or lack of it, and the failure to resettle them is that the tribals are unable to begin a new life after being thus dispossessed. As a result of the impoverishment and bondage that ensue, they resort to destructive practices like cutting trees for sale as firewood or migrate to the urban slums. These are the only survival options they are left with.[22] But to the middle class that gets the benefits of their impoverishment, they are a problem. The tribals who are resorting to these survival options, come to be considered destroyers of the environment, by the class that is at the root of their alienation.

3. Alienation and Dispossession

Impoverishment by deforestation and displacement is an integral part of their dispossession. Land alienation is a logical consequence. India has two types of citizens. Those in occupation of revenue land may claim ownership over it after twelve years. But those living on forest land can never get its ownership even though their ancestors might have been in its possession for centuries before the colonial forest and land laws came into force.[23] A large number of tribals belong to the latter category. Forests account for more than 50% of their food and most other requirements of many of their communities. But the colonial law that is in vogue even today continues to treat them as encroachers and denies them the very possibility of their ever owning their habitat.

Even when they own *patta* land, the process of impoverishment mentioned above forces them to sell or mortgage much of it. In other instances the

land they have cultivated for generations is encroached upon, at times with the encouragement of the Government. For example, in the tribal areas of Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, through an agreement, the Nilambur Maharaja handed over to the tribal community, for cultivation in perpetuity, what is known as *poromboke* land belonging to him. In the 1950s the Tamil Nadu Government abrogated this agreement unilaterally. So the land they were cultivating came to be considered Government property, with the tribals losing all legal rights over it. Anyone considered capable of growing more food was encouraged to occupy it. As a result, this land has since been taken over by non-tribal settlers from Kerala, who were encouraged by the Government during the "Grow More Food" campaign of the 1960s. Almost all the tribals have thus lost their land to the settlers and have become bonded labourers.[24]

At times dispossession takes place through connivance between the officials and locally powerful persons. For example, the Land Acquisition Act, 1894, enacted for a colonial objective, empowers the Government to acquire private land for a public purpose. But the "public purpose" is yet to be defined even a century later.[25] So, often the project authorities take over much more land than is required and later sell it for a profit or use it for purposes other than the project, often to the benefit of their relatives.[26]

In many instances, the encroachers belonging to powerful communities, do not allow land laws to be implemented. For example, in the tribal regions of Wynad in Kerala, several hundreds of acres of tribal land was taken over by the Government in 1956, with a promise that it would be developed into a plantation and returned to them after five years. It is yet to be returned to them. A part of it has been given to non-tribals. Besides, a large number of settlers have occupied thousands of acres of tribal land in the Wynad and Idukki districts of Kerala. In many cases the original owners have become bonded labourers. In 1975 the Kerala Legislature passed a law stipulating that the land thus encroached upon be returned to the tribals. It is yet to be implemented because the settlers are a powerful vote bank and the tribals are powerless. In 1996 the Kerala High Court ruled that the law be implemented without delay. Instead of going by this ruling, the Legislature amended the law, making it applicable to land occupied after 1986 instead of 1970 as it was earlier. Most land was occupied in the 1960s and 1970s.[27] Because of pressure from the tribals, the President of India refused his signature to the amended bill. But there is no sign that the law will be implemented.

Such powerlessness can be noticed also in other States. In Orissa, more than a third of the tribals have lost their land to non-tribals, through a similar process. When impoverishment forces the man to migrate out of the area in search of jobs, the locally powerful persons exploit the woman's powerlessness, to encroach on her land. In other cases, because of impoverishment, the officials act in connivance with the locally powerful persons and change the records in their favour.[28] Maharashtra

has a "land for land" scheme for irrigation project DPs. In reality, only 30% of those entitled to it have been given land. They include more than 40% of the non-tribals and fewer than 15% of the tribals.[29]

There is little that the tribals can do since they do not have access to the official machinery which, more often than not, goes against them. For example, even according to official estimates 180,000 acres of tribal land in the scheduled areas of Andhra Pradesh has been encroached upon by non-tribals. According to researchers the area thus alienated was more than 600,000 acres in 1988. But instead of enforcing the law that disallows sale of land in the scheduled areas to non-tribals, in 1988 the State Government tried to regularise this encroachment. The Tribal Advisory Council comprising of all the tribal legislators, whose consent is required for this change, was pressurised into accepting it.[30] This measure was abandoned only because of resistance from the tribals.

4. Challenge to Theologians

We have given above a few instances of the process of tribal dispossession. We have also seen that what is called national development has in reality become a mode of transferring the resources of the poor to the rich. In that sense economic colonialism that is the norm at the international level, continues in another form also within the country. Internationally, the resources of the poor countries are transferred to the rich countries in order to keep up their life-style based on overconsumption. The middle and upper classes within our country continue the same process. Using the access they have to all the services, these classes appropriate the resources for themselves, and further impoverish the already poor, particularly the tribals and the Dalits.

This situation is a challenge to theologians to join all persons of good will in finding a response to the degradation of the already powerless. Basic to this process is the powerlessness of the tribals and the pattern of development that is geared to building a physical or industrial infrastructure but not to the good of all. A major issue in this debate is environmental degradation. However, not all perceive it in the same manner. There are at least two distinct trends around the environment.

The first is the predominantly Euro-American view accepted by a large number of Indian middle class environmentalists. They perceive ecological imbalance as water and air pollution and destruction of plants and trees. Their task, then, is to save the natural world[31] which is presented by some theologians as restoring the creation of God. These environmentalists do not question the unjust economy and the consumerist society that are basic to environmental degradation and the impoverishment of the eco-system dependants. So often they try to restore nature at the cost of the people, as one can see in many recent Supreme Court judgements on the environment.

The second is the view of those who regard the environment as people who depend on it for a livelihood. For centuries these commmunities have kept a balance between human and

ecological needs, through a culture that ensures inter- and intra- generational equity and assigns a more important place to women than the "mainstream" societies do, without their being equal to men. This school of thought views the present environmental imbalance as the result of over-exploitation of the resources to meet the needs of a small minority.[32] In this perspective, restoration of the environment is linked to a change in lifes-tyles and to justice to the communities that are being marginalised by the unjust economy.[33]

A theologian can make a choice depending on his/her view of creation and nature. Those who view the natural world predominantly as something to be conquered and dominated present their thinking as the interpretation of Gen 1, 28 "be masters of the earth and conquer it". In this perspective, the world was the wilderness of little value, waiting to be controlled by human beings. This ideology became the basis not merely of the conquest of nature but also of peoples. Colonialism and the conquest of peoples were often legitimised by pointing to the conquest of their habitat that was presented as being ready to be tamed by human beings: as an integral part of the colonial "civilising education," not as economic exploitation of the people who depended on it.[34] It was essentially an ethno-centric view of the world. The "civilised" western human being was its centre and the rest of the world belonged to its periphery.

It is Western Christianity that has taught us to see ourselves as the centre of things with the right, even the duty, to conquer, subdue and have dominion over nature. Early scientific thought reinforced this view of ourselves, by seeing the earth as the centre of the universe, with the planets, the stars and the sun all circling round it.[35]

This view has been basic to the exploitation of the tribals in India. They are commonly presented as people who love dance and music and inhabit the wilderness. An implication of this stereotype is that they are easy going, not hard working and as such not capable of conquering the earth. Those who claim to work hard and can conquer the world according to the Genesis mandate, would then have a right to acquire their resources and develop them. Their habitat can be claimed by the "civilising elements" who are ready to "develop" and maximise its potential. What Sachs states about the international economy is equally true in what concerns the tribal:[36]

> Up until recently, the burden of the unification of the world had nearly exclusively to be carried by the people of the Southern hemisphere. Starting with the plague killing millions of Aztecs and Mayas, right after the white person's arrival ... whichever achievements have been brought to the last corner of the globe by the gradual integration of the world, they shrink into insignificance in the face of the bitter consequences which come along with it. By comparison, the countries of the North were able to corner the gains of the unification of the world on their side ... the rise of the West has in part been fuelled by the riches drained from the South through the network of global interconnections.[37]

4.1. Environment as People

While this view dominated the world, there was an equally important, though marginal, view of the role of nature. It found its base in the prophetic trend of the Bible, as given in Ps 8,3-4:

> I look up at your heavens, made by your fingers,
> At the moon and stars you set in place,
> Ah, what is man that you should spare a thought for him,
> The son of man that you should care for him.

In contrast to the trend to conquer nature, this school tried to "save the earth". But there are two distinct views even in this. Some look at the earth as the natural world. Many of them give to the earth created by God precedence over human beings, without looking at the political and economic aspect of the use of the natural resources. They rarely question the unjust economic order.

Another school has realised that the causes of injustice have to be remedied. They view the environment as the creation of God with the human being at its centre. The God they believe in is the One who came to make all things new (Rev 1, 5). This renewal makes no sense to them unless the sinful social system is healed. If this perspective is forgotten, there is every danger of further destroying the environment in the name of protecting the natural heritage understood as the creation of God. For example, most European and other OECD countries keep a third of their territory under forests, proclaimed as the creation of God. But they do not reduce their use of timber products. Instead, they destroy forests in Africa, Asia and Latin America, in order to save their woods. Indian nature-oriented environmentalists, taking a cue from the West, attempt to do the same. They want nature to be protected and not the people who have ensured its renewability for centuries. The eco-system dependent communities, predominantly tribals in India, are the main victims of this approach. They are often deprived of their livelihood in order to protect the natural heritage.

4.2. The Theologian's Response

Theology has to respond to this process of destruction of nature and marginalisation of the tribals and other eco-system dependent people. In doing so, the first task of the theologian is to acknowledge the role that Christendom has played in the past, and reflect on our role today from the point of view of the victims of development, more specifically the tribals who are paying the price of national development. The theologian needs to reflect also on the environment from the perspective of those depending on nature directly.

As a step towards it, the theologian has to rethink the meaning of the creation of God and situate the tribals within the context of those who have lived the concept of sustainable and just management of what God has put at the disposal of His people. Their communities, women in particular, are now being turned into victims of the development of the powerful. When they resort to the destructive option, that being the only one available to them, they are termed enemies of the creation of God.

So the second task is to play the prophetic role of acknowledging the sinfulness of this pattern of development that denies to the tribals and other poor, the fundamental right to life with dignity which is enshrined in the Indian Constitution under Article 21. The theologian has to join those who are searching for a pattern of development that accords primacy to the people to whom the world belongs and views GNP growth as subordinate to it.

Within this perspective, a theology has to be developed, based on a community ethos and on nature as the creation of God that is meant to be shared by all. Creation is meant for the need of everyone and not greed that is destroying the world and impoverishing communities that depend on it. In this search, the theologian has to get away from the temptation to romanticise the tribals as communities having answers to all the problems of the world. Their culture developed within a certain socio-economic context and may not be able to respond to all the problems we are facing today. They too have a right to change. In the name of the creation of God they cannot be kept as museum pieces. But in theologising, it is important to understand the value system on which their culture was based. These values of equity and renewability are basic, not the practices that can change.[38]

The search for alternatives will depend on these values that are also the perspective of the biblical jubilee. The management of the creation of God can then be understood according to this value system. For example, forests and other CPRs are today managed on the basis of the right of the powerful. The existing law is supportive of this trend. The management of human resources has to change from the perspective of human development and the concept of a partnership of equals. A genuine community forestry and other natural resource management systems have to be introduced, to keep a balance between the livelihood of the local communities, national development and ecological imperatives. The theologian will have to search for a religious basis within the value system of the tribal management system.

5. Conclusion

The theologian will then be a partner with the tribals and other marginalised communities in the search for a pattern of development that combines industrial development with a social infrastructure. The categories which have till now been excluded from the benefits of development have to be given priority in the form of education, health, nutrition and other inputs that can help them to encounter other groups as equals and not as suppliers of cheap raw material and labour as they are today. The livelihood of the tribals and their value system can be the starting point in this common search.

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Christianity and Caste

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1. The Issue

Caste is a social formation peculiar to Indian Society. Whereas societies all over the world, with the possible exception of tribal societies, show similarities in terms of the hierarchical ranking of class formations, Indian society, in addition to class differentiation, shows a unique pattern of caste stratification which often, not always, overlaps with class formation. Caste in its origins may in effect have been a kind of functional differentiation within society and therefore analogues to class. However, in the course of ages, it acquired racial and religious overtones which predicated it rigidly on birth-determined status with the accompanying notion of ritual purity and impurity. The result was an ambiguous social phenomenon. On the one hand, the votaries of '*Varnāśram*' claim that Indian society acquired an adaptive and integrative genius within a pluralistic set-up, and this enabled it to last through the vicissitudes of history. On the other hand, critics of caste argue that it has been a factor of disintegration rather than integration, and that caste segregation and exclusivity has hindered the emergence of civil society in contemporary India.

The mentality associated with caste is perhaps more problematic than the structures of caste which today are crumbling anyway before the onslaught of modernisation. Caste-mindedness, which resides in the subconscious most of the time, asserts itself in subtle and not-so-subtle forms in private and public life. The devious logic of caste-mindedness is that all humans are not in fact born equal, and hence are not entitled to equal consideration and treatment. What then happens to the principle of equality under the law on which a modern polity is founded? The caste mindset contravenes constitutionalism, with its cardinal tenets of republicanism, civil liberties, fundamental rights, egalitarianism and secularism. This mismatch invariably proves costly in social and political terms. Culture and economy are also vulnerable to the depredations of caste as vast reservoirs of talent remain untapped within the body of society, unless they are released through affirmative action. An achieving society self-consciously seeks out merit and gives it every encouragement whereas an ascriptive society prides in its status and tradition.

The bottomline of the debate on caste is the concept of human being that one chooses to have. Is it a 'univocal' concept or an 'equivocal' one? A univocal concept is one that accepts human nature as fundamentally the same world-wide, with the same dignity,

rights and responsibilities. An equivocal concept on the other hand does not believe in the essential commonality of human nature and grades humanity in terms of levels of relative worth. To the extent that these contrasting concepts are operationalised in real life, we shall have very different social results. The univocal concept helps the emergence of a society that is more open, participative and egalitarian. All sections of the community feel a sense of belonging and have a common stake in the welfare of the whole. They are, therefore, more likely to contribute to the total social product whether in terms of culture or of economic output. The equivocal concept on the other hand consigns large sections of the community to second, third and fourth class citizenship. It inhibits creativity and social mobility which are essential for innovation and achievement. A healthy sense of competition is pre-empted as a result. The consequence of social stratification is a stagnant and reactionary society that is more rooted in the past than oriented to the future.

2. The Christian Response

What is the Christian outlook in this regard? To answer this question we need to go back to the sources of Christian doctrine and practice, and examine to what extent these have been reflected in the Indian context. As for Christian doctrine, we read in the book of Genesis that "God created man... male and female he created them" (1:27). We are further told that "God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (2:7). The creation narrative goes on to say that "God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. God built the rib He had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. The man exclaimed: "'This at last is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh! This is to be called woman for this was taken from man.' This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body" (2:23-24).

The above quotations from Genesis contain in a nutshell the Christian view of human nature though expressed in an anthropomorphic and allegorical manner. Human dignity flows from the fact that God has created him or her in His own image and likeness. As a 'minigod', a human person has the unique faculties of reason and will, and therefore, of self-expression and self-determination. His fundamental rights and civil liberties are rooted in his basic constitution as a sovereign person whose life is a free gift of the Creator himself. Liberty, equality and fraternity are therefore germane to his nature and may not be alienated or violated by any power under God. All civil and political authorities are mandated to uphold human dignity and rights through good and just governance. The State does not do its citizens any special favour by safeguarding their life and liberty. It is only discharging its sacred duty by them.

The second of the above quotations from Genesis brings home to us the astounding fact that each one of us is a unique configuration of organic

compounds with a breath of the divine sustaining us. This puts us in solidarity with one another and makes us responsible for one another. We are ever so ephemeral and vulnerable as mortals, yet ever so special as being animated by the same Divine Spirit. There is no question of some being more equal than others, at least as far as the constitution of human nature itself is concerned, though there may be a wide variation among individuals and groups in terms of capabilities and socio-environmental conditioning. Genesis also asserts, in a very poetic and graphic way, the equality of man and woman who share the same origin, and, therefore, the same dignity and destiny. This has important implications for gender justice as scriptural sanction is often sought to rationalise male domination in domestic and societal affairs.

A brief sampling of quotations from the New Testament will serve to illustrate the overall Christian view of human nature and human society. This view is a non-discriminatory one, the only basic discrimination constantly made being that between those who live by love and those who do not. The Apostle Peter, while addressing the household of the Roman centurion Cornelius, says "The truth I have now come to realise is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

In another context, the Apostle Paul, while addressing the Council of the Areopagus in Athens, speaks in a similar vein when he says, "Since the God who made the world and everything in it is Himself Lord of heaven and earth, He does not make His home in shrines made by human hands. Nor is He dependent on anything that human hands can do for Him, since He can never be in need of anything; on the contrary, it is He who gives everything – including life and breath – to everyone. From one single stock He not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but He decreed how long each nation shall flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be. And He did this so that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him. Yet in fact He is not far from any one of us, since it is in Him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are His children'" (Acts 17:24-28). In his letter to the Romans, Paul again emphasises: "Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God" (Rom 3:14-16). Consequently, Paul exhorts his followers, "If you love your fellowmen, you have carried out your obligations. All the commandments; 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet', and so on, are summed up in this single command: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself;' Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour; that is why it is the answer to everyone of the commandments"

(Rom 13:8-10). The same exhortation to love is found in the First Letter of John: "My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never know God because God is love (I Jn 4:7-8).

Social differentiation is one thing, which is both unavoidable and in many ways a source of human enrichment; but discrimination among various categories of human beings is totally alien to the Christian spirit. Paul recognises this fact when he states: "... if all the parts were the same, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many, but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand 'I do not need you', nor can the head say to the feet, 'I do not need you'" (I Cor 12: 18-21). Paul takes the principle of non-discrimination to an extreme when addressing the churches of Galatia in the following terms: "... there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28). And in the Letter of James we read, "... as soon as you make distinctions between classes of people, you are committing sin ..." (James 2:9).

3. Church and Caste

The non-discriminatory character and participative spirit of the early Christian communities in the Middle East are brought out in a brief pen-sketch in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read: "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed" (Acts 2: 44-45). This and the earlier biblical citations serve as a background to our understanding of the pristine Christian social outlook which influenced Church teachings in the centuries that followed down to our own day.

However, as happens most of the time in human affairs there is a considerable gap between precept and practice, and this holds good of the Church too. In the course of its long history, the Church has come to be stratified and structured in a hierarchical straitjacket. There is not only differentiation but often discrimination among hierarchy, clergy and laity. There is an inbuilt gender bias against women which precludes them from ordination and priestly ministry. Add to this, in India caste incubus has affected sections of the Christian community as through some kind of social osmosis. During the early missionary era, only converts from the Brahmin caste were normally ordained to the priesthood. There have been incidents occasionally reported from the not-so-distant past of so-called Brahmin priests refusing to concelebrate Holy Mass with priests of non-Brahmin descent. So persistent was the caste factor as faced by the foreign missionaries that they were often constrained to limit their ministry to one or other caste, excluding the others. Thus Francis Xavier restricted his apostolate to the coastal *paravas* of low caste, virtually shunning the upper castes. On the other hand, Robert de Nobili cultivated the Brahmins exclusively and adopted their lifestyle. The same was the case with John de Britto. In present-day Goa, it is not

uncommon to have matrimonial alliances forged within the same caste. And in Kerala, which tradition holds to have welcomed the Apostle Thomas and history has documented as having welcomed Vasco da Gama, the herald of the missionary era, we find that Syrian Christians place themselves high up in the social hierarchy both within and outside Church circles. In South India generally, where a large proportion of Indian Christians are concentrated, it is estimated that some sixty to seventy percent of the community comprises converts from the lower castes, the so-called Dalit Christians. In certain dioceses, separate burial grounds are reported to have been set aside for the Dalit Christians. A generation or two ago, it was not uncommon for certain Churches in Mumbai to have separate pews for Koli and Kunbi Christians, belonging to the fishing and agricultural communities respectively. In Vasai, there are Christians who consider themselves *Samvedi* (*Sāma Veda*) Christians and therefore of Brahmin status.

4. Reservation and Christians

Following the decision of the Government of India to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in respect of the so-called 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs), there have been stirrings within the Indian Christian community to have benefits of reservation extended to the deprived sections of the community, particularly the Dalit Christians, or Christians of Scheduled Caste origin. The development has obliged Church leaders to turn the spotlight within, and take cognisance of areas of discrimination and neglect within the Christian community which professes egalitarianism. Pressures have been building up within the communities to take positive steps to end this discrimination, which runs counter to Gospel values. At the same time, demands are being made on the government to render the Dalit Christians eligible for the socio-economic benefits available to the Scheduled Castes under the policy of affirmative action.

Those who are opposed to the extension of Scheduled Caste reservation benefits to the Dalit Christians maintain that as Christianity does not believe in caste, the question of Scheduled Caste Christians does not arise, and thus extending the benefits of reservation to them is ruled out. If such categorisation is extended to the Christian community, caste structures would be introduced into the Church itself, which would be a paradoxical and undesirable consequence. The rejoinder to this argument is that while Christianity in India has explicitly outlawed untouchability, yet the Constitution provides reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This reservation cannot be on the basis of religion as that would mean a clear violation of the provisions of the Constitution itself. Thus it can be on the basis of socio-economic criteria whereby backwardness is established. It may also be pointed out here that Christians belonging to the Scheduled Tribes qualify for the benefits of reservation along with the non-Christians of Scheduled Caste origin for similar benefits. Moreover, OBC Christians, along with other minorities, are entitled to the benefits of reservation as per the Mandal Commission recommendations.

Thus it is only Scheduled Caste Christians who are left in a limbo as far as the benefits of reservation go. This is inexplicable if the ground for reservation is socio-economic backwardness which cuts across religious denominational boundaries. If, however, the ground is religion, it clearly is in contravention of the letter and spirit of the Constitution. There is reason to believe that the latter is the case in view of the fact that Scheduled Caste Christians who re-convert to Hinduism have the benefits of reservation restored to them while they are deprived of the same benefits as long as they remain within the Christian fold.

Another interesting phenomenon is that Scheduled Caste Sikhs and Buddhists enjoy the benefits of reservation despite the fact that neither Sikhism nor Buddhism believes in caste and both faiths in fact explicitly repudiate caste. Thus the argument that because Christians do not believe in caste, Scheduled Caste Christians are not entitled to the benefits of reservation falls flat on its face. A basic question that needs to be asked is: Is it not the responsibility of a government that runs a professedly secular, welfare state to promote the upliftment of all sections of its citizens, of whatever caste or creed, particularly the weaker sections? What has a religious label to do with this? To take the stand that it is for the Church leaders to uplift the weaker sections of their own community rather than call upon the government to do so, is a specious one in that the bishops are spiritual leaders, and cannot be saddled with additional secular responsibilities which are primarily the preserve of the civil authorities. The same argument would apply to the spiritual/religious leaders of other communities, majority or minority, as well.

The long and short of the foregoing discussion is that as a civic community we need to take stock of the situation in which we find ourselves at present socially and politically. Are we promoting distributive justice in a rational and transparent manner among all sections of the polity? Are we applying secular, socio-economic criteria in extending reservations to the weaker sections? Or are we mixing up communal and casteist considerations in what should be a humanistic, egalitarian enterprise devolving on the public authorities? The principle laid down by the Supreme Court that those who constitute the 'creamy layer' of the backward castes, who are otherwise entitled to the benefits of reservation, are to be excluded from such entitlement, points the way to a non-discriminatory policy of affirmative action in the cause of social justice. It is the degree of socio-economic backwardness that must be the determining factor in entitlement to reservation and no other. Thus whether a deprived person belongs to the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Neo-Buddhist or any other community or sect is irrelevant to the issue at hand.

A pertinent question can be raised here as to whether the Church, by calling for reservations for the Dalit Christians, is not thereby exacerbating the caste problem in India rather than contributing to its solution. In reply it might be said that what the Church is doing is

to call upon the government to follow a non-discriminatory public policy vis-à-vis the deprived sections of all communities, not excluding the Christian community. The only way to combat casteism is to establish unambiguous criteria for backwardness that can be applied across the board to all sections of the national community. Perhaps a 'basic needs' line, that could also be called the 'human dignity' line, should be drawn, below which no individual or group within the national community must be allowed to descend. Such a line would be the cut-off for determining entitlements to reservations and other concessions. A formula for phasing out such benefits and concessions also needs to be worked out in respect of those individuals and groups who have graduated into self-help status. No vested interests should be permitted to develop under the guise of reservation, which has unfortunately been the case up to the present.

Whatever reservations one might have about the recommendations of the Mandal commission, one positive outcome of the 'Mandalisation' of Indian Society has been the progressive secularisation of caste structures, through their use as vehicles of socio-political mobilisation. Many backward castes have become upwardly mobile in the process. The stranglehold of the upper castes has been broken and their claims to hegemony have been debunked. Even the pro-Hindutva parties and outfits that have mostly been dominated by the upper castes have had to come to terms with the likes of Kalyan Singh, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, all hailing from the backward castes.

Mandalisation has led to the desacralisation of Indian politics, and this has served as an antidote to what was perceived as the Sanskritization of the lower castes in their bid to ascend higher up in the caste hierarchy. Today the articulation of caste interests, together with their aggregation across caste boundaries through a process of political bargaining, takes place on purely secular terms, while the space for narrowly based religious discourse and transactions has progressively shrunk, the Mandir movement notwithstanding.

5. Conclusion

The Indian Christian Church cannot remain unaffected by the ferment and metamorphosis taking place in the rest of the Indian Society. As part and parcel of the national community, it has to define itself vis-à-vis the wider society, seek out a legitimate role for itself, put forth its reasonable claims on the polity and assume its just share of benefits and burdens of common citizenship. It should avoid seeking special privileges and exemptions for itself save such as it would advocate for all sections of society without discrimination. It should not fight shy of participating actively in cultural, economic and political life as Indian Christians. The laity and clergy alike are free citizens of a free country and cannot shirk their social responsibilities. The Church, like any other organisation, institution, political party or group, has both the right and the duty to take a stand on public issues, particularly where ethical values are involved, as these constitute the bedrock of its mission. Christian institutions, whether educational or chari-

table, have been by and large cosmopolitan both in their clientele and in their staffing patterns, and this fact alone has been no mean contribution to national integration across barriers of caste and creed. It is to be hoped that as Indian Christianity sheds its minority complex, it will play an increasingly pro-active role, in association with other progressive forces, in exorcising the demon of caste from our body politic.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 77-92

Christianity in Independent India

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Even after fifty years of freedom, the Christian community in India is still struggling to find an identity of its own in the country, and a constructive role in the nation building process. It finds itself at the centre of controversy time and again.[1] It is often attacked from without, and disunited from within. So this Golden Jubilee Year should be a time for introspection and reflection on its role in independent India.

There have been Christians in India for a long time, in fact, reaching back to the earliest period of Christianity. And yet, it is still a small minority religion, submerged within the culture of the dominant religions. This minority status still acts as a drag upon it, hampering it from taking up the challenge of opportunities that are peculiarly its own. It still views everything from a minority – which in practice means communal – perspective which leads to a feeling of insecurity and the urge to fight for its rights. This in turn has been exploited by successive governments who placated the Christians by protecting their communal rights in return for their political support. The Christian community has become a defensive rather than a creative minority.[2]

Christians are still uncomfortable about their colonial past, the association of their faith with the rather unedifying history of Christian nations in the west. It makes them introvert and estranged, in spite of the fact that they are engaged in a great deal of beneficial and worthwhile activities in different fields. Christians are still considered followers of a foreign religion, lacking in Indianness.[3] They are still accused of converting others to their faith. In fact, the educational, medical and other institutions for humanitarian services that are run by Christians are seen as a ploy to conversion. There are Christians who still face discrimination because of their racial or social origins. Christians are still substantially dependent upon foreign funds to maintain their top-heavy institutions. The role of the Indian Christians in the political life of the country has been, by and large, inconspicuous. The majority of them come from the depressed classes.

What are the reasons for all these accusations? Have Christians, in the course of the last fifty years, contributed anything substantial to the Indian polity and national life? In attempting to answer these questions we have to go back to history, particularly the history of the National Movement and the Christian attitude towards it; we also have to examine the period immediately before independence and the Christian attitude to the events that transformed India from a colony to a sovereign na-

tion. By and large, Christians saw the National Movement as a Hindu movement, posing a threat to their identity. Only a few joined it actively, and as a result, the community faced a serious problem after independence, namely, the problem of integrating themselves in independent India. On the other hand, Christians were forthright in rejecting communal attitudes, separate electorates, reservations, the formation of a separate political party etc., and upheld the unity of the country which would protect the legitimate rights of all its citizens. They put complete trust in the common destiny of India and pledged to work for national integration; and this is acknowledged as their distinctive contribution in the framing of the Constitution of India. In the light of this pledge made by the Christian community to commit itself to the cause of national integration at the formation of free India, I would like to examine the self-understanding of the Indian Christians as a minority 'by compulsion', as one author has succinctly put it.[4] It will also bring to light the truth of the accusations levelled against them by their fellow-citizens. Let us first of all, begin with a clarification of the term 'minority.'

1. The Concept of 'Minorities'

What is a minority? The term minority is a product of democracy. Democracy, based on majority rule, gives rise to the existence of dominated groups or minorities.[5] The existence of minorities is based on a number of factors like race, culture, language, religion, economic functions, political functions etc. The minority-dominant relationships are determined by variables of social, economic and political power which are unequally distributed between the two groups.[6] A minority may have different aims, such as preservation of identity and culture on the basis of tolerance of differences and equality of opportunity; it may strive for assimilation and seek to lose its identity as a discrete group and try to merge with the dominant group; sometimes a minority may have secessionist aims like attainment of independence; or it may entertain militant aims to achieve political domination over the majority. Minorities are usually assigned a lower status in a given society in one or more of the four following areas of life: economic, political, legal and social. Sometimes minorities choose to exclude themselves voluntarily in order to protect their identity. Often minorities perform specialised functions in societies, like in the field of economics, politics, social life etc. The Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities set up under the Human Rights Commission defined minorities as including only those non-dominant groups in a population which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population and only those sufficient by themselves to develop these characteristics and loyal to the country of which they may be nationals.[7] The Indian Constitution does not define minorities but recognises the existence of minorities and provides them with, apart from the fundamental rights, a special package of religious, educational and cultural

rights (articles 25-30); it has also created a constitutional machinery for safeguarding and implementing these rights. The three categories of minorities who can claim protection are minorities based on language, religion, and culture (articles 29-30). Accordingly, "Any section of citizens, being small in number in a definite area, in respect of religion, language or on any other ground, seeking equal or preferential treatment either to maintain its identity or to be assimilated with the majority is a minority."[8] The concept of minority has nothing to do with number, but with an attitude of dominance and subservience in a given society.

The question of minorities is nowhere so pronounced as in India, particularly religious minorities, because in India religion plays an important role and its impact is very profound. The history of the origin of the various religions in India is outside the purview of this paper. However, the origin of the minority question, particularly during the British era, needs some exploring. First of all, the British effected the shift from minority consciousness to communal consciousness or minority communalism.[9] This view is widely shared:

> The Morely-Minto Reforms of 1909 gave political expression to the already latent social and religious divisions in the nation by the newly minted concept of communal representation. The classification of constituencies, under the Act of 1919 into general, special and reserved further consolidated these divisions; a process which was to give rise to what came to be known as the communal question and was to become the evil genius of Indian political life till its final exorcising by the creation of Pakistan.[10]

The British institutionalised division, hatred for one another and distinctions among communities, all for their convenience to rule and exploit this country. Religion was the best means to achieve this, considering the profound attachment of the people to religion. Separate electorates, separate family laws, caste quarrels, linguistic disorders etc. were created by them to divide the people. The terms minorities, communal etc. with their negative connotations were introduced by the British. British imperialism was never tired of doing anything to keep India divided, by pitching communities against one another. The minorities became unduly and unhealthily community conscious. After 1921, they acquired a sharp awareness that their interests were at stake and that necessary political action should be taken to safeguard them. The tendency began to emerge to emphasise differences, demanding undemocratic special privileges, concentrating on the narrow and selfish affairs of their own particular class, race or religion. Communal election plans were devised in order to perpetuate the hostility of religious communities among themselves.

Once the British had to leave and partition was a reality, India had to provide the minorities of the country adequate security so that such divisions might not be repeated, and to garner their support for the building up of the nation. This was the task of the founding fathers of the Constitution. Fears had to be removed from the hearts and minds of the Muslims, Christians,

Anglo-Indians, Sikhs, etc. On the eve of the drafting of the Constitution, India had 361 million people speaking about 845 languages or dialects with 15 major languages, belonging to Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and a small community of Jews; each of the minority groups had its own fears and suspicions.[11] In this paper I am concerned only with the Christian community and its attitudes.

Indian Christians played a minor, or rather insignificant, role in the creation of independent India. But once independence was a reality, they made a definite choice of joining the national mainstream of independent India by stating that they sought the protection of their cultural and religious identity not by separate electorates but by fundamental rights fortified by statutory safeguards. In this way they contributed to the founding of the democratic structure of the Indian society.[12] It was a manifestation of political maturity by the Christians. It was the result of a realisation among Christians that they do not have a destiny separate from that of other Indians, and the conviction that the task of the churches is not to fight for their own advantage, but to dedicate themselves to the common good. However, before we discuss that, a word must be said about the role of the Christians in the freedom struggle.

2. Indian Christians and the Struggle for Freedom

One hears accusations even today that Christians are anti-national because they did not take part actively in the freedom struggle. Perhaps history will shed some light upon the truth of these accusations. However, this examination of history has to be content with general observations, because a definitive history of the role of the Christian community in the freedom struggle is yet to be written. Indian Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic and non-Catholic affiliations had different attitudes to the National Movement. It may be said with some certainty that generally Protestant Christians, particularly those who were not governed by an episcopal hierarchy had the most liberal attitude towards the National Movement; it was encouraged by a group of educated and enlightened people who found themselves under the canopy of the All India Conference of Indian Christians.[13] Its leaders were committed nationalists. Catholics were confused about the response to the National Movement. "By contrast, the Catholics with a strong representation in the south and scattered in small communities in the north of India, encountered the changing political scenario, disunited, confused in their political thinking and falling back on episcopal directives for guidance in sorting out public issues – directives which, in the event, did not go beyond exhortations to guard the Catholic community from the encroachments of a wicked world..."[14] For the Protestants, on the contrary, the All India Conference of Indian Christians founded in 1914 became the apex body for the expression of their political aspirations. Apart from its non-political objectives, the Conference wanted to formulate a common political policy in the wake of the National Movement and also wanted to join hands with the Roman Catholics to present a united front of the

Christians vis-à-vis the government. Already in the last decades of the 19th century, there were prominent Protestant Indian Christians who enthusiastically supported the Indian National Congress and attended its annual meetings.[15]

However, this participation slowly declined. According to G.A. Oddie, this decline of interest was due, on the one hand, to the evangelical view that individual salvation was more important than participation in mundane things such as politics; and on the other, the fear of being regarded as disloyal to the government; there was also the fear about the future, as to what would happen if the Congress and the nationalists achieved their objectives and India became an independent democracy dominated by a Hindu majority. The British authorities, too, began to look upon the activities of the Congress with suspicion, so also the western missionaries and the Indian Christians who were influenced by them. "Some Indian Christians therefore began to argue that it was extremely foolish to risk losing the support and favour of the British authorities through an association with what seemed to them to be an extremist organisation."[16] Joseph J. Ghosh, a Bengali Christian writes in 1909:

> We do not know in what way it will be of any advantage to Indian Christians if they join the non-Christians in political agitation. If further political rights and privileges are granted to the people of this country, our poor and small community will not have the remotest chance to be profited by them. On the other hand greater powers in the hands of non-Christians may prove dangerous to the very life of our community. We know by experience that wherever the non-Christians are in power the poor Indian Christians labour under a great disadvantage and have to suffer humiliation, indignities and even persecution.[17]

K. M. Panikkar would later on say:

> Christianity directly contributed but little to the growth of the nationalist feeling. The earlier of high caste converts, Kalipad Mukherji, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Raja Harnam Singh remained nationally minded Indians even after their acceptance of Christianity; but with the growing estrangement between the British government, to which Christians as a community looked for encouragement, and the nationalist movement whose avowed object was to recover India's freedom, the Christian community found itself placed in a very difficult dilemma.[18]

Kaj Baago, the Protestant Church historian, speaks about the role of the National Christian Council in the National Movement in these words: "Prayer for peace was the repeated answer of the N.C.C. Review to the pressing political problems, and one cannot hold back the remark that the frequent calls to that issued from the N.C.C. in the years seem to have been just about the only contribution the Council found it possible to give to the nation's struggle for freedom."[19] According to Baago, the main reason for the inability of the N.C.C. to give a lead to the Protestant Christian community in their struggle to respond to the national question was missionary influence and domination.

However, as the National Movement gained momentum, there were people who saw the damaging consequences of this position. C. F. Andrews said: "I cannot but feel that it should be the most serious blow to Indian Christianity if the impression gained ground that Indian Christians were opposed to the National Movement, and were only occupied in the interests of the their own community."[20] K. T. Paul, one of the most ardent nationalists would say:

> We will do well to realise that there is a terrible danger if we persist in the policy of keeping aloof. Materially, socially, morally, and politically, viewed in fact from every standpoint, our interests are intimately bound up with those of other Indian communities. Will it ever be otherwise? Long after Britain's political mission to India is finished, let us hope five centuries later, for all things earthly must end or change – we shall still be Indians.[21]

Again,

> What greater opportunity can arise than the crisis of today? ... To be born at this hour in India and to have the opportunity to take a share in the shaping of our national destinies at perhaps the most critical point of its history, if that is not an opportunity, what is? It would not only be a lamentable misapprehension of the spirit of Christ but also a grievous neglect of a great God-given opportunity, if it is not realised that Indian Christians have a tremendous duty in regard to the secular crisis in India.[22]

However, the Resolutions of the All India Conference of Indian Christians in 1920 were still reserved in their attitude to the Indian National Congress and the National Movement, in spite of the fact that there was already an emerging nationalist group in the Conference. It condemned the policy of non-cooperation as impractical, unwise, unnecessary and suicidal to the interests of the country. The policies of the Congress were considered to be in a state of flux. This was repeated in 1921. However, in the Conference of 1932-33, the situation changed and S. K. Dutta made an important contribution to the national cause by rejecting the government policy of dividing constituencies on a communal basis; but otherwise, he refused to change the Conference into a political body. He rejected separation and the devices of protection and said that the Christians were willing to assume their responsibilities as citizens of the country; but they would not accept the ignoring of the community's rightful aspirations:

> We would announce once again to our countrymen that in the event of the abandonment of these devices of protection by the majority community, and the largest minority community, we are willing to take our place as citizens of the country. We are willing to work for a common Electoral Roll, open to all citizens, we are willing to abandon all these makings of separate communities, for places of power and prestige. Indeed it is our interest to do so, for our ambitions are greater than the narrow limits of our community. In the services for example, or in the Legislature, we do not desire our community to be marked with these percentages. In a community such as ours, an open field is the best incentive, and in the long run will pay us best.[23]

In 1943 the Conference once again reaffirmed the commitment of the Christian community to the nationalist cause but pleaded for fair treatment from the majority communities:

> We are behind no other community in our burning desire for a self-governing India in the immediate future. We are nationalists as much as any one else ...While we are Christians and proud to be such so far as our faith is concerned, in all other matters we are Indians first and Indians last. There is no antithesis between religion and patriotism, for a true Christian must be a good patriot. Indian Christians are ready to place their country above communal considerations ... Indian Christians wish to take their full share in the political and civic life of the country ... We should not forgo any opportunity of serving our country and through our country our community in being active members of legislatures, or in joining political associations, attending political meetings, and, above all, as a bridge community doing our utmost to narrow the gulf specially in times of communal tension between the two principal communities of India.[24]

The Conference, however, said that if the government persisted in the view that communal considerations were still to be the basis for appointments, although the Christians were not in favour of that, they should also be given their due share.

The dilemma that the Catholic church faced was more excruciating. Led by bishops who were foreigners, and having their headquarters in a foreign country, it was difficult for her to understand how the Indian Catholics could rise against a European power. The church realised the seriousness of the problem only in the period immediately before independence. Of course, there were some prominent nationalists among the Catholics already from the beginning of the National Movement, like Brahmabandab Upadhyay who, in his characteristic vitriolic style thundered against the British:

> With the spread of English education and culture, India lost her own idea of civilisation. Our educated classes think as they have been taught by their *Firinghi* masters. Our minds have been conquered. We have become slaves. The faith in our own culture and the love for things Indian are gone. India will reach *Swaraj* the day she will again have faith in herself ... What we want is the emancipation of India. Our aim is that India may be free, that the stranger may be driven from our homes, that the continuity of the learning, the civilisation and the system of the *rishis* may be preserved ... Are we afraid of your cannons and guns? Arm brothers, arm! The day of deliverance is near. We have heard the voice and we cannot fail to see the chains of India removed before we die. It is now too late to recede.[25]

Also the journals, *Light of the East*, and *The Week*, under the editorship of Aloysius Soares tried to keep the nationalist spirit alive in the minds of Catholics but they were voices crying in the wilderness of an apolitical community.[26] *The Week*, particularly, was uncompromisingly nationalist and rejected communal electorates, but at the same time found fault with Gandhi's political methods of non-cooperation and civil disobedience – a fact which

Gandhi deplored deeply. However, the hierarchy perceived its utterances as clearly 'uncatholic' and banned it from its colleges and seminaries. In the South, where the Catholics were more powerful than in the North, two associations claimed to represent the attitude of the people toward the National Movement: the Kanara Catholic Association of Mangalore, and the Catholic Association of South India centred on Madras. However, there was no clarity among the Catholics as to what was politics and what was religion, and what position had to be taken regarding the National Movement. They were divided according to regions, loyalties and ideologies. While separate electorates were vehemently supported by some, they were equally vehemently opposed by some others. No one body could claim to represent all the Catholics of the country. Some supported Gandhi while others rejected his methods. Some supported the Congress, while others saw it as a Hindu party. The Catholics were in absolute disarray.

Alfons Väth, a Jesuit missionary who taught history at St. Xavier's College Mumbai, wrote that for Catholics, participation in the National Movement was an action against conscience because it was directed against a legally constituted government. They must remain loyal to the government and pursue their goals through lawful methods. He accused Gandhi of breaking the law and undermining respect for it; he said that he used morally objectionable methods for achieving his political ends. According to him, Gandhi and his companions did not possess the statesmanship to lead India to independence, and India did not have the necessary stature for becoming a nation. It possessed only geographical unity and not internal unity. It was not ready for independence.[27] According to him, Christians should reject the National Movement because it endangered missionary work. They needed neither full autonomy nor dominion status. They should show their gratitude to the British government which had been good to them. The National Movement was anti-European and anti-Christian. Even in 1946 the Catholic journal *Clergy Monthly* would deplore nationalism as endangering mission.[28] "Anyone who has eyes to see can realise that in India the present intense nationalism raises serious obstacles to the conversion work and contains unmistakable threats for the future."[29] It was considered unfavourable to the progress of Christianity by creating indifference, antagonism and prejudice. The surest way of being loyal to India was to be loyal to Christ and his church. The demand by Catholics for permission to cooperate with the Protestants in the struggle for freedom was disapproved by the hierarchy from the beginning. In 1920 many Catholics were present at the All India Conference of Indian Christians without ecclesiastical approval. In 1921, 1922 and 1923 there were no Catholic delegates present. Aloysius Soares, a prominent Catholic leader, lamented later the reasons for this attitude: "The fear and suspicion with which the Catholic Church looked at Reform churches in Europe – the fears were mutual – were imported into India by the white hierarchy and continued un-

abated till the last Vatican Council made the word ecumenism fashionable."[30]

However, in 1932, something positive happened in the Christian attitude towards the National Movement, namely, the creation of a common political platform for all the Christians of India, Roman Catholic and Protestant. At the Poona Conference of October 28, 1932, against opposition from many Catholics, it was affirmed also by the Catholics that separate electorates for Christians would be against their own interests. What they needed, rather, were religious and educational safeguards which would be part of the Fundamental Rights to be incorporated in a future Constitution of India.[31] A copy of the Fundamental Rights as drawn up by the Conference was presented to the Prime Minister of Britain, but nothing came of it. In 1942, the arrival of the Cripps Mission made the matter of cooperation between the two churches still more urgent because it was felt that unless the Christians were organised, they would completely lose out on many fronts; the Protestant Christians invited the Catholics to respond to this challenge. Individual representatives responded to it but not the official church. In the meanwhile, realisation was growing among the Catholics of the need of an All India Catholic body. The result was the founding of the Catholic Union of India in 1944. After this, cooperation between the two bodies became easier. A Joint Committee of Catholics and Protestants was formed to salvage what was still possible and to assert their rights in the new India. Thus began the common efforts of the Indian Christians to respond to the political challenges, practically on the eve of Independence.

3. Christian contribution to The Indian Constitution

To take part in the framing of the Constitution was one of the most crucial tasks faced by the Christians in independent India. As pointed out earlier, the most important concern of the Christians was the status of their religious Rights in independent India under a Hindu majority. Therefore, they demanded a strong Constitution with Fundamental rights which guarantee and safeguard religious freedom, including the right to propagate, together with their other legitimate rights. Already in February 1946 this demand was put before the Cabinet Mission by the Joint Committee of Catholics and Protestants. They wanted no special privileges for their community and were ready to accept joint electorates with or without reservation of seats. But they emphasised that religious minorities should have statutory protection for their religious and educational rights including the right to practise and propagate their religion.[32] Later on this was fought for by the Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly; it was opposed by many Hindu representatives on the ground that it would be a licence to convert people indiscriminately, and that it was against the secular character of the country.[33] Because of the strong leadership of Nehru and Patel, the article on religious freedom included also the right to propagate. I would like to briefly sketch the course of events that led to it.

4. The Constituent Assembly and Minority Rights[34]

The Constituent Assembly met for the first time on 9 December 1946. It was composed of the representatives elected from the then elected legislative assemblies of the British Indian provinces, with the representatives of the princely states joining at a later stage. It was in no way a body elected on the basis of a liberal franchise. The nominees of the Indian National Congress were predominant, with a few members from other parties and a large number of independents. It had top intellectuals, distinguished jurists, and constitutional experts of the country from different religions, castes, various estates and interests, and a galaxy of freedom fighters. Of the total of 290 members who were eligible to attend, only 210 attended the meeting. The Muslim League was absent from the Constituent Assembly.

In the second meeting of the Constituent Assembly held on 13 December 1946, the procedure of providing constitutional safeguards to the minorities in India was taken up. A Resolution was adopted which had been passed at the Haripur Congress Session of 1938, which said that it was "its primary duty as well as its fundamental policy to protect the religious, linguistic, cultural and other rights of the minorities in India so as to assure for them in any scheme of government to which the Congress would be a party, the widest scope for their development and their participation in the fullest measure in the political, economic and cultural life of the nation."[35] This was welcomed by the representatives of the minority. On 29 January 1947, the Advisory Committee on the subject of Fundamental Rights, including rights of minorities, was set up and it met under the leadership of Sardar Patel on 27 February 1947. It set up the Subcommittees on Fundamental Rights and Minorities besides three other Subcommittees dealing with other national matters. The Subcommittee on Minorities was headed by H.C. Mukherji, the famous Christian leader from Bengal and it met on the same day. The question under consideration was how the economic, political, religious, educational and cultural interests of the minorities could be safeguarded; what should be the nature of the safeguards; how it could be ensured that these safeguards were effective and when they were to be eliminated.[36] Memoranda were submitted on behalf of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Sikhs, and Anglo-Indians demanding constitutional safeguards. No specific communal safeguards were asked for on behalf of the Indian Christians and Parsis.

The Christian concern focused mainly on three clauses of the Draft Constitution drawn up by the Congress Party, which dominated the Constituent Assembly. They were clauses 13, 16 and 17 regarding the right to practise and propagate one's religion, religious instruction in aided schools, and the right to conversion from one religion to another. Clause 13 said that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate their religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this chapter. The question came up

before the Minority Rights Subcommittee on 26 March 1947. The words 'practise and propagate' aroused heated debates but the clause was passed by a majority vote. The clause also met with resistance at the Advisory Committee level. There, too, it was passed with a narrow majority and was incorporated into the Draft Constitution. At the General Assembly meeting of 1 May 1947 the Christians feared that it would not be passed without amendments but with the help of several prominent members who supported the clause it was passed. Fr. Jerome D'souza writing in retrospect speaks of the 'strong stand' taken by the Christian members in passing the entire clause.[37] This was a clause which granted religious freedom to the citizens of India in a manner not found in any other Constitution.

Clause 16 was regarding religious instruction in public schools. It said that those attending public schools receiving public funds shall not be compelled to take part in religious instruction that may be given there. This too was passed although after some debate. Clause 17 was regarding conversion. It said that conversion from one religion to another brought about by force or fraud or undue influence shall not be recognised by law. It created a lot of debate, particularly regarding the conversion of minors; there were many Hindus who clearly said that they were against all conversions form one religion to another because they feared that it would lead to another partition of the country. Fr. Jerome D'souza played a key role in the debate and said that the minorities did not need a better safeguard than clause 13; he also said that the way it was discussed and adopted by the Constituent Assembly was very reassuring for the minorities.[38] The matter was referred to the Advisory Committee and the Christians suggested the following modifications: that conversion of minors with the consent of the parents be allowed; that conversions by fraud or force be banned; and that the words 'undue influence' be suppressed in the text. The Advisory Committee recommended that the entire clause concerning forced conversions and conversion of minors be omitted. The Constituent Assembly, which took up this matter after the solemnities of the first Independence Day, on 27 August 1947, accepted this proposal. The Christians showed themselves pleased with this decision. In general, the Christians were happy with the fact that the Fundamental Rights of minorities were accepted in the Constitution. In the words of Jerome D'souza:

> If the Fundamental Rights, including as they do minority rights, are assured in an absolutely indubitable manner, no kind of political safeguards will be necessary for us and we shall not demand them, as long as, I say, this part of the Constitution is enforced without any kind of "encroachment" or misinterpretation ... As far as the small Christian community is concerned, we have gone a great way in giving up those political safeguards and we are prepared to go further and give up the reservations which have been made in certain provinces. And if we do so, it is because we know that in the spirit in which these fundamental rights have been guaranteed, there is for us an assurance of safety and a confidence which does not need to be propped up

or further affirmed by political safeguards and privileges.[39]

In the session of 18 May 1949 the question of reservation of seats was discussed. Although separate electorates were given up, reservation of seats in joint electorates still existed. The Christian community readily accepted the abandonment of reservation. Fr. Jerome D'souza claimed that it was only in a spirit of compromise that reservation with joint electorates was accepted by the Christians. However, in the face of the completeness, the generosity, and the thoroughness with which individual rights have been safeguarded in the Fundamental Rights; the way in which these Fundamental Rights are placed under the power and jurisdiction of the Supreme Judicature; and the spirit in which these provisions were passed by the House, the Christians needed no reservation.

> My main concern was with the safeguarding of fundamental rights and minority rights: right to profess, practise and propagate religion, to all citizens freedom of education, freedom of association etc. ... When these fundamental rights were made justiciable, that is when any violation of them by individuals or governments, could be challenged in a court of law, the Christians felt that the safeguard of preserving minority rights by reserving special seats for them in the Legislatures on the basis of their population, was no longer necessary and that in the interests of national integration it was best to merge with and become part of the general electorate.[40]

In all this, the hope of the Christian members of the Constituent Assembly was that their action was a great step in the direction of nation building, strengthening democracy and cooperation among the different communities of India. "In this way Muslims and Christians, Hindus and Parsis and Anglo-Indians, will stand shoulder to shoulder and work out the prosperity and happiness of all our people, and lead the new Democracy of India to the glorious triumphs which Providence assuredly has in store for her."[41]

Perhaps from a historical distance we can now appreciate the importance of this contribution. It is possible to go behind the motivations of the Christians in demanding the right to propagate their faith as a license to convert people to their faith indiscriminately. One cannot deny the fact that conversions have taken place with motivations other than religious, and still take place in isolated cases, not only to Christianity but also to other religions; it should be rejected as not in accordance with the spirit of any religion. However, from the quality of the interventions and appeals of the Christian representatives in the Constituent Assembly, it seems reasonable to conclude that they saw this right in a broader perspective, as fundamental to human freedom and as contributive to the strengthening of India's secular democracy rather than as a divisive factor. They believed that this would only enhance the freedom that India won in such a unique way. Therefore, we can say that it was a lasting contribution of the Christian community to the Constitution of India. The willingness of the Christians to give up separate electorates and reservations already at an early stage – one should say that this had to

happen sooner or later whether one liked it or not – was another far-sighted action.

5. Conclusion

However, one can only regret the fact that the Christian community soon seemed to have forgotten the implications of this pledge. Already the insistence by Christians on the right to propagate their religion was seen by some Indians as a communal attitude, although it is doubtful whether the Christians saw it from this perspective at that time. It was rather, happenings in the years after independence that made Christians become minority conscious, worried about their privileges and rights. The definition of the Scheduled Castes excluding Christians, thus bringing about problems for depressed class Christians; playing down the number of Christians in the 1951 Census; the questioning of the right to propagate religion by a number of Indians; the attitude of the government to missionaries; the appointment and functioning of the Niyogi Committee by the Madhya Pradesh government etc. sowed the seeds of fear in the minds of Christians.[42] However, the strength of the Congress party and its government was able to allay their fears to a certain extent. A minority complex was, however, developing. In the post-Nehruvian era, there were still more events which were perceived as anti-Christian: the expulsion of missionaries from Assam; the general aversion to missionaries; the accusation that they were connected with foreign intelligence agencies and that conversion was going on in various parts of the country; the Freedom of Religion bills introduced in state legislatures and even in Parliament; the regulations which were introduced regarding Christian educational institutions in various states etc. led to the emergence of a fresh wave of minority consciousness among the Christians. The Catholics demanded a Minorities Commission and some Christians even demanded separate electorates for Indian Christians. These were, however, rejected as an immature reaction.[43]

During the emergency, the general attitude of the Christian churches, once again, was one of safeguarding minority rights; they participated in the 20 point programme of the government with little opposition to the oppressive measures of the Emergency, although several Christian individuals and groups did oppose the Emergency. M.M. Thomas branded the general attitude of the Christian community as "communal gratefulness," which was contrary to the spirit of the gospel:

> But the Church is more than a minority community concerned with its own communal interests. In Jesus Christ, it represents the humanity of all the people of India. From this angle, the Church's concern is with human rights, with justice and freedom for all people. Therefore communal gratefulness should not be carried to the point of betraying the Christian concern for the healthy development of the body politic.[44]

In another place he expresses himself still more critically:

> The church is not concerned with being the minority or majority, but with being the conscience and servant of all men and women as they seek their

social and spiritual well-being. The minority consciousness of the Indian Christian communities which makes them seek conformity to the powers that be because they promise protection to it, is a denial of the theological nature of the church of Jesus Christ.[45]

During the Janata regime the Christian community was once again perturbed by the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill and the alleged persecution of Christians there; then came the O.P. Tyagi Freedom of Religion Bill in Parliament supported by Morarji Desai. The churches reacted again and saw these developments as an assault upon their fundamental rights; there were others who saw this in a broader context of freedom for all citizens to follow their conscience. Recent governments have in no sense shown a marked shift in attitudes towards Christians or minorities.

But the dilemma seems clear to the Christians as to where to draw the line between minority rights and genuine participation in nation building. The tension is bound to persist, but the occasion of the celebration of the 50th year of free India may be an opportunity for some soul-searching; it is time to examine whether the pledge made by the founding fathers of the Constitution has been honoured. This pledge can be honoured by us only as genuine Christians and genuine Indians. The implications of this statement are many, and cannot be explicated here. However, this much can be said with certainty: on the eve of independence, Indian Christians showed themselves to be committed citizens of this country, ready to contribute their share toward the shaping of its destiny. This should be a matter of pride to them. They have done a great deal in honouring this commitment. Some developments in free India have instilled fear and insecurity in the minds of Christians regarding the secular credentials of the nation, particularly some happenings in recent times. However, that is no reason for going back on the pledge that we have made to the nation fifty years ago. Perhaps this is a historic opportunity, once again, to show the creative spirit of the Christian community to contribute to national integration and development while protecting its legitimate rights, as was done by the Christian community at the time of the framing of the Constitution. M. M. Thomas perceptively says: "The rights of religious minorities must be seen as coupled with the struggle for the rights of all minorities, regional, cultural, and most of all political ... It is sheer immaturity which concentrates on Christian minority rights without any reference to issues of civil liberties and democratic rights of all citizens."[46]

Notes

1. Arun Shourie's book, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*, New Delhi, ASA Publications, 1994, the issue of reservation for dalit Christians, the attack on priests and religious in different parts of the country etc. can be cited as examples.
2. G. Oommen, "Minority Consciousness of Christians in Post-Independence India: A Historical Perspective", *Indian Church History Review*, 19 (June, 1985), pp. 70-71.

3. M. Subhash, *Rights of Religious Minorities in India*, New Delhi, National Book Organization, 1988, p. 243.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-20.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-49.
10. C. Fonseca, "The Indian Christians and the Fundamental Rights", *Indian Church History Review*, 17 (December, 1983), p. 85.
11. M. Subhash, p. 53.
12. C. Fonseca, p. 87.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
14. *Ibid.*
15. G. A. Oddie, "Indian Christians and the National Congress", *Indian Church History Review*, 2 (1968), pp. 45-54.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
17. Quoted in G. A. Oddie, p. 51.
18. K. M. Panikkar, *Foundations of New India*, London, Allen Unwin, 1963, p. 52.
19. T. V. Philip, "Protestant Christianity in India since 1858", in G. Menacherry, ed., *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, v. 1, Trichur, 1982, p. 60.
20. *Ibid.*
21. G. A. Oddie, p. 52.
22. T. V. Philip, p. 60.
23. M. K. Kuriakose, *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, Madras, Christian Literature Society, p. 356.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 268-270.
26. C. Fonseca, pp. 93-94.
27. I. Padinjarekuttu, *The Missionary Movement of the 19th and 20th Centuries and its Encounter with India*, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Peter Lang, 1995, p. 137.
28. "Nationalism and the Missions", *Clergy Monthly*, 9 (1946), pp. 257-262.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
30. C. Fonseca, p. 91.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
33. G. Oommen, "Minority Consciousness of Christians...", pp. 55-56.
34. M. Subhash, pp. 52-82.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 58ff.
37. L. Sundaram, *A Great Indian Jesuit: Fr. Jerome D'Souza*, Anand, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1986, p. 165.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
42. G. Oommen, pp. 58-59.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-64.
44. From a collection of reactions and responses by M. M. Thomas to the Emergency and the attitude of the Indian churches, *Religion and Society*, 24 (June & September, 1977), p. 217.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 93-105

The Good Shepherd (Jn 10)
A Political Perspective

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The Gospel of John is traditionally regarded as very theological and spiritual because of the mystical and theological language used by the author. Since the middle of this century, however, we see a new trend emerging in Johannine studies which accepts a historical tradition underlying the Fourth Gospel.[1] The Gospel of John is frequently interpreted by scholars as a response to Hellenistic Culture, to Gnosticism, and to the expulsion of the Jewish Christians from the synagogues.[2] However, very recently, some have started to read the Gospel of John from a new perspective, viz., as responding to the Christians who, because of their faith in Jesus, faced significant political challenges from the Romans. Hence, to present Jesus as "politically unconcerned" in the context of the Johannine community, is to present his teaching as "abstract and historically ineffective."[3] In the words of Cassidy, "in depicting Jesus' identity and mission within his Gospel, the evangelist John was concerned to present elements and themes that were especially significant for Christian readers facing Roman imperial claims and for any who faced Roman persecution."[4] I place these words at the outset of this study as an orientation for the analysis that follows.

The pericope on the Good Shepherd (Jn 10) is bound up with many difficulties of interpretation. There are differing views concerning the literary context, literary type, structure, unity and authenticity of this pericope.[5] What is the theological focus of the discourse on the Good Shepherd? There are different opinions amoung scholars. The pericope raises the question of true and false claims of messiahship.[6] Jn 10 focuses on Jesus' eschatological power over his own death and that of his disciples.[7] Some interpret the passage in an ecclesial sense with Jesus the Shepherd creating a new community over against the Jewish Community.[8] Jesus' actions and words bring the Tabernacle themes — water, light, and worship of one God — to a climax in our pericope when Jesus solemnly proclaims himself as the Good Shepherd, the one true God.[9] We begin our analysis by asking the following questions concerning the 'world' behind the text, the 'world' in the text and the 'world' in front of the text:[10]

1. What is the political background of the Johannine Community? How does the text respond to this situation?

2. What is the immediate literary context within which the evangelist narrates this discourse? How does this

particular context reveal its profound meaning?

3. What is our Indian context within which we read this passage? What are its challenges for us today?

1. The Johannine Community: Its Political Background

Before going into the political background which is presupposed by the Gospel of John, we should know the date and the place of composition of this text. Firstly, where was it written? Even if there are disagreements concerning the place (Syria, Judea, or Egypt),[11] it cannot be anywhere outside the territories of the Roman empire.[12] This would imply that John represents a community within the geographical and political context of Roman colonialism. The community of John was affected by the policies and actions of the Roman emperors. Secondly, when was it written? I accept the traditional view that the Gospel was written after 70 CE and before 110 CE.[13] This would suggest that at least some of the last editions of the Gospel were written during the reigns of the Roman emperors Domitian (81-96 CE) and Trajan (98-117 CE). It is reasonable to conclude that both John and his community (the first readers of the Gospel) had a common experience of Roman imperialism and religious persecution.[14]

Roman colonialism meant not only economic exploitation,[15] but also political oppression of the people who believed in the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. After the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and of the Temple, the Jewish Community struggled to maintain its traditions without the Temple. How did Judaism respond to this religious and political problem? It held on to the Law. By way of illustration let us take the Second Book of Baruch. The author takes the symbols of the feast of Tabernacles and describes the problems faced by the Jewish community because of the loss of the Holy City and of the Temple in the form of a dialogue in the following words:

> *The problem*: "For the shepherds of Israel have perished, and the lamps which gave light are extinguished, and the fountains from which we used to drink have withheld their streams. Now we have been left in the darkness and in the thick forest and in the aridness of the desert." *The response given by Baruch:* "Shepherds and lanterns and fountains came from the Law, and when we go away, the Law will abide. If you, therefore, look upon the Law and are intent upon wisdom, then the lamp will not be wanting and the shepherds will not give way and the fountain will not dry up." (2 Baruch 77,11.13-16).[16]

How does John respond to the same problem? While the Jews looked at the Law, the Johannine Community looks at Jesus as the living water for any one who thirsts (7,37), as the light of the world (8,12; 9,5), and as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (10,14-15). Now we shall take a closer look at the text to make this point more intelligible.

2. The Good Shepherd: Jesus' Claim and Its Significance

The Good Shepherd Passage is placed in the literary context of the Jew-

ish feasts. Jn 5,1 introduces the common theme for chapters 5-10, "the feasts of the Jews." The evangelist takes the four major feasts of the Jews: the Sabbath (Jn 5,9), the Passover (Jn 6,4), the Tabernacles (Jn 7,2) and the Dedication (Jn 10,22) and, situating the ministry of Jesus within the setting of these feasts, the author develops a new Christology for the Community. The presence of the living God, once celebrated in these feasts, now comes to its fullness in the Person of Jesus Christ.[17]

What is the immediate literary context within which the evangelist narrates the discourse on the Good Shepherd? Jn 10, 1-21 is situated in the temporal setting of the feast of the Tabernacles, which is mentioned in Jn 7,2.[18] There is no indication of a change in time until Jn 10,22. However, there are many who would take the feast of Dedication as the literary context of Jn 10,1-21.[19] I am of the opinion that the discourse on the Good Shepherd looks both backward and forward since it is the last pericope in this section. I would therefore agree with Brown when he says that this passage on the Good Shepherd "does terminate the discourses at the feast of the Tabernacles and introduce the discourse at Dedication."[20]

The literary context of the feast of the Tabernacles does reveal the profound meaning of the discourse on the Good Shepherd. Josephus informs us that this feast was "by far the greatest and most sacred for the Hebrews."[21] The evangelist, then, places this discourse at an auspicious moment in the life of the people. We need to have some knowledge of the celebration of the Tabernacles in order to understand the meaning of this discourse and its significance for its first listeners.[22] The celebration of the feast of the Tabernacles lasted for a week and it consisted mainly of three rituals: i. the water libation ceremony, ii. the mounting of the light, and iii. the confession of faith in Yahweh as the true God.[23]

The words of Jesus have a special meaning in the context of these three rituals:

The water libation ceremony was characterized by a solemn procession every day to the pool of Siloam.[24] People collected water from the pool and brought it to the temple through the water-gate. This water was used for the ritual washings. This ceremony was associated with the eschatological hope that the Messiah would come and perfect the Mosaic mediation of the water which is the Torah. It is in this context of the water ceremony that we have the solemn proclamation of Jesus that he is himself the source of living water in Jn 7,37: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.'"[25]

The light ceremony consists in the illumination of the women's court in the Temple. Thus the Temple becomes the light of all Jerusalem. It is also associated with the eschatological hope of the return of the pillar of fire which guided the people of Israel in the Exodus.[26] It is at this solemn moment that Jesus reveals himself as the light of the world in 8,12: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; the one who follows me will not walk in

darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

The recognition of Yahweh as the true God is the third aspect of the celebration of the feast of the Tabernacles. The priests recall the apostasy of former generations, which is symbolized by their action of moving toward the rising sun in the east; and then, turning away from it, they look back to the Holy of Holies and profess their faith in the *one* true God, Yahweh.[27] This emphatic denial of sun-worship is clearly expressed in the *Mishnah*, *Sukkah*, v. 4: "Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs towards the temple of the Lord and their faces towards the east, and they worshipped the sun towards the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned towards the Lord."[28] In this context, Jesus reveals himself as the one true God, the messianic Good Shepherd, who freely lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10, 14-15).

Here I limit my attention to Jesus' proclamation of himself as the Good Shepherd. My attempt is to demonstrate that, in doing so, Jesus responded not only to the traditions and beliefs of the religious leaders of Jerusalem but also to the policies and practices of the political leaders of his time, namely, the Romans. Hence the proclamation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is both a religious blasphemy for the Jews *and* a political threat to the Romans.

2.1. Jesus Is the Good Shepherd: A Religious Blasphemy

After the proclamation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Jn 10,1-16), the evangelist describes the confusion of the crowd in vv. 19-20: "There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, 'He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?'" In the narrative that follows, the Jews put a formal question to Jesus in v. 24: "So the Jews gathered round him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" The dispute concerning the identity of Jesus in the light of the Tabernacle themes reveals that the declarations of Jesus led the Jews to the right conclusion, namely, that Jesus in some way claimed "equality with God." This claim is interpreted by the Jews as a religious blasphemy in v. 33: "The Jews answered him, 'it is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God.'"

Neyrey has seen a "forensic proceeding" in the accusation of the Jews and the defence of Jesus in Jn 10.[29] In Jesus' apology, he makes use of Ps 82 to defend himself (vv. 34-35). What is the meaning and function of Ps 82 in relation to the accusation made by the Jews? Or how does Ps 82 defend Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd and thus be equal to God?

When we read Ps 82 the questions that are pertinent at this moment are the following: i. Who are the 'gods' referred to, and judged, in the Psalm? ii. What is its significance, in our context, in Jn 10? With regard to the first question, there are differing views about the gods being divine or human. We have very ancient traditions interpreting the gods as *human* judges and rulers based on the references in Exodus 21, 6; 22,8 and 1

Sam 2,25.[30] The *Targum Onqelos* also translates gods *(ʾĕlohîm)* as judges *(dînāyē')* in the above mentioned texts.[31] According to the traditions of ancient West Asia (Near East), there are gods who are patrons of nations and are responsible for the kings, judges and officials of their respective nations. They are also called the angels of the nations. Thus a kind of national guardian angels may be suggested by this reference to the gods.[32] The *Peshitta* translates both 'the divine council' and 'in the midst of the gods' (in v. 1) as 'the assembly of angels' and 'in the midst of the angels,' respectively.[33] The human rulers are expected to fulfill the will of their gods or guardian angels. Therefore God's judgment on unjust gods/ angels has its parallel in His judgment on unjust human leaders.[34]

What does Jesus refer to when he cites v. 6 of Ps 82 in Jn 10, 34-38?

> Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

From the text, it is clear that for Jesus the "gods" are those who receive the word of God (v. 35). They are the Patriarchs of Israel who received the theophanies, the leaders like Moses (Ex 3), the judges (Josh 1; Judg 1), the kings (1 Sam 16) and the prophets (Jer 1,2) of the people of Israel.[35] Hence the leaders of the people of Israel, to whom the word of God came, are called gods or sons of God. They have been chosen and anointed by God. This is accepted in the Jewish tradition. Thus the three aspects of the accusation against Jesus, namely, i. Can Jesus be called god or the son of God?[36]; ii. Does Jesus make himself equal to God? [37]; and iii. In what sense is Jesus a son of God? are all answered by the citation of Ps 82. Neyrey rightly points this out when he affirms, "if Scripture was not in error calling mortals 'gods' (Ps 82,6), then neither is there any error in calling the one whom God consecrated and sent into the world 'the Son of God' (10, 35-36)."[38] Jesus continues his argument by saying that he has been *consecrated* and *sent* by the Father, viz., God (v. 36). The divine consecration of Jesus would imply that he is totally set apart for the *works* of God. Here we have in the text an example of a typical Johannine irony.[39] When Jesus uses the term *gods* two layers of meaning are implied. On the first level, Jesus is the son of God like the other leaders of the people of Israel. Jesus however claims something more than what is meant at the first level. The intimate union between the Father and Jesus makes him unique: the "Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10,38). Thus, on the second level, Jesus is the Son of God, the unique revelation of the pre-existent Logos. Therefore in the manner of the forensic proceeding, Jesus uses this psalm as an "apologetic response" to defend himself as the Son of God.[40]

The use of Ps 82 gives us a further clue to understand the meaning and implication of the text.[41] Ps 82 is addressed mainly to the judges or rulers. The gods are in the place of God who leads the people. The Jewish state being theocratic, the *rulers* of the people of Israel are in the place of Yahweh who favours the poor and the oppressed, and they are expected to do the same. There are many who consider Psalm 82 as a social critique of the rulers in the 8th century BCE.[42] In Ps 82 the rulers (gods) are judged by Almighty God for their oppression of the weak and the orphans and for their indifference towards human suffering (vv. 3-4). The gods are accused of walking in darkness (v. 5). The maltreatment of the poor and the downtrodden, the lowly and the powerless, is a matter of life and death to the gods. In other words the gods are judged because they are not doing the will of God. Injustice shakes the very foundations of the earth (v. 5) and the "world threatens to fall apart into chaos once more."[43] God's radical and universal concern for *justice* is very conspicuous in this psalm, which articulates God's will. In contrast to the rulers or the gods who are judged by God in Ps 82, Jesus, throughout the Gospel, goes on affirming that he does the will of his Father,[44] and thus reveals his identity as the true Son of God.

Is the claim of Jesus in chapters 7-10, culminating in the Good Shepherd discourse merely religious blasphemy? The discourse is preceded by the major sign of healing the blind man (9,1-41) and is followed by the unsurpassed sign of bringing Lazarus back to life (11, 1-44). In Jn 11 Jesus proves and confirms his claim by giving life to the dead man, an activity of God. Power over death is something that pertains only to the realm of the divine. As a consequence of Jesus' action and words many believed in him (11,45). This challenges the Romans, and so the Jews are afraid of being destroyed by them. We have the internal evidence for this in Jn 11, 47-48: "So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'" Grundmann thinks that v. 48 expresses this "political anxiety" and it reaches its climax in the decisive suggestion made by Caiaphas the high priest in v. 50: "You do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."[45] According to Jn 11, 47-53, one of the reasons which hastens their decision to kill Jesus is the fear of the intervention of the Romans. Why do the Jews fear this destructive intervention of the Romans? At least in this passage, the Jews consider Jesus as a revolutionary who could provoke the Romans. "In his own mind Caiaphas was giving voice to a common-sense maxim of political expediency. He was anxious to get rid of Jesus lest, as one more in a series of revolutionaries, this troublemaker provoke the Romans to action against the Jews."[46]

2.2. Jesus Is the Good Shepherd: A Political Threat

The image of 'shepherd' was a figure of speech common in ancient West

Asia. It was used to designate both the gods and the kings. In the Babylonian creation epic, Marduk was referred to as a faithful shepherd.[47] Also in the biblical tradition, both God and the national leaders are called shepherds. This image is used in the Exodus event to depict God as the loyal shepherd leading the people to safe pastures (Ex 15, 13.17). At the time of the Prophets, it is a "well-established and regular portrait for the ruling nobility."[48] In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet uses the same figure of speech to refer to both the religious and the political leaders.[49] Jer 6,3 says, "Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her; they shall pitch their tents around her, they shall pasture, each in his place." Here shepherds are the commanders of the enemy from the north, and the flocks are their armies.[50] In Jer 23, 1-8, the 'false shepherds' refer not only to the kings but also to the civil and spiritual leaders.[51] The Persian king Cyrus is anointed as God's servant and chosen as his shepherd to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Isa 44,28). In Ezk 34 the author talks about the true and false shepherds. Ezekiel uses the wicked shepherd theme to illustrate selfish and irresponsible leadership (vv. 2-4), and he criticizes leadership based on domination and oppression (v. 4). Therefore the image of the 'shepherd' can depict God, the kings, and the political and the spiritual leaders. In other words, 'shepherd' was a common epithet for royalty and divinity.[52]

Other titles attributed to Jesus in the Gospel, namely, 'saviour of the world,' 'Lord' and 'Lord and God' are also titles associated with the imperial cults.[53] Julius Caesar was the first Roman emperor to be acclaimed as 'saviour'. But later on this title was arrogated by other emperors like Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Trajan and Hadrian.[54] Emperor Nero was heralded as 'saviour of the world' in the Eastern Provinces.[55] Since Nero's reign, a supra-human status as 'lord' was attributed to the emperors. We have pottery fragments which testify to the use of the title, 'lord' for Vespasian and Domitian.[56] Concerning the third title, 'Lord and God,' Domitian was the only emperor who demanded and received this supra-human status. The historian Suetonius in his work, *Lives of the Caesars*, writes that Domitian himself arrogated the title 'lord and god' (*Dominus et Deus*) to himself in a formal decree.[57] Therefore divine status or supra-human status was given, and sacrifices were offered, to the living emperors.[58] The emperor Trajan, even while living, was already numbered among the gods.[59]

Roman imperialism exercised its authority through the religious leaders in Judea. Hence in the words of S. Rayan, "to raise a radical religious question was to raise a radical political question; to challenge the Jewish church-state and set it aside amounted to challenging Rome and setting it aside."[60] Jesus making himself equal to God would imply that he is placing himself in opposition to the Roman emperors who arrogated such divine status to themselves. In fact Christians were asked to deny the divinity of Jesus and to worship Roman gods and to offer wine and incense to the emperor's statue. They were accused of chanting

verses "in honour of Christ as if to a god" (*Pliny's Letter to Trajan*, X. 96).[61]

The proclamation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is preceded by the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9). As we read on, we realize that the man who is healed is excommunicated from the Jewish religious community because of his faith in Jesus (Jn 9,34). But Jesus calls him to be a member of his new community (v. 35). According to Marsh, this action of Jesus answers the following questions of the readers of the Gospel: "Who is the true leader and ruler of the true people of God? Who has the proper authority to include or exclude a man from the society of God's chosen people?"[62] The discourse on the Good Shepherd confirms this interpretation, viz., the true shepherd of the Johannine community is not the Roman emperor, but Jesus.

In Jn 10,1 the evangelist starts with the description of the false shepherd whom Jesus calls a 'thief' (*kleptēs*)[63] and a 'robber' (*lēistēs*).[64] Who are the 'thieves' and the 'robbers' referred to in the discourse? There are different views on the targets of Jesus' remarks. Brown holds the view that the 'thief' and the 'robber' refer to the Pharisees and the Sadducees.[65] According to Barrett, they are the messianic pretenders.[66] Bultmann is of the opinion that they refer to the Jewish authorities, to the false teachers who are mentioned in the First Letter of John, and to the Pseudo-Saviours of the Hellenistic world.[67] In my opinion, the 'thief' and the 'robber' are distinguished from Jesus the Good Shepherd in terms of their means of entry: entrance through the door versus climbing over the fence (v. 1); in terms of their orientation or purpose: to give life in abundance versus to steal, kill and destroy (v. 10); in terms of their actions: laying down one's life versus leaving the sheep and fleeing (vv. 11-12); and in terms of their relationship: knowing the sheep versus being strangers (v. 14). In short, the Good Shepherd exercises his authority for the welfare of the sheep, while the 'thieves' and 'robbers' think of their own profit and security.

The Romans controlled the social practices and the life-style of the people by their military power and political strength. Now let us view them in the light of the above criteria: i. The entrance: the Romans had not entered through the door, but had invaded these provinces by force and military power. Exploitation and violence were central to Roman imperialism. Roman rule was very cruel as it kept the people in fear and submission by indulging in large-scale massacres.[68] ii. The purpose: the Roman rulers were actively involved in destroying the people, their culture, religion and way of life, rather than in promoting their life and welfare. iii. The action: they were not laying down their life for the people, but exploiting them economically, oppressing them politically, and alienating them religiously.[69] Thus the teaching and action of the Good Shepherd contradicted their usual practice of self-enrichment at the cost of the people who were in their colonies. iv. The relationship: they did not know the people, but were strangers. The quintessential principle of the Roman empire can be summarized in the following statements: a. "people were

to be subjugated and controlled by force," even by using violence; b. "the strong and the powerful should use their resources to further enrich themselves."[70] This Roman policy was radically questioned by Jesus in the discourse on the Good Shepherd. This religious and political dimension of the discourse was perceived by the Jews as a challenge to the Romans and thus to their own existence (Jn 11,48). Hence it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus' proclamation of himself as the Good Shepherd was a political threat to Roman imperialism.

3. Jesus, the Good Shepherd: Implications for India

Jesus made this proclamation: "I am the Good Shepherd... I lay down my life for the sheep" (Jn 10,14-15), in a particular context and to a particular group. John has presented this with a specific reference to the feast of the Tabernacles, in response to the concrete problems of the Johannine Community facing religious alienation from Judaism and political domination by the Roman rulers. However, its application and relevance are not limited to that particular context in history.

Marsh is right when he says that the symbol of Jesus as the Good Shepherd "originally meant far more than the usual stained-glass picture of a shepherd with a sheep in his arms."[71] The deep concern for justice in human society is an integral character of the messianic shepherd as it is presented in Isa 43,11-16. Unfortunately, modern readers have not perceived the connection of the shepherd with the office of royal power and political authority. I do not favour the idea of Jesus as a political revolutionary, viz., that the revolution brought by Jesus through the image of the Good Shepherd is primarily a political one. What I wish to point out is that the discourse on the Good Shepherd has significant political implications.

What does the discourse on the Good Shepherd convey to us, the people of India, who have just celebrated the Golden Jubilee of our Independence from British Colonialism? What are its challenges and implications for us? During the last 50 years of Independence, most of our 'shepherds' have shown the narrowness of their vision, manifested their selfishness in actions, confirmed their greed for power, and proved their incompetence in management. Our hearts have been hardened by the shocking news of corruption and of various kinds of scams from top to bottom.[72] The political stance of Jesus revealed in the discourse on the Good Shepherd radically challenges this corrupt political structure. We, Indians, can read the discourse on the Good Shepherd as a political critique of the leaders of 'free' India. According to J. Desrochers politics in India has become the "most fertile ground for money-grabbing, corruption, exploitation, and even criminal activities."[73] After a lengthy analysis, A. Kohli concludes that "the roots of India's growing problems of governability are more political than socio-economic; that is, they are located mainly in India's political structure."[74] Against this political background, the discourse on the Good Shepherd raises the following questions: How do our leaders gain politi-

cal power? What are their means of entry into the political field? Do they *enter through the door* or *climb in by* other means? The absence of a Good Shepherd in our country is proved by the political instability and the increasing use of force and violence in the political system. The legitimate demands of the poor have been mostly rejected by the government in order to cater to the interests of the rich and powerful. Our political system is often manipulated by the ruling party and their supporters for their own benefit.[75] Do our leaders know our people? Unless they make their own the griefs and the anxieties of our suffering people, they will remain strangers to the majority of our people. Unfortunately, we are constrained by a system which values profit more than people. Most of our leaders think of the people in terms of what profit they can make for themselves. Are they not identifying with the 'thieves' and 'robbers' against whom Jesus raised his voice?

Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd empowered the Johannine community to make the right option for Jesus at the time of the persecution by the Romans. Today we have no foreign rulers to exploit us. In our context the 'thieves' and 'robbers' represent our corrupt political leaders. Unlike the Good Shepherd who protects and keeps the flock together, they drive the people helter-skelter and mislead them into the wrong and perilous paths of casteism, religious fanaticism and linguistic communalism. Jesus challenges us to recognize and to promote committed and competent political leaders who stand by principles. The discourse on the Good Shepherd inspires us to cleanse the Indian politics of corruption and invites us to work towards a true political democracy. This discourse also points to a radical and universal concern for life, freedom and justice. This would imply that we are called, in our context, to defend the earth from destruction; to protect children and the unborn; to respect women as life-giving partners; and to empower the poor and the downtrodden to shape their lives freely. In other words, the life-giving and self-sacrificing attitude of the Good Shepherd demands from us a permanent and ongoing revolution from within, which will enable us to foster the growth and well-being of all living beings.

Notes

1. The historical tradition underlying the Fourth Gospel is similar to that of the Synoptic Gospels. See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, 2 vols.*, New York: Doubleday, 1966, vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxiii.; M. J. Robinson, "Recent Research in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 242-252; and A. M. Hunter, "Recent Trends in Johannine Studies," *ET* 71 (1959-60), pp. 164-167 and 219-222.
2. See the classical commentaries like Brown, *John*; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953; and F. J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
3. S. Rayan makes this comment about Jesus' attitude and action in general. See "Jesus and Imperialism," in S. Kappen, ed., *Jesus Today*, Trivandrum: Ecumenical Press, 1985, p. 112.

4. R. J. Cassidy. *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p.1
5. The full treatment of these difficulties lies beyond the scope of this paper. For a detailed exposition of the problems, see J. Quasten, "The Parable of the Good Shepherd: John 10,1-21," *CBQ* 10 (1948), pp. 1-12 and 151-169.
6. P. W. Meyer, "A Note on John 10, 1-18," *JBL* 75 (1956), pp. 232-235.
7. J. H. Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, pp. 59-80.
8. I. de la Potterie, "Le Bon Pasteur," in *Populus Dei: Studi in Onore del Cardinale Alfredo Ottaviani per il Cinquantesimo del Sacerdozio, 19 Marzo, 1966, 2 vols.*, Rome: LAS, 1969, vol. 2, pp. 936-43.
9. F. J. Moloney, *Reading John: Introducing the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, Melbourne: Dove, Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, pp. 33-35.
10. For the method adopted here, see S. Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991, and G. Soares-Prabhu, "Interpreting the Bible in India Today," *The Way, Supplement* 72 (1991), pp. 70-80.
11. See Brown, *John*, pp. ciii-civ.
12. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, pp. 3-5.
13. For the reasons, see Brown, *John*, pp. lxxx-lxxxvi.
14. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, p. 4.
15. For the economic situation of the people in Palestine at the time of Jesus, see S. Safrai and M. Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century, 2 vols.*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974-76, and F. C. Grant, *The Economic Background of the Gospels*, London: Oxford University Press, 1926.
16. For the text, see the translation by A. J. F. Klijn, "2 Baruch," in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols.*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, vol. 1, p. 647.
17. For a more detailed analysis of these chapters from this point of view, see F. J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12*, Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1995.
18. For those who look at this passage in this light, see Moloney, *Reading John: Introducing the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, pp. 29-37, and R. H. Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel: A Commentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, pp. 199-201.
19. For those who consider Jn 10 and Jn 11 as one integral unit set temporally at or near the feast of Dedication, see C. H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, pp. 164-65, and R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John, 2 vols.*, New York: Crossroad, 1968, vol. 2, p. 238.
20. Brown, *John*, p. 388.
21. My translation of Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 8.4.1. #100.
22. For a detailed description and explanation of the feast of the Tabernacles and its ceremonies, see A. Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 92-98 and G. W. MacRae, "The Meaning and Evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles," *CBQ* 22 (1960), pp. 251-276.
23. Moloney, *Reading John: Introducing the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, p. 33.
24. See Brown, *John*, pp. 326-327.
25. In all the biblical references, we follow mainly the RSV translation.
26. Moloney, *Reading John: Introducing the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, p. 33.

27. *Ibid.*
28. Quoted in A. Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 93 n.1.
29. J. H. Neyrey, "'I said: You are gods': Psalm 82:6 and John 10," *JBL* 108:4 (1989), pp. 649-53.
30. For this understanding of the gods, see C. H. Gordon, "'*Elohîm*' in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges," *JBL* 54 (1935), pp. 139-44.
31. *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus*, tr. by B. Grossfeld, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988.
32. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament, 2 vols.* tr. by J. A. Baker, London: SCM Press, 1967, vol. 2, pp. 194 and 199.
33. *The Syriac Bible*, United Bible Societies, 1979.
34. For a detailed analysis of this psalm, see M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100, Word Biblical Commentary Series*, Dallas: Word Books, 1990, pp. 328-342.
35. B. F. Westcott, *Gospel of John*, p. 70 and A. T. Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII: John X. 33-36," *NTS* 11 (1965-66), 158-62.
36. In Ps 82, these two terms refer to the same people, see v. 6.
37. This accusation is made against Jesus elsewhere in the Gospel of John, for example, in 5,18; 10,33; 19,7 and 19,12. It is more systematically refuted by Jesus in Jn 5,19-29.
38. Neyrey, "'I said: You are Gods': Psalm 82,6 and John 10," p. 653.
39. For Johannine irony, see P. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.
40. Neyrey, "'I said: You are Gods': Psalm 82,6 and John 10," p. 653. However, some hold a different view, for example, A. Loisy considers the use of Ps 82 as 'a play on words,' see *Le quatrième Évangile*, Paris: Emil Nourny, 1921, p. 335; similarly Bultmann also denies that Ps 82 in any way responds to the charges (*John*, p. 389).
41. For a short survey of the research done on the interpretation of Ps 82, 6-7 in relation to Jn 10, 34-36, see A. T: Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered," *NTS* 13 (1966-67), pp. 363-367.
42. For this interpretation, see H. Niehr, "Götter oder Menschen – eine falsche Alternative: Bemerkungen zu Ps 82," *ZAW* 99 (1987), pp. 94-98.
43. P. D. Miller, "When the Gods Meet: Ps 82 and the Issue of Justice," *Journal for Preachers* 9 (1986), pp. 2-5.
44. For example, Jn 4,34; 5,30; 10, 37, etc.
45. Does the voice of the narrator in vv. 51-53, which interprets the statement of the high priest as prophetic, hide the political character of the event? W. Grundmann provides a comprehensive treatment of the issue in question. See "The Decision of the Supreme Court to Put Jesus to Death (John 11: 47-57) in its Context: Tradition and Redaction in the Gospel of John," in E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 295-318.
46. Brown, *John*, p. 442.
47. See the Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET), 69.71.72, quoted in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 1188.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 1189.
49. Jer 2,8; 3,15; 10,21; and 25,34-38.
50. K. L. Barker & J. Kohlenberger, *NIV Commentary, 2 vols.*, London, Sydney, Auckland:

Hodder & Stoughton, 1994, vol. 1, p. 1170.

51. See the commentary on Jer 23,1-8, in Barker & Kohlenberger, *NIV Commentary*, p. 1204.
52. For a detailed study of its usage, see J. Jeremias, "*Poimēn*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols.* (1995), vol. 6, pp. 485-502.
53. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, 13-16.
54. For the documentation, see D. Magie, *De Romanorum Iuris Publici Sacrique Vocabulis Sollemnibus in Graecum Sermonem Conversis*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1905, pp. 67-68, cited by Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, p. 13; see also C. Koester, "The Saviour of the World (Jn 4:42)," *JBL* 109 (1990), p. 667.
55. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, p. 13.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 14; also cited by A. Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, p. 355.
57. Cited by Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, p.14.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16.
59. Pliny's attitude towards emperors as it is expressed in his letters is an evidence for such emperor worship. See K. Scott, "The Elder and Younger Pliny on Emperor Worship," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 63 (1932), pp. 156-165.
60. Rayan, "Jesus and Imperialism," p. 105.
61. Quoted in Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*, p. 90.
62. J. Marsh, *Saint John*, London: Penguin Books, 1988, p. 394.
63. For the meaning of *kleptēs*, see H. Preisker, "*Kleptēs*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 754-756.
64. For the use of *lēistēs* in the NT, see K. H. Rengstorf, "*Lēistēs*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, pp. 260-262.
65. Brown, *John*, p. 393.
66. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, London: SPCK, 1991, p. 369.
67. Bultmann, *John*, p. 372.
68. R. J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel*, New York: Orbis Books, 1978, pp. p. 78 and p. 177; see also J. Galtung, *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective*, New York: 1980, p. 132, quoted in Rayan, "Jesus and Imperialism," p. 103.
69. For the political situation and the economic life in Palestine at the time of Jesus, see Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, pp. 216-419 and 631-700.
70. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel*, pp. 54-55.
71. Marsh, *John*, p. 397.
72. For a detailed study of the corruption, see S. B. Sahai, *Politics of Corruption*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995, and N. A. Palkhivala, *We, the Nation*, New Delhi, Bombay, London: UBSPD, 1994.
73. J. Desrochers, *Towards a New India*, Bangalore: St. Paul's Press, 1995, p. 84.
74. A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*, Cambridge: CUP, 1991, p. ix, quoted in Desrochers, *Towards a New India*, p. 86.
75. Desrochers, *Towards a New India*, p. 89

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Religion and Secularism

An Exploration into the Secular Dimension of Religion and the Religious Dimension of Secularism

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The debate on secularism has taken a new turn in our times and the nature of the debate has been such that secularism is now inevitably being listed in the category of "isms". This is unfortunate because of the real danger that the legitimate concerns of secularism, as A.B. Shah[1], the "ideological" champion of Indian secularism, has formulated them, might be trivialised. It is in the interests of religion to dialogue with the concerns that buttress Shah's understanding of secularism; for behind this enterprise lies the intention to acquaint the two sides with points of contact which could help bridge the gap between them. Secularism is not as anti-religious or a-religious as religionists have been led to believe and religion is not as anti-this world as secularists might be thinking.

1. Religion and Secularism

Historically religion and secularism have been regarded as opposed patterns of thought and behaviour. In India secularism has made it a point to combat religion, especially organised and institutionalised religion. And in some quarters secularism has come to be regarded as a sort of atheism which has to be resisted tooth and nail. What needs to be questioned today is the pre-understanding of religion and secularism that has been operative in the respective camps of religionists and secularists.

Before proceeding I would like to make clear my own stance with regard to religion and secularism.

- Religion is the perspective from which human beings attempt to understand the waters of the transtemporal.
- Secularism is the perspective from which human beings attempt to understand the land of time.

What transtemporal means needs not detain us since what is asserted here is not its existence or otherwise but merely the fact that religion's primary concern is the transtemporal and secularism's concern is the temporal. What is common to both of them is the world of change, that is, of birth, growth and death.

Furthermore, I shall be working in this discussion on the following thesis: Positively, what religion is referring to in the medium of religious language is basically not different from what secularism is advocating in secularist terminology; negatively, the positions of religionists and secularists overshoot

their mark both in developing their own standpoints as well as in interpreting the standpoint of the other.

1.1. The Concerns of Religion

In number definitions of religion seem to exceed the number of religions that human beings practise. This is not astonishing since the nature of religion is such that like a mountain it discloses different aspects to diverse viewers from different angles. In such a context it seems more appropriate to explore the concerns of religion rather than its definitions.

In spite of all the differences in the articulation of their beliefs religions have among other things a common concern with regard to life and its vicissitudes. Religions teach their followers to bear up with the vicissitudes of life in such a way that they are not crushed by them. This is not to suggest that religious traditions thematically propose this objective. No, very few of them even think of it. The point is that religions do teach their followers how to face life and its difficulties with hope and/or equanimity. All religions aim at making their followers look at reality as it really is.

We could begin by asking about the meaning of "the vicissitudes of life". First of all vicissitudes refer to suffering, old age and death. Whatever one's profession, sex, age, nationality or possessions no one can escape suffering. Over a consistent period of time no one can remain unaffected by one or another kind of suffering or trial. It is part and parcel of the human condition. Religions wish to equip their followers with attitudes ranging from hope and patience through initiative and commitment to equanimity and detachment to deal with life's situations.

However, these attitudes are clothed in language that varies according to the world-view in which the religions find themselves. In general the vocabulary of a tradition is of a piece with the paradigm of that tradition. For instance, the language of the Buddhist traditions is very different from that of the Christian or the Eastern religions. However, it is the reality of life that looms large behind such differences in language and expression – in all traditions. Indeed it is the reality of life's suffering that all religions try to address themselves to, in order to help make sense of it! Whatever else religions may explicitly or implicitly aim at or propagate, directly or indirectly they are all concerned with ways and means of understanding, and of dealing with suffering and death.

Accordingly, religions try to discover in one way or another meaning in suffering, either as an "effect" of one's deeds (or more precisely, of one's misdeeds) or as the means of purifying oneself (=heart, mind and will), or as the hindrance that has to be overcome on the path of enlightenment, etc. However lofty the articulated goal of a religious tradition may be, one of its primary objectives is to teach the practitioner ways and means of being prepared to face the vicissitudes of life.

1.2. The Concerns of Secularism

The language of secularism is different from the language of religion, so

too are their respective concerns. Because of secularism's basic opposition to "religious dogmatism and the obscurantism associated with it" people mistakenly assume that secularism rejects religion. Moreover there is however, an important positive content to secularism which needs to be explored by religionists. A.B. Shah states:

> Secularism does not reject religion in the sense in which Gandhi understood it. But it is opposed to religious dogmatism and the obscurantism associated with it. Instead it relies on reason and scientific knowledge to promote the material and cultural progress of man. It seeks to foster harmony among human groups despite differences of faith by ensuring that these latter would not vitiate life in fields where all have to work and live together.[2]

Secularism, as Shah understands it, works for universal human values, social justice and promotion of material and cultural progress. It discovers meaning in life in and through the promotion of universal human values.

1.3. Religion's "Transtemporal" and Secularism's "Temporal" Concerns

It is undeniable that religion stresses one set of things and secularism another. Whereas the stress in religion is on sin, attachment, delusion, that in secularism is on social values and social justice. Religion concentrates on the will of God, or *Dharma* or *Yoga* but secularism takes up universal human values. Religion aims at salvation, liberation, *Moksha*, etc.; whereas the goal of secularism is material and cultural progress.

Though one cannot simply state that sin, attachment and delusion are the exclusive concerns of the realm of the transtemporal, and that social justice has to do with the historical still there is a stress here in both religion and secularism that is peculiar and specific to each. Religion does look at the transtemporal through the temporal and secularism concentrates on the temporal as historical. Religion tends to devalue the temporal and secularism discounts the transtemporal.

2. Religion and Revelation

One of the main questions about religion and revelation seems to me to be this: do religion and revelation purport to "inform" us about the "world" they "reveal"? In other words, are we to understand what religion and revelation say about the transtemporal literally, in a historical sense or is their meaning to be found beyond (that is, transcends) the level of the literal and the historical?

For our discussion this is a pivotal point since on it depends our understanding of religion. The point is not whether religion and revelation *claim* to inform us about the world they are speaking about but whether in fact they *can*. Can religion and revelation mean literally what they say about the transtemporal? Doubtless some religionists will answer this question positively and most secularists will in all probability deny that there is any such reality at all. This, I think, is the centre around which our dialogue and discussion will have to take place.

Even though some religionists, basing themselves firmly on the foundation of their belief-system, assert that it is not they but revelation itself that speaks (for example) of a new heaven and a new earth, of a kingdom of peace and justice where every tear will be wiped away, of a second coming of the Lord in power and glory, etc., etc., the focus of our discussion however has to be not just on what Scriptures say but on what they could possibly refer to. Arguably then with this the problem-area of our discussion shifts over to that of the language of religion, since saying and referring belong to the realm of language. Language is primarily concerned with saying something about something [to someone] and hence with referring. We have, therefore, first to ask ourselves how language functions in the normal life of any person (be the person "religious" or "secular").

3. The Quest of Secularism

A mountain can be viewed from different angles. No one point is more true than the others. Every viewpoint has its positive and its negative aspects. Secularism's quest is for wholeness of the land of the living as seen from the shores of time. Though this is a legitimate quest and a legitimate point of view secularism too has both positive and negative aspects.

Standing on the firm ground of reason secularists seek a reasonable understanding of reality. In our thesis we stated that secularism stands on the shore from which it views the land of time, that is to say, secularists are firmly grounded on the shore of time and history. They are fully committed to the quest of making sense of time and history. Whatever belongs to this realm comes under the scrutinising purview of the secularists. They are adamant in not leaving out anything which manifests itself in time and history. At the same time, they are equally adamant about not admitting any thing which prescinds time and history. Thus "God", "eternity", "heaven" etc. are for them postulates which do not belong to the stuff of time and history.

Thus secularists are suspicious about all those concepts which religion might proclaim as being "beyond" time. What secularists cannot accept is any postulate that has no bearing on time and history. In the secularist world-view meaning derives in and through the world of time. No meaning is possible that is not sprung from the soil of time and history.

Time and history – here is the strength and at the same time the weakness of secularism. Strength because any meaning that is more than subjectivistic in character has first to make sense in the soil of time and history. Cultural and inter-cultural communication are possible only because of time and history. Time and history are not a private world but characteristics of an open world, open to all cultures and creeds. It is in such a world that meaning is born, blossoms and flowers into personal and inter-personal communication and brings forth fruits of communion! But even here we have to ask ourselves whether meaning is available just for the asking, whether meaning like an object is just there, as the secularists seem to take for granted.

Thus both from the side of religion as well as from that of secularism we have to ask questions about meaning and language and how they are related to reality.

4. Language, Truth and Reality

What are the different ways in which human beings express their diverse needs? Are there, for instance, different modes of reference in their language-usage? Are such reference-modes restricted to the idiosyncrasies of the individual or are they anchored in the language community to which the speaker belongs?

4.1. The Functions of Language

Predominant in our linguistic universes is the mode of direct reference. It is predominant because it is basic and is presupposed by all other modes of reference. E.g. this is a table, this is my brother Rama, etc. This mode is direct, unmistakable and unambiguous. The referent is clearly identified through "ostensives" like "this". However what is to be noted here is that in spite of clarity and an absence of ambiguity with regard to the referent, knowledge of the referent though direct is only approximate. Unambiguity is achieved through direct pointing out, not through any definition or conceptual explanation. To put it in Heideggerian language, what is referred to, namely the referent, is known through its presence, its "be-ing there", but not through its "essence". We know that it is there and we know it because of its "appearing" there; whatever we know of its "whatness" (its essence, as it were) we know through its "be-ing there".

Obviously then, even in this mode of direct reference our knowing is about the "be-ing there" of a thing. This is the meaning of the assertion that the reference to something though direct is only approximate. It is approximate since it is neither exhaustive nor precise in details. Consider, for instance, the scientifically accepted truth that the earth is round. It is true that the earth is round. But this mode of expression is true only in a certain context of astronomy where it ignores the contours of the earth simply because in the mathematical model it employs the uneven factors are negligible, that is, not only can they be neglected but from the standpoint in question, they have to be neglected.

If we now come back to our examples, "this is a table", and "this is my brother Rama" we shall readily see that the designation "table" is not the "essence" of that which presents itself to us *as* table and that the description "my brother Rama" only approximately describes the presence before us.

What in fact we are doing in the case of direct reference is this: whatever we are saying we are saying primarily of its "be-ing there". The implication is that what we are positing about the referent refers primarily to its "being there" (that is, the ontological) and only in as much as it is "there" does it refer to "what" is there (that is, the ontic). Expressed in simple words: even in the case of direct reference the reference is primarily to the "presence", and only partially and secondarily to the "what" of that presence.

Our pragmatic concerns might mislead us into thinking that our con-

cerns in life are really with the what of the "be-ing there" than the "be-ing there" itself. That this is not so should become apparent from the following. Our concern, first of all, is with the being of what is there; the "what" in itself is something abstract. When we take "human being", for example, we note that this is something abstract which cannot engage us. It is the human being there in the concrete historical situation that arouses our interest, our passions, our love, our hatred, our wrath, etc.

One might object that the "what" is indeed of importance here, for it is the human being as opposed to some other kind of being that interests us. Besides, if the "what" of the "be-ing there" were not of specific interest then any being would do; in that case, the difference between the human and the other kinds of beings would not greatly matter. But we know that this is not the case. Hence the what of the "be-ing there" cannot be unimportant.

The specific manner, in which human beings are present, is so important that it characterises their very mode of be-ing; it is not their "what" that characterises them but their specific mode of presence. Only human beings know themselves as "be-ing there". This refers not so much to their whatness as to their mode of presence. It is in and from this basic mode of presence that other modes of be-ing are recognised and related to the "be-ing there". In this manner of reflecting on "be-ing there" knowing is not a mere quality of humans. Being human is equivalent to "be-ing there" knowingly. The three (be-ing there, knowing and being human) are phenomenologically (not metaphysically!) almost synonymous. Again to employ Heideggerian language, "be-ing there" is be-ing there knowingly in the realm of openness, that is, in the disclosure of reality. Humans are beings that are aware of their presence in the disclosure of reality.

On a background like this it should be clear that though the above objection speaks of "whatness" it is in fact referring not so much to an "essence" as to a mode of "be-ing there" in the disclosure of reality and that is why the presence of a human being does make a difference. In the light of one's own "be-ing there" one understands the way other beings, especially other human beings, are there present in the disclosure of reality.

The mode of what we have called direct reference then is neither the only one nor the most important one. There is a much more vital mode of reference which human beings make use of than one is aware of. And that is the mode of personal communication. By personal communication is meant not so much communication as communion between persons. The difference between the two lies in the fact that for the former the referent is in the world of perception and for the latter it is in the world of person. The referent in the world of perception can be located directly or indirectly. Not so with the world of person which is a world of communion where there is no separation between subject and object, spirit and matter, and consciousness and reality. It is a dynamic though differentiated world in which be-ing

manifests beings (that is, entities), Truth grounds truths; and be-ing and Truth constitute reality. Reality is the reality of be-ing and Truth.

In such a world the reference is not to the world of perception but in and through the world of perception to that of person. This is the case when we speak of love and warmth and a sense of belonging; when we refer to loyalty and faithfulness, selflessness and service; above all, to joy, happiness and peace. In these examples no specific object is being referred to and in all such cases no one instance nor all the instances put together can be said to constitute, say, love or peace or selflessness.

We can now return to our discussion of the referent of the direct reference. Our "be-ing there" can never be objectified, however much we might think that this is possible. Furthermore, we do not grasp the essence of things. At the most we grasp partial aspects of their presence in the disclosure of reality. The real referent of the direct reference is the be-ing of the referent through these partial (that is, ontic) aspects. It is a colossal fallacy to believe that the reference is to the partial aspects, and not to the "be-ing there" in which they are manifested. This make-belief which is further reinforced by the successful implementation of our plans and aspirations in the pragmatic realm, misleads us into believing that reality is as we believe it to be and as manifested to us in our pragmatic undertakings.

4.2. Naïve Realism

Here we have arrived at the crux of our problem – a problem inherited equally by all, whether religionists or secularists. Naïve realism is a common inheritance; indeed it is so common that it cuts across all kinds of ideologies and belief-systems. And it is not as if just the *hoi polloi* alone were susceptible to it. The learned too are not immune to it; not even professional philosophers and theologians escape its influence.

Naïve realism is based on two pillars: the objectification of be-ing and the subjectification of Truth. This is also the reason why Naïve realism sticks adamantly to the categories of subject/subjective and object/objective.

Objectification of Be-ing

Objectification of be-ing consists in reducing the ontological to the ontic. Be-ing is reduced to an entity and is treated as if It were graspable by human beings. Of course, to a certain degree be-ing is graspable, that is why we can speak of It. But by no means can It be grasped as if It were an object. What is grasped are the diverse modes of be-ing. These modes manifest be-ing but they are not identical with be-ing. Hence reality cannot be identified without more ado with the modes of be-ing. When we speak of reality we mean both the ontological and the ontic dimensions. Naïve realists neglect the ontological and reduce reality to the ontic. Reality for them is only that which is graspable and grasped by the human mind. They are not aware that the modes of be-ing are graspable *because be-ing has already grasped us in the first place.* Having been first grasped by be-ing through various modes of be-ing we are able to grasp the graspable aspects of

be-ing which are really not be-ing but *modes* of be-ing. Objectification of be-ing means, therefore, reducing the ontological (that is, be-ing) to the ontic (that is, to an entity).

Subjectification of Truth

Naïve realists turn out to be pragmatists whose only major concern is to show that things work as human beings plan for them in advance. And it is from here that both their idea of reality and their criterion for Truth-validation derives. Not surprisingly then, for them reality is what is graspable and Truth is what is grasped by the human mind. For them what is grasped is Truth because what is grasped corresponds to and is a reflection of reality.

In the naïve realistic world-view Truth is primarily a quality of the mind that grasps reality. In as much as it grasps reality it is true. Thus Truth is dependent on the human subject that grasps the object. Truth is not that which is already there but that which comes into existence only when the grasping mind corresponds to reality. Truth being dependent on the grasping mind is thus seen to be a quality, a characteristic of the knowing subject. In short, Truth for the naïve realists is a subjective experience. They "know" the Truth, they can "tell" the Truth, they "search" for the Truth, and with luck, they may even "find" the Truth. In certain extreme cases "we" may even have the Truth! Unlike in the case of Scripture where it is Truth that makes one free, here in the case of the naïve realists, it is they who make Truth free!

Thus both in the case of the objectification of be-ing and of the subjectification of Truth one and the same spirit, namely, the spirit of reification is at work. In the first case be-ing is reduced to the graspable and in the second what is grasped is declared to be Truth.

Now both the religionist and the secularist, it seems to me, fall a prey to both these dangers but each to a different degree. The secularist is more inclined to the objectification of be-ing and the religionist to the subjectification of Truth.

Secularists while declaredly searching for all that is there to be known do not appear to be sufficiently open to the dimension of be-ing; for them be-ing is the graspable, the knowable that can be grasped. In their world-view there is no room for that which makes the knowable knowable, like light which itself is unseen but makes the visible visible. There is in their scheme of things no space for the disclosure through which be-ing grasps and takes hold of us, no possibility of wholeness, caught up as they are in a world divided into subject and object but unified only in their act of knowing. Paradoxically enough objectification leads ineluctably to subjectification of Truth.

Truth is not *a* truth but the dis-closure of be-ing in which and through which Truth grasps us and en-*light*-ens so that we understand (that is, as R. Panikkar expresses it, stand under the spell of) the truth of the diverse modes of be-ing. Truth is characterised by an ontological openness in which and through which our search for and dis-

covery of the truth of the modes of being can meaningfully take place. Indeed all meaningful search of whatsoever kind is possible because the disclosure of Truth enables us to enter it; this in turn opens us to the truth of the different modes of be-ing.

The religionists on their part are convinced of their truth, which to defend, preach and propagate, they claim, is their birthright. They are concerned most about the truth/s of their religious tradition. Whether they say it explicitly or not, they tend to put their truth at the centre of the universe of religious truths, so that from this centre they can locate and relate all the other traditions, religious and secular. They are convinced that their religious truth is both the centre and the circumference of all truths whatsoever, that every truth has to be subservient to their religious truth, that no truth can go against their religious truth and that therefore every truth is ultimately to be legitimated by their religious truth. Religious truth is the only real, lasting and independent truth, other truths being derivative and therefore dependent truths.

What then is this religious truth that is so central for religionist? From where does its legitimation and validation derive? How does it become accessible to human beings?

For the religionists, of course, the answers are obvious. For them the central truth is the truth of revelation (however this may be articulated by the respective religious traditions). And revelation does not stand in need of any legitimation or validation. Indeed it is that which makes every kind of legitimation and validation possible. It is not a human voice that is speaking here. It is the voice that makes every other voice possible. Every other truth is founded in some way or the other on this central truth. The truth of revelation is unquestionable; a question is possible only on this unquestionable background. And every answer becomes an answer in as much as it "participates" in the unquestionable background.

While one may not dispute most of what religionists assert, the criticism that they will not take kindly to is the following: almost all religionists believe that the revelation-truth of their specific tradition stands in a class of its own when compared with the revelation-truth of other religious traditions. For such a subjectivistic stand that refuses to accept that the revelation-truth of other religious traditions could be in the same category there is no reasonable explanation whatever. The reasons that one tradition may proffer in support of its stand do not convince the other traditions and so each tends to absolutize its own stand, even though the reasons put forward may be very much similar to its own.

Now, it is possible that the understanding of truth is such that no rational explanation can be given but the nature of the inconsistency of a religious tradition becomes apparent when its unwillingness to accept a similar stand from other traditions or even from other world-views like those of the secularists surfaces. It is here that its subjectification of Truth becomes evident. The justification for its truth is its originary experience and its validation

for the centrality of this truth is similarly founded on such an experience.

The understanding of truth that is implied in the stances that religious traditions take with regard to the truth of other religious traditions is such that it can be classified as being nothing less than subjectivistic. Religious traditions usually put the truth of their own tradition in the centre and from that vantage point consider the truth of other traditions which is rarely, if at all, considered to be of equal importance. It is paradoxical that each religious tradition considers its central truth central for all but does not accept this centrality for the central truth of other religious traditions. In itself this need not be surprising but it is surprising when we consider the way religious traditions justify their central truth. The experience of faith (speaking homologously) is put forward as the first and last justification for the central truth of a tradition. Again, this in itself may be perfectly justified, as we shall see a little later, but religious traditions which justify their central truth in this manner refuse to acknowledge this mode of justification when employed by the other traditions.

Obviously such a stance is anomalous. The one and the same mode of justification is said to be valid in one's own case but invalid in the case of other religious traditions. On the one hand, we are asked by a religious tradition to accept faith-experience as a valid mode of justification for its central truth; on the other, the same tradition refuses to accept as valid this mode of justification when used by other religious traditions. It is in such a stance (shared by most, if not all, traditions) that the subjectification of truth becomes apparent.

In itself the experience of faith as justifying the central truth of a tradition seems to be a perfectly valid approach. There is, however, a qualification to be added. The experience of faith has to be an experience, not a dogmatic assumption; and if it is an experience it is difficult to see how such an experience can, so to say, go out of its way and make a judgement *about* the experience of another religious tradition. Surely the experience of the central truth of one tradition cannot be an experience that refutes the experience of the truth of another tradition! No experience can refute another experience. No experience can challenge another experience. Wherever this appears to be the case, it is in fact a challenge to the *articulation* of that experience, not to the experience itself. From that point of view all traditions (whether they are claimed to be human or divine) are in the same boat. For when they claim to be speaking of the experience of their central truth they are *speaking* of and *expressing* the experience of their central truth – which obviously is not the same thing as the experience of their central truth.

With the stress on experience there is another point that needs to be clarified. It is from one's own experience that one tries to understand the experience of others. If I have been burnt I understand how another when burnt must be suffering. If I have been burnt in the fire of faith-experience I shall understand in some way another

who is burning with the fire of divine love. My experience will have made me sensitive and open to others who might possibly have gone through a similar experience. It cannot be the case that genuine experience makes us blind to the experience of others. On the contrary, I shall be aware of the difficulties and dangers of such experience, on the one hand, and of the openings and opportunities, on the other. Experience is suspect when it openly supports double standards. Ultimately it is not so much ill-will or dishonesty that is at the root of double standards as a subjectivistic understanding of truth.

We have repeatedly stated that objectification of be-ing is the inverted copy of subjectification of Truth. Objectification of be-ing means that be-ing is reduced to a being, an entity. The beginning of the ocean is overlooked and instead understood as the end of the island. Just as the end of the island can, if one turns around, become the beginning of the ocean, so too a being can be understood as the place of the dis-closure of be-ing. The end of the island is *mutatis mutandis* the beginning of the ocean; a being is the place for the disclosure of be-ing.

Subjectification of Truth means subjecting Truth to dependence on a subject. Truth is not Truth in itself and by itself; it becomes Truth only when a subject utters it. To paraphrase this, Truth is reduced to truths, truths articulated and expressed by a subject. There is no such thing as Truth. Truth, if it exists, exists in and because of a subject.

Earlier on it was asserted that objectification of be-ing is the inverse copy of subjectification of Truth. In the former be-ing is understood as a being (that is, as an entity) and in the latter, Truth is reduced to propositional truths. But be-ing cannot be entified (or ontified?). If it is, then it is no more be-ing. Be-ing is openness in which beings are manifested; if light is what lights up things, then light itself cannot be lit up. Similarly if be-ing opens up and manifests beings, then be-ing itself cannot be opened up and manifested. This is, of course, what is vainly attempted in the objectification of be-ing.

Truth is the light of be-ing in which truths are dis-closed. Truth itself cannot be the product of the dis-closure; Truth is the light, the openness, the disclosure of be-ing. Hence Truth is neither the abstract noun covering all truths nor the sum of all truths. Truth is the light which helps us to experience specific truths; it is the openness in which we discover beings; it is the dis-closure in which being reveals be-ing.

In other words, where we have arrived at is the need for a new and fresh understanding of be-ing and Truth. Not only are the two interrelated; they are the two sides of the same coin called reality. It is from here that we have to think of be-ing and Truth, or (to introduce Indian vocabulary) *sat* and *satya*. There is no *Sat* without *Satya* just as there is no *Satya* without *Sat*. (Just as an aside, may I remark that the *satyam eva jayate* of the Upanishads is not a moral truth which like "truth will out" will "overcome someday"; the Truth of

be-ing cannot be subjected and overcome; it alone remains ever victorious!)

Clearly the subjectivistic stand is built on an arbitrary foundation; arbitrary because though it assumes "experience" for the truth of its tradition, it is not open to assuming "experience" with regard to the truth of the other traditions. This rejection of the experiential character of the truth of other traditions also reveals the arbitrariness of the truth of its own tradition. For when a tradition is built on experience the nature and conditions of such an experience should become apparent to the believing members of this tradition. From what we have to go by (namely the rejection of the experiential character of the truth of other traditions) it appears that the tradition is built more on a dogmatic assumption hid under the linguistic mantel of faith-experience than on a genuine experience of the truth of the tradition.

Expressed in another way, religious traditions assume that their own truth is the centre of all truth. When they take up such a stand with regard to their own tradition but reject the centrality of the truth of other traditions they are not really in touch with the faith-experience of their own tradition. For if they had been they would understand that the nature of the truth of other traditions is similar to the nature of truth of their own tradition. Hence instead of rejecting it outright they would study how the centrality of the truth of their own tradition is to be related to the centrality of the truth of other traditions.

What we can conclude to from this is that religionists when accepting the truth of their own tradition are as much arbitrary and subjectivistic as they are in rejecting the centrality of the truth of other traditions.

What would religionists have to do to overcome this charge of arbitrariness and subjectivity? For one thing they will have to work out an understanding of Truth that is larger than and supportive of their faith-experience. For another they would have to be more open to and more tolerant of other traditions claiming to have a similar (faith-) experience.

Not only religionists but all those who make Truth depend on their experience are, in fact, guilty of subjectification of Truth. Truth, if it is really Truth, has to be the ground of all truths. Truth has to be more than experience. Experience cannot make Truth; rather it is the other way round. It is Truth that through its dis-closure allows one enter into and undergo the experience of Truth.

At the same time the secularists' stress on time and history poses a danger to holistic living. The perspective of time and history, as we have noted earlier, is both legitimate and valid; however it does not make up the whole fabric of being human. Being human is neither limited to nor restricted by the perspective of time and history which is only one of its "kairological moments". There are other moments which are equally valid and legitimate. Secularists assert that only the world of time and history is real and reasonable, that of the transtemporal being imaginary and fantastic. In such a case, standing within their horizon of understanding they take their approach to reality and

Truth as the standard for all human beings. The danger of the time-and-history perspective is that it excludes other kairological moments. In other words, this perspective is right in what it asserts and wrong when it denies validity to other perspectives.

5. Meaning and *Mythos*[3]

Being human is not a static process; it is dynamic and diverse. It is dynamic because however much individuals may become rigid and ossified the "human spirit" is restless in its quest for deeper meaning. This search is not limited to any one group or any one individual. It can suddenly irrupt anywhere without prior notice as it were. Being human is also diverse precisely because this search for meaning manifests itself in diverse garbs. Slogans like "history repeats itself" and "there is nothing new under the sun" are true only in a very vague and imprecise sense. All serious study of history, however, is a refutation of such a shoddy way of thinking.

The search for meaning is characterised not only by restlessness of the spirit (that is to say, not satisfied with the already given and discovered) but by the mythic realm in which this search takes its origin. This mythic dimension becomes manifest in the specific way of living, thinking, feeling, willing, working, etc., of a people. It is in the mythic dimension that unity and meaning are experienced. Any community of meaning has its source and stability in the mythic dimension. The kind of "*Mythos*" (that is, the horizon of understanding) that a community lives in determines the universe of meaning that is specific to that community. The perspective of time and history is the product of a specific *Mythos* and it is only in this ambience that time and history have the kind of meaning that they do in fact have. In another *Mythos*, say, of the Hindu traditions, time and history have a different meaning and a different cogency of meaning altogether. The kind of meaning time and history have in the "Western" world-view is cogent only in that world. That this is so is evidenced in the circumstance that such cogency is absent in other world-views.[4]

Community of meaning is present and operative only when and where there is a common *Mythos*. A *Mythos* makes possible a communion which is the base of understanding and consensus, of dialogue and discourse, and of fellowship and common endeavours as diverse as love and labour. Now this communion itself is a mode of be-ing; hence it cannot be objectified. But its "be-ing there" is made palpably manifest in experiences we call understanding, love, joy and peace which also cannot be objectified. There is here, in such instances, a "surplus of meaning" which one can neither prove nor point to but is just taken for granted. Anyone who has had such experiences will have no difficulty in conceding this surplus of meaning. The surplus of meaning is in fact the *Mythos*, the mythic presence in which a community lives, moves and has its being.

Religionists and secularists have to keep in mind that this mythic presence is operative not just in "primitive" peoples but in all human beings. Ac-

cordingly they will have to revise their understanding of understanding. On such a revision will depend the relevance of their respective ideologies and theories. This should not create the impression that with the discovery of the mythic presence we have discovered whatever is to be known about the process of understanding. What is meant is that one's theory has to keep pace with discoveries that have already been made. One cannot do astronomy today ignoring the discoveries of the telescopes that our satellites are carrying.

What has been discussed up to this point is only a prelude to my main thesis: *Religion and secularism are two aspects of the quest for meaning*. Religion tries to dis-cover meaning in life from the viewpoint of eternity and secularism attempts to discover meaning in life from the viewpoint of time.

There is an important point of contact between religion and secularism – both of them have their origin in the common search for meaning without which neither of them would be intelligible. That means, both derive from a common source – the quest for meaning which is made possible by the most fundamental dimension of the mythic presence which constitutes the unity of the human race. The quest for meaning is not restricted to any class, creed or ideology. In the last analysis all human behaviour springs from this source. Our understandings and our misunderstandings, our loves and our longings, our hopes and our expectations, our plans and our ambitions, our desire to know and to discover more and to go deeper into the mysteries of life, our attachments and our detachment, the extremes of asceticism and of consumerism, of exploitation and disinterest – all this is part and parcel of our search for meaning.

Now this search for meaning is itself not a new meaning. It is an openness, an openness to be-ing. But there is a specific perspective to this openness which colours the meanings that are born when this openness encounters be-ing. Raimon Panikkar has called the specific openness of a tradition its *Mythos*.

Mythos is not something static or objectifiable; it is a dynamic diversity in a fundamental unity. There is the fundamental unity of the human race; at this level there is the basic commonality and community-aspect of human beings. Whatever our differences and divergences we all have commonalities like birth, life and death, hunger and thirst, sleep and rest, and the need of communion and community. This commonness manifests itself in the fact that in the greatest of differences some unity and understanding are possible. This level of mythic presence founds the unity of the human race. Wherever there is some sort of common understanding this is made possible by the mythic presence. Whatever the specific *Mythos* one may be shaped by, there is a still deeper level where all human beings are equally shaped and formed as human beings – this is a level which no human being can escape. We have named this the level of the fundamental unity of human beings.

Speaking heuristically there are different levels of mythic presence

which begin at the level of the fundamental unity of human beings and gradually become narrower and narrower, levels that shape us through our specific culture and creed, to say nothing of history, economics and politics. These levels explain more easily why there is more openness to the attitudes and values of one's own culture than to those of another culture. It becomes evident here that not only the limits to freedom and tolerance are determined by the specific *Mythos* in which one finds oneself but even one's understanding of reality and Truth. That Truth is one and absolute we need not discuss but *our understanding* of the absolute Truth will be neither one nor absolute. Depending on the *Mythos* in which we grow up and on which we are fed our understanding of Truth is bound to differ.

When within our own *Mythos* things make sense to us, this "making sense" remains unquestionable: it never occurs to us to question that which makes sense, and even if someone were to question that which makes sense the question itself would not make sense to us. Whenever we have arrived at what makes sense we have in fact arrived (even if it be for the time being) at the limits of our *Mythos*. We simply cannot go beyond that. Even if we were to try to do that we would not be able to understand whatever lies beyond the boundaries of what makes sense.

As a matter of fact all thinking and all patterns of thought function only within the limits of what makes sense. To go beyond is to enter the realm of non-sense and this no human being is capable of. It may be that what an individual does may not make sense to me. But to the individual it somehow must make sense. Trying to understand this is trying to enter into the *Mythos* of the other. For the limits of a *Mythos* are the limits of what makes sense; and in as much as the different *Mythoi* begin to overlap in that much a fusion of horizon begins to take place.

6. The Meeting of Religion and Secularism

It is in the difference of their respective *Mythoi* that the root of the differences between the religionists and the secularists has to be located and identified. The differences are not so much in the Truth as in their perception of the Truth. Each *Mythos* enables a different access to Truth because it enables a different access to be-ing. The understanding of reality and Truth being mediated by a specific *Mythos* is not found outside of that *Mythos*. The significance given to timelessness is as real for the religionists as that given to time and history is for the secularists and vice versa. Hence the question which one is more true is not applicable here since such a question of the truth of a *Mythos* cannot be posed from outside the *Mythos*.

Does this imply that whatever emerges from a *Mythos* is necessarily true. This is a complex question which cannot be dealt with here in detail. It is enough to state the following: our understanding of truth is mediated by our *Mythos*; hence what makes sense to my tradition may not make sense to the other tradition. From my perspective *sati*, for instance, cannot be right but it

could be seen to be right from another perspective. The question cannot be settled as long as our respective *Mythoi* do not encounter each other. It is in a dialogue that leads to a fusion of our horizons that the truth of *sati* has to be settled. The future of our planet depends on such a dialogue, given the different directions in which our diverse horizons of understanding are pulling.

When secularism attempts to understand this world from the viewpoint of time and history, and religion tries to understand it from that of the transhistorical both the viewpoints are from within a specific *Mythos*. There is no such thing as standing "neutrally" outside a *Mythos*. We always and already stand within a *Mythos* and what we have from within a *Mythos* is a viewpoint, the point of view that our specific *Mythos* enables. Without a *Mythos*, that is, outside of a *Mythos*, we would not be able to live since it is the *Mythos* that mediates what makes sense. With this we have arrived at an important point: whatever makes sense, always makes sense only within a specific *Mythos*. It is not an abstract meaning that makes sense but a meaning in a specific mode of mythic presence.

Thus both the transhistorical and the temporal are modes of be-ing experienced from within specific horizons of understanding. What we, whether religionists or secularists, encounter is be-ing and depending on the *Mythos* in which we stand we look at it from the transhistorical or the temporal viewpoint. Is there such a thing as the transhistorical over and beyond time? Is there such a thing as time without eternity? It depends on the *Mythos* in which you are. Neither time nor eternity are to be thought of ontically (as entities) but ontologically (as modes of be-ing). Here, "is" is not to be understood ontically since "is" is not an entity; we are not speaking of the "essence" of time and the transhistorical but only of the mode in which be-ing is present before (= *pre-esse*) us.

Whether it treats of and believes in "God" (or whatever it may call the Ultimate Mystery) or not, ultimately religion looks at reality from the perspective of the transhistorical and whatever other beliefs (like God, heaven, afterlife, soul, etc.) it may deduce from this main belief they are all different versions of that basic edition called the transtemporal. Whenever religion tends to reify its beliefs secularism will be a healthy antidote. The existence of secularism should have a salutary effect on religious traditions which are in danger of falling a prey to such temptations.

For its part secularism views everything from the viewpoint of time and history and thus ensures the base of all meaningfulness and significance. For, there can be no experience of meaningfulness without meaning in time and history. However, secularism runs the danger of reducing meaningfulness to meaning and here religion should be a reminder that to reify be-ing (from where all meaningfulness derives) is to be blind to the realm of meaningfulness.

Thus religion and secularism are both concerned about the world of human beings. They are both committed to the highest good of humankind, how-

ever much they might differ in their conception of the "highest good". The quest for the highest good makes eminent sense to both religion and secularism. *Whereas secularism stresses the meaning of the highest good, Religion puts the accent on its meaningfulness.* Meaning is the smile on the face and meaningfulness is the joy in the heart. Without the joy the smile is artificial and without the smile the joy will be faceless. This means that there is here a point of encounter between religion and secularism – an area for complementarity and correction.

No model can ever be comprehensive; this is more profoundly true of those models through which one looks at human beings and their world. All our so-called comprehensive models are (bound to be) one-sided. This refers to all models: to those prevalent in religion and to those prevalent in ideologies like secularism. Hence all models, whether their context is religious or secular, though they may offer a whole world-view, are nothing more than mere perspectives. Even when they speak of their concern for the world of human beings and actively strive to promote their highest good, they do this from one specific viewpoint alone, never exhaustively, much less definitively.

Appendix

For those not familiar with A. B. Shah's stance on religion and secularism I am quoting some important passages from his book, *Religion and Society in India*, (Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd. Bombay/New Delhi 1981), passages which help in appreciating Shah's approach to secularism.

(a) "However, man does not live by bread alone, and even for producing enough bread it is necessary that those who are called upon to work for development have the right kind of attitude and value commitment. In their absence economic development itself is likely to be inhibited by the ballast of the past as has, indeed, been the experience of almost all the developing countries which became independent after World War II.

"The historical relationship between religion and social change provides a fascinating field of inquiry. Most world religions arose as the harbingers of a social and cultural renaissance and offered to their followers a higher world-view than the one which was dominant till then. This is obvious in the case of Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. It is not difficult to show that a similar statement would hold about Hinduism too.

"A new religion comes into existence in response to certain felt needs of its would-be followers. These needs may be briefly formulated as follows:

1. Human being comes across a variety of experiences which exhibit certain patterns of diversity as well as uniformity and which therefore call for a certain intellectual framework within which they may be unified in a satisfactory manner. Every religion worth the name has therefore a body of doctrine which claims to explain the origin of man and the universe, the processes of nature and the decline and fall of civilisations. This constitutes the intellectual core of religion.

2. Besides the need to understand what he experiences, man also feels the need to choose between different alternatives. He has therefore to have criteria for deciding what is in conformity with the world-view offered by his religion and what is incompatible with it. These criteria define the good life in terms of a code of ethics, which forms the ethical content of religion. Morality consists in living according to the ethical injunctions of religion, and immorality in flouting them in one's life.

3. Since religion is essentially a social phenomenon, in the sense that it is to be found only in organised human groups, the good life has to be realised through social institutions. Mysticism has always been an exceptional phenomenon from the point of view of organised religion, which – as in Islam – has sometimes even condemned it as opposed to 'true' religion. Religion therefore also lends sanctity to such institutions as would facilitate a life in conformity with its dictates and condemns as immoral those which would imply a violation of its ethical norms. Every religion thus also functions as a sort of social theory for its followers." pp. 13-15.

(b) "It follows that in any religious system there must be two kinds of knowledge. The empirical knowledge in terms of which man understands and to a certain extent controls, or adapts himself to, the processes of nature and of human life is too important to be denied by any religion. However, since such knowledge can only deal with the world of sensory experience, in the religious view it is of subsidiary, utilitarian value. What is more important is the other knowledge of the transcendental reality which imparts meaning and significance to human existence. The final authority of *this* kind of knowledge can only be faith either in a revealed scripture or in the word of its official interpreters; such knowledge cannot be tested against logic and empirical verification.

"In the religious world-view, the criteria for judging this-worldly actions and for interpreting events have also to be transcendental in the final analysis. Thus not only natural events are interpreted as expressions of the transcendental order, but also ethics itself is defined in terms of conformity to transcendental criteria. In other words, ethics is not, as it should be, a system of norms to govern interpersonal relations but a code of conduct to ensure grace in the eyes of the Deity or liberation from the bonds of earthly existence. So long as religion functions as an effective matrix within which our entire life moves, this does not create any problem for us. But when it ceases to be the sole or even the dominant concern of our thinking self, a situation of conflict is bound to arise.

"Not only ethics but art, science, literature – indeed, all pursuits of men – have to be evaluated in terms of moral criteria based on transcendental values. Moreover, since the human condition is constantly changing and man has to face a new situation at every turn, he needs authoritative guidance in order to reassure himself that he would not go wrong owing to ignorance or other weaknesses to which flesh is heir. It follows that those who are accepted as

authoritative spokesmen or interpreters of the will of God come to exercise total power in all spheres of life.

"In such a scheme of things there can be no autonomy for human reason. Transcendental values are by definition eternal and essentially unchangeable. If change appears inescapably necessary, it has to be within the limits approved by religious authority. There is no scope therefore in religious life for human creativity or for the rights of man in virtue merely of the fact that he is a human being. The human personality has no moral sanctity of its own.

"The history of every major religion shows a common pattern. In the first stage religion appears as a harbinger of change, often radical, and almost invariably seeks to lift society to a higher level of moral consciousness. It has to face the opposition of established interests, generally in the name of the currently prevalent religion, but succeeds because the new consciousness it reflects is better attuned to the changes which have already taken place due to the operation of non-religious factors in other spheres of life. The period of transition may be long as in the case of Christianity, or relatively short as in the case of Islam. In either case, unless the old order possesses sufficient vigour and is ruthless in suppressing dissent, a time arrives when what was once a protest movement becomes the religion of the new Establishment. This is followed by a period of stability accompanied by steady growth and expansion. The world-view offered by the new religion and the value system associated with it meet the needs not only of the cultural but also of the political and economic development of society." pp. 15-17.

(c) "The title of this essay [Meaning of Secularism for India] is in a sense misleading since it is likely to suggest that secularism can mean different things in different societies, whereas being essentially a concept that defines the relationship between religion, on the one hand, and human beings in different capacities, on the other, secularism can only have one single meaning. What may however vary from society to society would be the manner in which secularism is reflected in its laws and institutions, or the specific goals that a society sets before itself in order to ensure that its laws and institutions would be secular. It is in this sense that we examine here the meaning of secularism for India.

"However, before we undertake this exercise it is necessary to define the core meaning of secularism as it has come to be accepted by those who represent the secularist movement in India or abroad. According to them, secularism primarily means the separation of religion from man's secular life. Man lives at three levels – personal, interpersonal, and institutional, the last assuming a variety of forms such as educational, social, economic, political and many others that one can easily think of. Secularism would require that the decisions one takes at any of these levels are governed by considerations which do not stem from religious belief or dogma of any kind." p. 34.

(d) "If one examines the modes of expression of the secular attitude at the three levels considered above, one finds

that the essence of secularism would consist in looking upon religion as a strictly personal relationship between a man and his Maker -if he believed in one. This perhaps needs some clarification in view of the popular misconception that secularism necessarily implies atheism. What secularism requires is not a denial of the transcendental, whether the transcendental is conceived as God in the Semitic sense or as *Brahman* in the Hindu sense, but the acceptance of a truly spiritual view of religion and all that goes with it. Gandhi was a deeply religious man and yet he was completely secular in his view of religion and its bearing on personal as well as public life. Jesus Christ, who unlike Gandhi founded a world religion, was also secular in his approach to life in this world. His admonition to the Pharisees who asked him whether they should pay the taxes to Caesar is probably the first statement of the essential meaning of secularism given by a man of religion." p. 35.

(e) "This modern secularist movement may be regarded as beginning with this demand [for the separation of morals and education from religion] though as mentioned above, its origin can be traced to the New Testament. Consequently, once the power of the Church was broken, the Western man did not experience any serious difficulty in adopting a secular approach to life in this world without ceasing to be a believing Christian." p. 36.

(f) "Gandhi's failure to solve the Hindu-Muslim problem symbolised the failure of the Indian conception of secularism, namely, the belief that the state should treat all religions equally and desist from interfering in the practice of the followers of any of them. It did not go further and demand that in its turn, religion too should not interfere in secular life. In other words, the Indian conception of secularism sought to freeze the status quo in the conflict between religion and the modern conscience at the stage at which the Mutiny found it. For political reasons this was accepted by all parties to the Indo-British dispute – the British, the Hindus and the Muslims, each for reasons of its own. It was only after Independence and the opting out of the predominantly Muslim areas as a separate sovereign state that the national leadership could think of removing the artificial restriction on the meaning of secularism and interpret it so as to justify state action in what till then was regarded as the religious field for the purpose of promoting social welfare and reform." pp. 39-40.

(g) "The cumulative effect of the politician's continued willingness to appease religious obscurantism has been to popularise the *ersatz* concept of secularism which I think was first formulated by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. According to him, Indian secularism means non-denominationalism – which in simple language means that the state does not favour one religion at the expense of others." p.45.

(h) "It is this conception of secularism as much as the obscurantism of organised religious groups which needs to be combated if Indian society is to be integrated into a modern nation on the basis of social equality regardless

of caste and creed. Nor is it a question of choice; equality apart, even stability which is a precondition of survival and development cannot be ensured unless a truly secular spirit informs our national life. For in a major democracy, a non-denominational state must either evolve into a secular state or degenerate into a denominational one. If the latter alternative were to materialize, India would be reduced to a congeries of tribal collectivities in which not only God but man too would be degraded." p.46.

Notes

1. A.B. Shah has been at the forefront of defending and defining Indian Secularism. He founded the Indian Secular Society and its Journal *The Secularist*, a Journal devoted to the Promotion of Secularism, Rationalism and Humanism. Besides being the editor of *The Secularist* he was also founder-editor of *Quest* which was suppressed during the Emergency and which was resurrected in its new avatar as *New Quest*. His *Religion and Society in India* (Bombay/New Delhi, Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1981), now out of print, is a classic on the subject. In the Appendix I am presenting some important statements from that book which explain Shah's stance on secularism.
2. In his essay "Secularism and Maharashtra" p. 55, Shah writes : "Secularists would have welcomed government's interest in the preservation of certain aspects of India's cultural heritage, provided such concern was expressed in an enlightened manner consistent with the norms of modern critical scholarship." Shah speaks with approval of Jotirao Phule's 'humanist religion'. He states: "This new religion was based on *universal human values* such as the essential equality of all human beings regardless of caste, creed, sex or race. His method was an indigenous, unsophisticated version of the Socratic dialogue, in which he subjected all traditional beliefs and institutions to a twofold test of reason and social justice, informed by the knowledge that was made available through the Western system of education only recently introduced by the British." *Ibid.* p. 51 [My emphasis]
3. For a deeper understanding of *Mythos* see R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics. Cross-cultural Studies*, New York, Paulist Press, etc. 1979. passim.
4. R. Panikkar, "The Law of Karma and the Historical Dimension of Man," in *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*, pp. 362-388.

JPJRS I/1 (1998) 127-148

Advaitic Model of Pluralism for India

An Indian Christian Contribution

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The special issue of *The Times of India* commemorating the golden jubilee of Indian Independence, characterises the "great Divides" of India as: The Whole vs. The Parts, Villages vs. Cities, Bharat vs. India and Pakistan vs. India.[1] These "Divides" sum up the philosophical, cultural, economic, religious, and political divisions or diversities and the resulting conflicts of the Indian subcontinent. These "Divides" have become all the more acute because of the unstable political situations both at the centre and in some of the prominent states. The impression that politics has become associated with criminal elements has aggravated this situation of disharmony. Further, the prevalence of seeming lawlessness in public life has strengthened the roots of the division.

In this article an attempt is made to study the issue of pluralism from the perspective of the Indian nation and suggest a possible model to live with the diversity that India is. It may be noted that the article deals with the topic mainly from a philosophical point of view. It tries to go beyond religious pluralism about which much has been written. The attempt here is to articulate a philosophy of pluralism which will do justice to the full diversity of India in its cultural, political, social and religious dimensions. Because it is philosophical it will remain at a general level and will not offer any concrete suggestions. But it is hoped that the issues raised and the model offered will stimulate a better understanding of the Indian reality. Further, it is hoped that the model offered will enable us to cherish the diversity of India and lead to a more conscious and authentic life which respects the other. This may help us in journeying to a healthy integration. That could be a living tribute to the Jubilee Year of the nation's Independence and a possible model for a united India.

I shall use different expressions like pluralism, plurality, diversity, multiplicity, oneness and commonality. Without attempting to define these terms precisely, we accept the commonly understood meanings of these terms. The whole perspective in this article is neo-Thomistic. I begin by analysing the metaphysical concepts of the one and the many, and the analogy of being from this neo-Thomistic perspective. The typical model we elaborate is primarily Indian for the obvious reason that we are dealing with the Indian reality. This Indian model, based

on Bede Griffiths, has also a neo-Thomistic nuance. Griffiths, though not a strict neo-Thomist, was an ardent admirer of Aquinas. In this article I want to study the relation between the groups and cultures of the Indian subcontinent, using the traditional Indian concept of *advaita*. I shall attempt to modify slightly this profound concept of *advaita* based on a neo-Thomistic philosophy. For this I use Bede Griffiths' understanding of *advaita*.

1. The Issue

It is not an exaggeration to claim that no other country in the world is stamped so indelibly with pluralism and diversity as India. Linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious and economic diversity with an amazing variety and form has been our heritage for about 3500 years.[2] Different areas of thought and philosophy have generally coexisted peacefully, with the exception of some violent outbursts. This has led some Indian thinkers to look for a philosophical basis for pluralism. But the spurt in communalism and the violent assertion of local identities in recent times coupled with a fragmented and fragile political system and weak government in the Indian subcontinent are serious concerns. So the problem discussed in this paper is that of pluralism in general. How do we live in a reality which is divergent and pluralistic? We keep in mind the Indian subcontinent when discussing some of the issues related to pluralism. This grave problem calls also for an intellectual response. So in this paper an attempt is made to pose the problem of pluralism in general and to offer a response to pluralism using the ancient Indian philosophical notion of *advaita*. Such a response, I believe, would be liberative for the Indian nation, with its individual groups and identities. It may be further mentioned that we deal not exclusively with religious pluralism, though it is also a very significant factor in the Indian society. Our concern is the whole issue of pluralism in general, and we can treat religious pluralism as one paradigm case of a pluralistic society.

This paper has three sections. In the first one, an attempt is made to elaborate the fact of pluralism philosophically. For this we make use mainly of classical Scholastic terms modified to suit the modern times. Here we introduce some fundamental notions with a view to indicating the actuality of change, diversity and pluralism. After having established the metaphysical fact of pluralism, in the second section we look at the metaphysical possibility of pluralism. This too is dealt with primarily within a modified Scholastic framework. In the third section our concern is an existential one. Here we look for a model to live by with the fact and possibility of plurality. Since our context is Indian and the issue is also Indian, here the model we propose is basically Indian. We propose that a modified *advaitic* model could be a suitable model to live the plurality that India is, within the three horizons of individuality, comprehensiveness and integration. Thus it is hoped that our work will be a modest contribution towards developing an integrated India where plurality is affirmed and unity maintained.

2. The Fact of Pluralism: A Philosophical Perspective

2.1. Pluralism as a Fact: Metaphysical Considerations[3]

At a philosophical level, we have to start with the fundamental question of the very reality of diversity or pluralism. Is plurality real? When Indian thinkers speak of the world as *māya*, this is not necessarily an avowal of nihilism and a-cosmism (denial that the world exists). More often than not it is a way of asserting the *relative* unreality of the beings of our daily sense experience – another manner of indicating their contingency. Only the Absolute can be called unqualifiedly real: it exists necessarily, it cannot not-be and depends on nothing else for its existence.

However, some thinkers deny the reality of plurality altogether. They do not deny that we observe changes taking place around us. There is no quarrel over the phenomenon. What they do is to reject the validity of sense experience. Preferring to go solely by reason they argue that reason alone is a valid means of obtaining knowledge, and hence sense experience is defective. Now reason, they argue, reveals that change is impossible. Therefore, following the reliable guide of pure reason and eschewing the false leads of sense experience, we should deny the reality of the phenomenon of change. It is all pure illusion. Let's take a closer look at how they present their case.

2.2. Parmenides' Problem

The first recorded philosophical exercise in the West originated with two rival stalwarts and their two antagonistic schools in direct confrontation with each other. Heraclitus and his fellow Ionians, relying more on the information of sense, maintained the reality of change and the illusory nature of permanence. Parmenides and the Eleatic school held directly the opposite view: i.e., leaving aside the sophistries of Zeno they take seriously only the riddle of Parmenides, which alone is worthy of serious attention.

According to Parmenides, all that we can affirm is: "Being is." Reality is a single, uniform and unchanging being (not a becoming). After all, to really change means to acquire something new, something that was not there before. Now this "something new" which is allegedly acquired in a change must be either a being or a non-being: there is no "third possibility." But being cannot change by acquiring being, for that is nothing new; it is already being. Nor can it change by acquiring non-being, since non-being is nothing; acquiring nothing means not changing. Thus, as far as Parmenides and his disciples are concerned, change is shown to be effectively impossible. It is merely an illusion and no more. So is plurality too!

2.3. Aristotle's Answer

It was not until Aristotle that a clever and pertinent response to Parmenides' dilemma was provided, thanks to Aristotle's theory of *act* and *potency*. This theory gives a good basis for a dynamic and an *advaitic* worldview.

To grasp further this valuable insight, let us begin with the common

parlance terms *actual* and *potential*, which come from our everyday experiences. We can take a stone and a mango seed as examples. Both are obviously not a mango tree, but there is a difference. True, neither of them is an actual mango tree, but the mango seed is at least a potential mango tree: it has a certain orientation, an in-built capacity to become a mango tree, given a certain environment. But the stone is not a potential mango tree at all. There is nothing you can do to it, no environment you can provide it with, which will enable it to evolve into a mango tree some day. Thus, there is a halfway meeting place between being and non-being: potential being. A mango seed is an actual mango seed but a potential mango tree. A stone is an actual stone and not a potential mango tree (it may be a potential statue in the hands of a clever sculptor).

So we are in a position to understand better *act* and *potency*. In its most general sense, *act* means a perfection and *potency* means a capacity or readiness for a perfection. *Potency*, in turn, may be of two kinds, passive and active. A passive *potency* is the capacity to receive a certain perfection, e.g., a human person has the capacity to acquire fatness. An active *potency* is the capacity to do a particular perfective action. The faculty of sight, for instance, has the active *potency* to perceive colour – but not sound. Strictly speaking, we can find a minimal measure of disposition or orientation. A human person has the passive *potency* to acquire philosophical knowledge. But this is only because there is in the person some active inner disposition for it, which a chair lacks!

Going back to Parmenides, we can affirm that change and so multiplicity can be shown to be rationally possible by introducing Aristotle's understanding of *act* and *potency*. The beings of our experience are both actually what they are (a stone or a mango seed) and potentially something else (a statue or a mango tree). When they acquire this "something extra" which they were potentially, they acquire something genuinely new and so change! This explains multiplicity.

2.4. Change Is Not Substitution

All change and multiplicity imply some degree of composition. Not only must something new be acquired, but something of "the old" must be carried over to underlie the process. There is something in the stone which remains in the statue; it is the same seed which has now "become" a tree. In other words, something within the seed, some common substratum has survived into the tree. If every single element of the "old being" were totally wiped out and the "new being" was absolutely radically new, then there would be no real change but the annihilation of one being and its replacement or substitution, somehow or the other, by the new one! Now we can understand Aristotle's definition of change: "The fulfilment of what exists potentially, in so far as it exists potentially."[4] By "fulfilment", here, is meant the process of actualising what was existing potentially. The final state "in so far as it exists potentially" is added because otherwise we

shall be referring to the completed, final change, whereas, as we have seen, by change we mean the process of passing from *potency* to *act*.

The related problem of the one and the many is also to a large extent resolved. The problem refers to the fact that if being is one and it suffices, why are there many? In other words, is the multiplicity of beings around us real or only apparent? Are they really different individuals or actually various parts or manifestations of one single being? If there is only one being, how do we account for the apparent multiplicity or pluralism? If we accept a multiplicity of beings which are independent of each other, how do we explain the apparent unity and inter-connectedness that we experience in reality? Still, let us admit at the outset, it is much more logical to assume that there is one being, rather than many.[5] After all, if "to be," or existence, is the characteristic note of being, then what would there actually be to provide the multiplicity and individuation of beings?

Once again, Aristotle's approach provides us with an answer. Being is not just pure existence (as in God's case). In that situation, being would be necessarily infinite, unique and not multipliable. But, as the direct judgement has revealed to us, being is more than just existence, pure and simple. There is also the limiting element of essence in the beings we affirm. Thus there can be several existences limited by several essences. The infinite (unlimited) being is one, unique, and unrepeatable; finite (limited) beings are multiple because of their limiting essences. If there are different essences, we have different types of beings. If there is further an element of prime matter within the essence, we have further individuation within the species (many horses, many human beings, many mango trees and so on).

According to Desbruslais, a truly comprehensive and integrated metaphysics will provide a basis for both the essential plurality of beings as also their basic inter-connectedness.[6] In practice, however, Western thought has tended to exaggerate the isolatedness of individual beings and has ignored the organic unity that interlinks the cosmos. The Indian world vision, on the other hand, emphasises a holistic understanding of reality, seeing the entire cosmos as one, almost to the point of either ending up in monism or pantheism, or being misunderstood as such.[7] Contemporary thinkers do recognise now the solidarity that exists between all that is. Not only are "the things of this world" intimately linked to the Unlimited, the Infinite Being by participation, but there is also a kind of bonding between themselves, which could be better understood in terms of analogy.[8]

2.5. Relation between One and Many: Philosophical Reflections

We understand everything that is in reality as entities, because Being is constitutive of them. So the question, to what extent does the totality of existing reality form a basic unity, is proper.[9] This question of the cosmic unity and the universal unity is a basic question in the history of

thought. Even the early Greek thinkers, before 600 BC, had thought of everything as forming a oneness and attempted to bring the totality of reality under one universal law and to explain it from the "basic constituent of everything" (*archē panton*). The classical metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle were also similar attempts.

From the beginning of thought itself there was the temptation to equate this unity with monism. Parmenides, as we saw (500 BC), conceives of only one eternally resting *Sein* or Being. All plurality and change is for him only appearances. This thought continued in the neo-Platonism of Plotinus (3rd century AD) and in Proclus (5th century AD). For Plotinus the first and highest divine basis of existence is the One (*to hen*), out of which by necessary emanation (radiating out or flowing out) everything else comes about. Finally, everything else must return to its origin and so unify itself with the original One.

This thought has a significant influence on almost every kind of pantheistic view of the Middle Ages and in the mystical traditions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Even in the humanistic tendencies of the modern age, such thoughts were presented by Giordano Bruno (1660). They base themselves primarily on Neo-Platonism. For Aquinas, oneness has ontological priority over plurality.[10] Accordingly, in the substance-monism of Spinoza (17th century) there is only one divine Substance, which realises itself and presents itself in finite things as its various 'modes.' In the German idealism, Schelling speaks of the "*Absolute Identity*" in which everything is finally dissolved into one. But he later went beyond this thought. As against him, Hegel understands the Absolute as a Unity that develops itself dialectically, synthesising the thesis and the antithesis of progressive evolution, and comes to itself in the finite beings. This Absolute One later becomes the Spirit and returns to itself as the Absolute Spirit. Hegel's idea is thus a dialectical and all-encompassing unifying thought, which stays close to Proclus and Spinoza and has its influence to this day.

Metaphysically it must be said that Being is the principle of unity of all beings, in so far as and because it itself has a being, and constitutes an all comprehensive unity of beings. This comprehensive unity is applicable not just for the particular beings, but also for the totality of all beings. At the same time it is absolutely necessary to note that the unity of the whole does not suppress the unity of the individual.[11] Every individual being is in itself an unconditional and substantial validation of beings. It stays in specific and generic commonality and mutual relationship with others and it also stands for an analogous commonality of all beings in Being.

So, a brief metaphysical consideration of the relationship between unity and plurality is also necessary for us. It is true that unity or oneness does not add anything to being.[12] Still it must be affirmed that

unity is prior to plurality.[13] Plurality cannot even be thought of, much less exist, without unity, difference without commonality. Plurality presupposes unity. Unity (or oneness) does not necessarily presuppose plurality. To that extent unity has primacy over plurality. So they are not equal in all respects. If there is a plurality of beings, there must be a commonality of beings. But the reverse is not metaphysically true.

Pure plurality or a disconnected plurality without any relationship between its constituting elements can only lead to Humean empiricism, where no causality, no necessity and no laws whatsoever are present. Also pure unity, without plurality would be imaginable, but then there would not be any real world existing, nor any human beings to perceive it. There is in our actual world a commonality which relates plurality to unity.

Commonality as the unity in plurality cannot have its basis in the plurality as such, but only in unity. Unity in plurality presupposes therefore a unity before plurality, that is, a common basis for beings, which enables and forms the conditions for the possibility of the existence of plurality. Only such a unity can guarantee the plurality and diversity of beings.[14] The unity of the totality of reality is the unity of Being as such, which analogously develops itself to the plurality of beings. Such a plurality can be ultimately justified and understood only in the unity of the absolute Being.

Coming to the Indian *advaitic* perspective, we can see somehow a relationship involving *advaita* in pluralism. Between a mango seed and the tree there is a relation which is lacking between a mango seed and a stone. From an Indian perspective we can say that there is something in the mango seed which enables it to grow into a tree. And so the relationship between the mango seed and the tree could be visualised in terms of an *advaitic* union. Their's is not a relationship of identity or oneness. Nor is their relationship one of duality or complete separation. The category of *advaita* can help us here. Obviously, between the mango seed and the stone there is a *dvaitic* (dualistic) relationship in this particular context. More about this in the third section.

Thus we see that metaphysically though unity is primary, commonality has to be respected, and pluralism is a fact. Our next attempt is to see the relation between various beings with a view to applying it to various cultures. Such a relationship between beings, or in our case between the being of divergent cultures, we believe, could be achieved by the category of the analogy of being.

3. The Possibility of Pluralism: The Analogy of Being[15]

The way we understand being is crucial for our philosophical understanding of Indian pluralism. On the one hand we can assume being to be totally one with the Absolute, neglecting the ordinary beings of concrete existence. This will lead to non-realism of the world. On the other hand, we can hold

that all beings stand in the same relation to the Absolute, and then we would end up in pantheism. Is there a way out of the dilemma of non-realism on the one hand and of pantheism on the other (the terrible options that Sankara and Ramanuja, the great Indian metaphysicians, had to face)? Our answer is in the affirmative, and we hold that it is achieved by way of the analogy of being. Apart from the analogy of being it is difficult to visualise a philosophical response to this dilemma between "a-cosmism" and panthèism!

3.1. Terminological Considerations

Language implies words and concepts, both of which refer to things – the things about which we speak. Concepts may roughly be defined as mental signs of things, and words as verbal signs of things. In practice we can identify concept with meaning. If so, it should not be too difficult for us to recognise that though concepts may remain the same for different people, the actual words used by various languages to refer to a given thing may be quite different. For instance, a thing with four legs that wags its tail and barks, summons up the same concept in different people, no matter what language they may speak. Yet, each of these people still use a different word to designate that reality (or sum up its concept.) An Englishman will say dog, a Hindi-speaker will say *kuttā*, a Frenchperson *chien* and a Keralite *paṭṭi*. All these sounds are chosen arbitrarily, by pure convention. It would be ridiculous to ask which of the above words is more "fitting" or "natural" to apply to the thing concerned. Neither spoken word nor (its corresponding) written equivalent in any way imitates the shape of the animal or the sound it makes! In fact, there is even no correspondence between the sound of the word in question and the way it is written. That too is purely arbitrary. The element of arbitrariness and conventionality is part and parcel of every language.

We can go on to see how we actually use words and their corresponding concepts. Sometimes we come across a case where one word and one single concept or meaning is applied to one unique reality. This is so with all proper names, such as Pune, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and so on. Such a linguistic usage is called singularity. However, if all linguistic practice were to be like this – if we had separate words for each and every individual existent – it would be utterly impossible to communicate! Would-be speakers would have to know an infinite number of words!

Happily, there is the more frequent occurrence of univocity. Most of our words are of such a nature. Here, a single word, with the same, identical meaning, is applied to a host of different realities, all individuals within a particular species. Thus, the word horse or cat or dog is referred to each of the various specimens of the animals in question that inhabit the globe.

At the other end of the spectrum we find equivocity. In this case, one and the same word is used, with varying meanings or concepts, and is given to things that are totally different from each other. An example is the word, *date*. It has at least three different meanings (concepts):

i. A particular fruit; ii. A time period indicated on a calendar; iii. An appointment with a loved one of the opposite sex.

Or take, as another example, the term *bark*. It could refer either to the sound made by a dog or to the outer covering of a tree. There is no logical reason why, in either case, the same verbal sound should be used with reference to such divergent beings: pure arbitrariness, again. And yet, so it is in every language.

Analogy is a kind of halfway house between the two extremes of univocity and equivocity. An analogous word, then, is one which is applied to many things with a meaning somehow the same and somehow different. Now this "somehow the same and somehow different" can, itself, allow for two further understandings. It could imply, on the one hand, that part of the definition is verified by one of the things concerned, while another part of that same definition is not. For instance, we talk about the foot of a human being and the foot of a hill. The word "foot" is used analogously here, in the sense that the foot of the hill partly fulfils the definition of foot, which the human foot does completely – in as much as "foot", in both cases, indicates the lowest part of the reality referred to. But a human foot is not merely the lowest part of the body: it is also an instrument of locomotion, whereas the "foot" of the hill cannot enable it to displace itself. This is a case of what we might call extrinsic analogy. But there is another situation, called intrinsic analogy, where all the things concerned verify the definition of the word totally, but to different degrees. Take, for instance, the word "life", which could be defined as "self-perfective activity" or "self-developing activity". Now, we recognise that plants, animals and human beings all have self-perfective activity. The plant has, however, the lowest level of self-perfective activity: nourishment, reproduction, growth and repair. The animal has, besides these "vegetative" activities, also locomotion and sensitivity, which the plant does not have. Finally, a human person enjoys all of these and, over and above them, is also capable of conceptual language, religion and creative breakthroughs. Each of these three groups have "life," but, while they fully verify the meaning of life, they do it in evidently varying degrees.

3.2. The Analogy of Being

If we were to define *being*, for instance, in a manner that only God could truly fulfil (as "that which necessarily exists" or "that which requires nothing other than itself to account for its existence"), then we would be obliged to call this world of people and things non-being. Hence would stem those various "world-negating" philosophies, as the views of Sankara and Berkeley are traditionally held. On the other hand, if we want to maintain the reality of this world while still accepting the above definition of being, the consequent way out would be via pantheism: maintaining that this world is but, fundamentally, an expression of God. This is the way of Ramanuja.

There was also J. P. Sartre, who defined *being* in terms of two watertight compartments, *being-in-itself*

(*être-en-soi*, being that is unconscious and static) and *being-for-itself* (*être-pour-soi*, being that is conscious and dynamic). As a result of this arbitrary approach to and definition of being, he literally "defined" God out of existence!

The medieval thinker, Duns Scotus, was one of several philosophers who sought to define being in a purely equivocal manner by identifying being with existence: being is that which exists. By that token God and the things and persons of this world are all beings on an equal footing. Then would result the difficult problem of trying to get out of pantheism by introducing various subtle and confusing distinctions and refinements in the whole discussion!

For these reasons, it seems best to fall back upon the traditional Scholastic definition of being – *id quod suo modo existit* – "that which exists in its own way." As we shall now proceed to indicate, this definition is analogous in nature and so, among other things, is able to save both the transcendence of God and the reality of the world.[16]

God and creatures both verify the definition fully: God exists necessarily, with an unreceived, uncreated and unlimited existence; creatures exist by virtue of a received, created and limited or finite act of existence. God and creatures each have their "own" act of existence, in their "own way," and the difference lies in their way of existence.

So I am a being, the dog is a being and the cow is a being. What about my height and my weight? Are they beings too? Do they exist in their own way? For Scholastic philosophy the answer is certainly in the affirmative. They certainly "exist" – my height and weight are by no means illusory. They do not, of course, exist by subsisting, that is, they do not exist "by themselves", by a separate act of existence, by "inherence" as the classical term has it. In Scholastic idiom, "accidents" (such as one's height and weight) "inhere in the substance", that is, they share in the same act of existence that I possess in and through my substance.

All these are instances of the notion of being used analogically, with intrinsic analogy, that is, the full definition is verified in each case, albeit in different degrees. Do we have any instance of the notion of being used with extrinsic analogy, namely, in such a way that the full definition is not always implied?

Going back to the Scholastic tradition we can affirm that this is the case when we refer the word *being* to what has been called "possibles" and "relative non-beings". A possible, as the name implies, is not an actually existent being; it is an idea. Examples would be the pictures that the artist hopes to paint or the poem the poet plans to pen. Of course, once these people execute their projects, we no longer have possibles, but an actual landscape or a sonnet. Relative non-beings are pure negations, as non-cat or non-dog. However, it is usual to classify "evils" among such, for instance, blindness and cancer. An evil, in the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition is not a positive reality; it is a privation, a lack of a due perfection in a positive reality. Blindness is lack of sight in a person or any other being that is meant

to have vision. Inability to fly is a privation (hence an evil) in a crow, but not so for a human being. Sickness in general, as also in its various concrete manifestations (which would include cancer), is not conceived as a positive entity but as merely the lack of health in a positive reality in which it is due, such as a human person or a dog. Of course, few people nowadays would see cancer or leprosy as a mere lack of health, but as the actual presence in an organism of some noxious germ or virus or whatever. However, as indicated by Desbruslais, medical science had not made many strides in the days of Augustine or Aquinas, and so that is why they came to their particular conclusions about disease being a "relative non-being."

So, according to Scholastic tradition, we may speak of non-dog, disease and deafness as beings. And then we would be using the word *being* according to extrinsic analogy. The full definition of being is "that which exists in its own way." But, as we can infer, these things do not really exist: like possibles, relative non-being and non-beings are merely isolated essences. Thus, calling them "being" is like speaking of the "foot" of a mountain or calling God a "rock." They are terms used analogically.

We would have little difficulty in calling possibles and relative non-beings as being, by extrinsic analogy. Where we might have our reservations is whether disease is a relative non-being or not. However, that is not the point under discussion at the moment. We were in search of a definition of being, one that would steer us clear between "the Scylla of non-realism or a-cosmism and the Charybdis of pantheism."[17] And we have found that definition, "that which exists in its own way," fits the situation admirably, being of itself open to analogous application. As for diseases, well, we shall not call them relative-non-beings but actual beings (a concrete disorder in an organism caused by the actual presence of some observed or observable harmful entity). Then these would be beings by intrinsic analogy.

3. 3. Analogy of Proportion and Proportionality

Thomas Aquinas did not invent (or even discover) the idea of analogy; Plato and Aristotle spoke of *analogia*. Neoplatonic and Augustinian exemplarism gave it a new development, and it came to the Angelic Doctor through his compatriot Albert the Great and through the medieval Muslim thinker Averroes. Aquinas has made elaborate use of analogy in his work though he has not really dwelt much on analogy itself.[18]

For the purpose of our study here, it is sufficient to append what Aquinas holds about analogy of *proportion* and of *proportionality*.[19] The distinction crops up for the first time in the *De Veritate* (*On Truth*). In the former there is a resemblance between two things (e.g., the numbers four and eight, where one is twice the other), whereas in the latter the resemblance is between the proportion or relation of one pair of things compared to that of another pair of things (thus, eight is to four as six is

to three). To take a non-mathematical example, it would be analogy of proportionality were we to speak of "vision" with regard to ocular as well as intellectual perception. The meaning would be that as corporal vision is to the eye, so intellectual apprehension is to the mind.

Later on,[20] there developed tedious arguments among commentators on Aquinas as to whether he went on to abandon analogy of proportionality in favour of analogy of proportion, in the whole business of "God-talk" or attributing perfection to God.[21] This point is irrelevant to us here. However, in passing, I might point out that in his famous *Commentary on the Sentences* he listed both types of analogy, and the mere fact that he emphasised proportion more than proportionality in his more mature works like the *Summa Theologica* and the *Contra Gentiles*, is no conclusive evidence that he had shelved the notion!

3.4. Towards an Analogy of Being

Finally let us remark that unless one were to go along with the most drastic of monistic systems, we would be compelled to admit that the things around us are not plainly and simply of a piece, and yet, in order to make such a plurality intelligible, the tendency to a basic unity within the diversity has to be admitted. In other words, some kind of theory of analogy of being is inevitable for practical everyday life and communication.

Our next step would be to apply this theory of analogy of being not just to the various entities (*beings*) present among us, but also to the various cultures and divergent groups identities in the Indian subcontinent (being of cultures or of groups). Such a jump would certainly be a legitimate one. We do not need to justify this jump by referring to the concept of corporate personality. As we saw, if height, age and sickness could be considered as beings in diverse degrees, we could certainly apply the notion of analogy to collective beings, to group entities, and all our insights of analogy of being would apply to the collective beings too. If so, we could also talk of the analogy of beings of the various cultures and group identities. That would provide us with a possibility and legitimisation for the existence of various identities.

Coming to the *advaitic* vision, we could hold, from a Thomistic perspective, that analogy could be broadly compared to *advaita*. Just as analogy is central to the Thomistic framework so is *advaita* to the Indian framework. They make discourse possible both in Thomistic philosophy and in Indian philosophy. Without *advaita* there would be only total separation or identity which would make discourse impossible. So is the case with analogy in Thomism. So is the case with the possibility of pluralism. Without *advaita* there would be only mere disconnected entities not related to one another. *Advaita* provides us with a metaphysical and hermeneutical function to understand and to respond to beings. In the order of beings there are beings. But at the most fundamental level there is commonality in the Being. This commonality (or foundation) in Being is emphasised both by analogy and by *advaita*, without negating the beings.[22]

4. Encountering Pluralism: An *Advaitic* Model of Living Out Plurality

Here in this final section we try to generalise our approach to pluralism, going beyond the treatment of religious pluralism which is common today. Here we can broadly classify the two extreme views of understanding religious pluralism as monism and dualism. Without dwelling on them we go directly to our preferred model of a modified *advaitic* vision of Indian diversities.

The monistic approach to pluralism is one which seeks for the victory of one's own religion (or culture) over the others.[23] This approach builds walls against the other religions or groups, and tries to assert the supremacy of one's own group over other groups.

The dualistic approach to pluralism is the other extreme view. It is basically a way of "peaceful co-existence."[24] Here the emphasis is on a democratic right of the other to exist. Though there may be covert attempts at influencing the other, the underlying principle is that one has as much right as the other to exist and that each should leave the other alone. This is the notion of the "free market" of ideas and world-views. Here diversity is accepted as necessary and there is no overarching or underlying or indirect unity. That would be pure unconnected plurality which cannot be philosophically justified except through Humean empiricism.

The model that we follow is based on an *advaitic* approach.[25] A word of caution is called for. The term *advaita* is not used here as it is classically used, but as developed by Bede Griffiths. We use it in a specifically, Griffithsian understanding. Still we prefer to keep to this same termiology because it is our conviction that Sankara's *advaita*, interpreted classically, might have been one-sided. So we still use the term *advaita* where a larger relationship of general comprehensiveness, individual identity and overall synthesis is maintained. Though traditional *advaita* is not interpreted this way, it is our contention that a modified understanding as given below could still be called *advaitic*.

So the *advaita* we propose here is a slightly modified *one* as attempted by Richard De Smet and Bede Griffiths and influenced by their Thomistic philosophies. We presuppose that the basic *advaitic* intuition implies three things:

i. All existing beings have their existence depending on Brahman.

ii. All existence has meaning in relation to Brahman.

iii. All existence, including that of cultures, reveals something of Brahman.

If we apply such an *advaitic* model to understand the existence of cultural identities, it would make dialogue possible and imperative.

To develop such a model we base ourselves not just on the thought pattern but the whole life of Bede Griffiths, a Christian Sannyasi or a Westerner who was at home in India.

We shall briefly elaborate his understanding of *advaita* and apply it to the rich analogy of being in the cultures that exist in India. As such we try to appreciate the commendable aspects in Griffithsian *advaita* under three general categories: comprehensiveness, individuality and integration.

4.1. Comprehensiveness

One thing that strikes anyone who reads Griffiths' works or who is acquainted with his life is the enormous sense of wholeness or comprehensiveness in his vision of life. In all his writings, there is this comprehensiveness or totality, that accompanies and guides him. By comprehensiveness, we mean a way of looking at reality, by which there is no positive exclusion of any aspect, but an affirmation of all the various aspects of the reality.

We can have an initial idea of this comprehensiveness from a significant symbol which he uses for it: the symbol of the gothic cathedral. This symbol is articulated by him in his writings on the Thomistic philosophy. About the deep admiration he himself has for Thomistic philosophy he writes: "I began to read St Thomas for myself but I saw his shadow cast on the poetry of Dante and I recognised in the ordered structure of Dante's thought and the comprehensiveness of his vision something of the grandeur and immensity of a great cathedral. I had still only a very imperfect conception of its real significance."[26]

In fact, the comprehensiveness which he so much admired in Aquinas is evident in his own life. The vast amount of influences he had allowed to be exerted on himself, the diverse literature he had so ardently read, his various artistic interests cannot otherwise be explained.

Further, it must be emphasised that this comprehensiveness is not just at the epistemological level. It is a comprehension which goes from epistemology to a world-view and world vision (*Weltanschauung*). Further this comprehension extends itself to envelop the whole reality at a metaphysical level. Even in the reality itself he sees a gradation of being. Thus accepting the analogy of Being, he is convinced of a totality of Being which unifies the beings. So the comprehensiveness itself is for him strictly comprehensive.

To elaborate a bit more on the comprehensive nature of his works: his interest in science, psychology, evolution; his involvement with music, art, painting and literature; and his engagement with the conscious and the unconscious (and even the supra-conscious) are clear indications of this characteristic in him from an early stage. Even if "there was probably a good deal more of enthusiasm than discrimination in all this reading,"[27] it is evident that this enthusiasm for the whole is part and parcel of his own life.

Another simple illustration of the concern for the whole is his own description of the future of reality. Such a vision is for him something that involves "the earth and ... the

natural resources of the earth, ... the sea and all the creatures in it ... the animal world as a whole, ... and the outer space."[28] So such a comprehensiveness, which is at the same time interdependent and interacting is present all through his mystical and intellectual endeavour.

Further his efforts at arriving at a unified vision also indicate this same comprehensiveness. The unified vision is something which does not exclude anything, but is all inclusive and all encompassing. Methodologically, it is first from the perspective of this whole that he will later on go to find integration and unity. So it is an integration in the totality.

In this whole, everything, including the evil and the inappropriate, have their place. Even though he is vehemently critical of modern science, he does admit a place for it. Even the *avidya* and *māya*, which are generally not appreciated, become facts of life and so have their own proper place in his vision of things.[29]

It would be our contention that it is this all too evident comprehensiveness in his thinking and experience that could be easily misinterpreted as syncretism, though the two are certainly different. Syncretism would be a narrow and uncritical acceptance of the other, without in any way making it critically part of the system. Comprehensiveness is a view which is total, holistic, and which at the same time does not deny anything in the reality. There is a positive affirmation of different and contradictory aspects.

This aspect of comprehensiveness is extended very much to the sphere of religious faith and religious traditions towards the end-phase of his life. His last book, *Universal Wisdom*, is a clear case. There he tries to study the totality of religions within his grasp to see the basic insights of all these religious traditions.

Evidently the symbol for this comprehensive view for Griffiths is the gothic cathedral as already mentioned. He goes on further to elaborate the symbol of the cathedral. "It was no longer simply the outward form of beauty, the triumph of craftsmanship and of the almost unconscious union of humanity with Nature which impressed me. I saw that behind all this there lay the power of a vast intelligence, not merely of an architectural genius but of a whole philosophy of life."[30]

From a Christian perspective of the Trinity the Father could be the symbol of this comprehensiveness and totality. Since he is the source of the whole creation and he is the origin of everything that is, he could easily be understood as comprehensiveness itself.

4.2. Individuality

The normal danger with comprehensiveness and totality is that of forgetting the individual, the concrete. There is the temptation in contemplating the beauty of the rose to forget the petals that constitute it. Moreover if one knows the totality, then there is no need to get mere individual pieces of knowledge! For, the indi-

vidual pieces of knowledge one acquires, are not going to add anything new to the totality of knowledge that one already possesses. This could make one close to other systems, to other sources of knowledge. So a totality of knowledge could actually lead to inhibition of further knowledge! But this is particularly the defect which Griffiths avoids. For him the real is really important and not just in the context of the whole. So there is great respect for uniqueness, differentiation, particularity and concreteness.

So the second clearly marked feature in his whole thinking process is that of individualisation or concreteness. The comprehensiveness that we have dealt with above is never a comprehensiveness that dissolves itself in the totality. It is a comprehensiveness that positively accepts the differences, the diversity and even the contradictions.

The best example for this is given in Griffiths' vehement criticism of *Śaṅkara's* pure *advaita*. His effort to revive "relationship and reality" in the doctrine of pure *advaita* is a clear case of Griffiths' insistence on the individual existence. Both the additional aspects of realism and relationship imply individuality. Clearly, Griffiths is not speaking of a generalised and an all comprehensive reality, when he insists on the need for reality of the individual souls (*jīvātman*). Again, as he himself shows for the existence of love or relationship, individuality is the bare necessity. That is precisely what Ramanuja and Madhva were looking for in Indian philosophy without finding it.[31]

Further, his own emphasis that he is in no way attempting a syncretism is remarkable. He is very careful not to mix the differences in different traditions and then to attempt an artificial and superficial synthesis. "The danger in the encounter with Hinduism is always that of superficial syncretism, which would regard all religions as 'essentially' the same, and only differing in their 'accidental' characteristics. Needless to say, this is destructive of all serious dialogue and makes real understanding impossible."[32] Avoidance of syncretism implies that there are differences which cannot be easily bridged, which cannot be easily reconciled. So there are individual concrete ideas (or entities) which have to be accepted in their differences. Further it may be noted that it is the respect for the uniqueness that prevents him from accepting syncretism in any way. Each individual is not to be seen in the totality, but has its own uniqueness which does not give way to syncretism.

It is this individuation which gives the metaphysical basis for pluralism. To talk of pluralism without genuine respect for the individual (be it a person, a culture or a religion) will be unmetaphysical and ultimately meaningless.

That is why for him the best symbol for this aspect is that of the drop of water in the ocean, which actually retains its identity even in the

vastness of the ocean. For him the traditional drop-ocean analogy, wherein the individual soul is dissolved in the ocean of Brahma at the final awakening and wherein the individuality is finally lost, is clearly unacceptable. We can recall once again Griffiths' question about the drop in the ocean. He asks: "would the drop in the ocean not cry out in great joy: 'True, I am living, yet it is not myself who lives, but this ocean lives in me, and my soul is hidden away in its depths'? The soul that flows into God does not die, for how could she die through being drowned in life? ... Rather, she lives by not living in herself."[33]

From the perspective of the Trinitarian symbol this individuation is clearly found in Christ. The incarnation is the concretisation of the divine in the earthly. There is the role for differentiation, rootedness and involvement with the particular in Jesus.

4.3. Integration

The third all pervading characteristic that we find in Griffiths is that of integration. It has been with him from the very beginning of his intellectual career when he started to deal with the integration of the intuitive and the discursive faculties of knowing. It has remained with him till the end, where this aspect of integration has found manifold expressions. One can even affirm that integration is the key to understand Griffiths' intellectual and even spiritual journey.

Further, the actual relation between the various elements of totality and identity could be sought after only through categories of integration, though it may be mentioned that 'comprehensiveness' and 'individuality' do not belong to the same category. One is more than the other. Comprehensiveness encompasses individuals. So we cannot really speak of a 'marriage' between two 'equal' partners in this case.

The key symbol of integration would be that of 'marriage', as the very title of his second autobiography indicates. In marriage, just as there is an integration of the male and the female resulting in the offspring, we can see integration as an organic union between two 'extremes' resulting in an offspring. It is more than a convenient coalition of partners. Actually the very process of integration itself could be seen as a 'marriage' between the two above-mentioned characteristics: comprehensiveness and individuality.

It is here that the Holy Spirit comes in as the Trinitarian symbol for integration. Just as it is biblical to see his action as unifying and integrating the whole creation and taking the whole cosmos in Christ to the Father, we can understand this integration also from the perspective of *advaita*.

It may again be mentioned that for Griffiths a metaphysical relationship involving these three above characteristics is *advaitic*. It is an organic unity affirming the totality, the unity and the integrating transcendence. We shall be speaking of this *advaita* further to see it as the hermeneutic key in the interreligious encounter.

To sum up once again the main characteristics of an *advaitic* relationship as visualised by Griffiths:

- Individuality is respected and maintained, though in a transformed manner.
- Ever seeking for wholeness *advaitic* relationship is always open for the more.
- There is always an integration, a further growth and continued relationship which respects the differences between the partners.
- The horizontal, dialogical, circular and mediating characteristics in understanding could all be applied to an *advaitic* relationship.[34]
- In the final state, which is more than the sum of the parts, there is always a 'surplus,' that is, a deeper or holistic dimension.

As already indicated the best human example at a physical level is that of a marriage where the partners unite themselves, and the child would result. The final product, the family, is certainly more than the individual sum of the two partners.

5. Conclusion

Our basic question was the philosophical question of the existence of the Indian reality in its pluralism and diversity. What essentially constitutes the Indian reality is not our basic concern here. Our concern is a phenomenological understanding of the rich diversity of the Indian phenomenon and to expose ourselves to the metaphysical and hermeneutical challenges of this phenomenon. We have indicated that metaphysically pluralism is a fact and it is founded on oneness. And hermeneutically pluralism is a serious challenge for deeper encounter with and respect for the other without sacrificing the individuality of oneself or the other. This phenomenon of pluralism has its paradigmatic case in religion. It is our contention that even other dimensions of life like culture, economy and social groups could be understood from this perspective. It must be accepted that we have not been able to respond to the problem and challenge of pluralism comprehensively in this article. This article is only a first step at answering some of these challenges from a metaphysical perspective. We must admit that we have not been exhaustive in dealing with this controversial issue. For instance, we have not been able to address the issue of the identity of groups which are annihilative of other groups. We have not been able to position such violent terrorist groups in our spectrum of group identities.

We saw briefly that the monistic or dualistic approach to pluralism would be unsatisfactory. So we proposed an *advaitic* model of pluralism and unity. Such a model, based on the writings and life of Bede Griffiths, offers us a way of focusing the problem facing the Indian reality. Though it cannot be a panacea for all India's ills, especially for its political turmoil, it does offer a significant vision which could be beneficial for India, with its diverse and unifying dimensions.

Such an *advaitic* vision of pluralism based on an analogy of being, when extended to the phenomenon of

Indianness, could have quite surprising consequences.[35] The diversity and resulting conflicts that occur in the Indian subcontinent could then be handled creatively. The attempts of various ethnic and minority groups at self-determination could be approached more positively. The tension between the economic classes and social castes could be understood more comprehensively. The competition between linguistic groups and state interests could also be viewed from different perspectives. Even such a vision however would not be able to resolve all the difficulties of pluralism. But it would be a small step in the proper direction.

The comprehensiveness of the Indian reality visualises itself in our common approach to the notion of India. We would realise ourselves as Indians and our actions would stem from that basic conviction. Thus it is the general sense of oneness and wholeness with the other groups, cultures and entities that gives us the identity of being Indian. Such a view is holistic.

Within this holistic vision of the Indian reality, in spite of the tensions and conflicts, the existence of the individual group is seen as positive and something desirable, and therefore the need to eradicate the other displeasing one, disappears. There might still be scope for tension but that tension, would not be an annihilative one. There is a proper place for creative tension within the main frame of the Indianness of our society. In such a vision the disappearance of a single linguistic or cultural group would be taken much more seriously, then the disappearance of an endangered species in ecology.

The positive existence of the individual is not just affirmed and respected but also encouraged. The individual groups are maintained, affirmed and promoted. This could be very liberative for some minority groups which are threatened with extinction. The existence of individual groups based on the metaphysical notion of analogy gives them separate and at the same time related identities.

Our metaphysical approach ensures that the basic unity is affirmed and the individuality is respected. The separate identities of the different cultures and groups are identities shown to be metaphysically essential and their identities ontologically related. Thus the venture requires from us respect both for the individuality and the commonality.

When we relate the basic categories of our modified *advaita* to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, we do not attempt to compare the two doctrines. Our aim is to show that we could approach the issue of pluralism and oneness from the Trinitarian perspective, which needs to be worked out further.

A better, harmonious, individual relationship with the other groups is also seen as a positive value where the other is respected for its otherness. Its basis would also be philosophical. When the individual identities are seen as hermeneutic opportunities for the existence of the Indian nation, we have an imperative to work for collaboration, which is creative and mutually enrich-

ing. That could be inspired by our understanding of the analogy of being of cultures. This could lead to an overall comprehensive view of the Indian totality which according to Nehru is a "bundle of cultures in which the cow and the tractor march together."[36] Viewed thus, the great philosophical, cultural, political and religious "Divides" of India could be opportunities to build an individuated, integrated and comprehensive India. If so, the "culture of coalition" could be promoted to a "culture of integration" and extended from political governance to that of religious and cultural domains, replacing the "culture of confrontation."

Notes

1. *The Times of India*, Mumbai, August 15, 1997, special supplement, pp. 41, 50, etc.
2. Ignatius Puthiadam, "Diversity of Religions in the Context of Pluralism and Indian Christian Life and Reflection" in M. Amaladoss et al., ed., *Theologizing in India*, Bangalore, TPI, 1981, pp. 400ff. Just to give one example: more than 1652 languages and dialects coexist in India within an area of 3,287,263 sq.km.
3. For this section we are indebted to Cyril Desbruslais, *Philosophy of Be-ing*, Pune, JDV, 1997, 61-75.
4. *Physics*, III. See also Desbruslais, 63ff.
5. This would be the view of Parmenides!
6. This is our justification for introducing non-dualism or *advaita* in the latter part of the article.
7. We also recognise the dualistic tendencies in Indian philosophy and especially in the Samkhya tradition. The basic anthropology is also dualistic. Still we can hold in general that Indian tradition is more holistic compared to the Western tradition.
8. See next section.
9. Emerich Coreth, *Grundriß der Metaphysik*, Innsbruck, Tyrolia, 1994, 5.2.4.
10. Here it is useful to refer to the traditional understanding of the relationship between one and many according to Thomas Aquinas. See his *Summa Theologica* I, 11, 2.
11. Cf. Coreth, *Grundriß*, 142.
12. Aquinas affirms in *Summa Theologica* I, 11, 1

    I answer that, "One" does not add any reality to "being" ; but is only a negation of division; for "one" means undivided "being." This is the very reason why "one" is the same as "being." Now every being is either simple or compound. But what is simple is undivided, both actually and potentially. Whereas what is compound, has not being whilst its parts are divided, but after they make up and compose it. Hence it is manifest that the being of anything consists in undivision; and hence it is that everything guards its unity as it guards its being.
13. It might also be mentioned that at the epistemological level plurality is prior. Since we deal with the relationship between plurality and unity at the ontological level the priority is for unity.
14. Cf. Coreth, *Grundriß*, 70.
15. This section is from the chapter "The Analogy of Being" in Cyril Desbruslais, *The Philosophy of Be-ing*, Pune, JDV, 1997, 31-42.
16. Cf. Desbruslais, 37. This suggestion made by Desbruslais is accepted by us. So we

stick on to the classical definition of being with some modifications for our present times.

17. *Ibid.*, 39.
18. It may be noted that Aquinas did not want to elaborate a treatise on analogy as such. His intention was to use analogy with regards to speaking about God. Cited in Desbruslais, 41.
19. We do not intend to elaborate on this aspect. See E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trsl. L.K. Shook, New York, Random House, 1956, 105. Cited in Desbruslais, 41.
20. Even now the trend continues, though in a subdued manner. See Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1960. Cf. Desbruslais, 41-42.
21. This brings us to the modern problems of talking about God, which cannot be elaborated here. Cf. Desbruslais, 41.
22. Here we bring in Heidegger's famous distinction between Being (the activity or the mode of being) and beings (the entities or objects of concrete existence).
23. Puthiadam, 407.
24. *Ibid.*, 408.
25. Puthiadam does not elaborate on this approach though he mentions it (*Ibid.*, 408). We attempt to elaborate this method based on Bede Griffiths' writing and life.
26. Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography*, Springfield, Templegate Pub., 1954 (*GS*), 62-63.
27. *GS*, 23.
28. Bede Griffiths, *New Vision of Reality: Western Scence, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*, Felicity Edwards, ed., Springfield, Templegate Pub., 1990 (NVR) 282.
29. We are aware that both these concepts have some profound significance and they have also positive and healthy functions. Here we take their more popular understandings.
30. *GS*, 62.
31. So Griffiths could hold without any hesitation: "The world is not an emanation from God nor an appearance of God, but a creation; a relative mode of being dependent on his absolute Being, existing temporally not eternally and dependent for its existence no less than for its essence on him. It is this doctrine which gives that reality to the world, distinct from God yet totally dependent on him, which Ramanuja and Madhva were seeking." Bede Griffiths, "Indian Spirituality and the Eucharist" in *India and the Eucharist*, Bede Griffiths, ed., Ernakulam, Lumen Institute, 1964, 14-15.
32. Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, Springfield, Templegate Pub., 1966, (*CI*), 46.
33. Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, Springfield, Templegate Pub., 1976, (RC), 144-145.
34. Cf. Kuruvilla Pandikattu, *Christian Advaita as the Hermeneutic Key to Bede Griffiths' Interreligious Dialogue*, Ph. D. Diss., Innsbruck, Univ. of Innsbruck, 1996, 2.2.1.
35. It is interesting to note that the identity of an Indian or the Indianness of the nation cannot be understood univocally. These terms are vague and open to many interpretations. To some extent it is also proper. Here it is interesting to note what the famous industrialist Hinduja says of Indianness or better Hindu identity. He contends that "the word Hindu refers to all Indians who live in India, similar to the words, Americans, British, Israelis, Persians, Arabs and Africans, all of which refer to people living in

that particular region of the world." (Srichand P. Hinduja, "Our 'Hindu' Identity: A Vision for the Millennium" in *The Times of India*, Mumbai, December 11, 1997, 13). He adds further that the word "Hindu refers to all Indians and should only be used to encourage a national identity and not a religious one." (Hinduja, 13). Our concern here is not with this terminological consideration. Still these notions of Hindu identity and Indian identity are worth considering while dealing with the Indian nation.

36. Quoted in Robin J. Dannhorn, ed., *Fodor's Guide to India*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, 76.

Metaphorising of Reality

A philosophical look into symbols,
myths and metaphors in life

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ

In *Metaphorising of Reality* an attempt is made to visualise human living as a series of dynamically and mutually interrelated and enriching activities. Metaphors, like symbols and myths, not just add colour to language (P. Ricoeur) but change and recreate language. Thus living metaphors are inevitable to a living language. The domain of metaphors could be extended from language to actual human life. Living is a hermeneutic encounter and can be visualised as a metaphorical innovation. Living is creating new meaning and new reality. Authentic living could be characterised by a transformation of reality, a metaphorical or mutually transforming encounter with. This leads to a deeper and radically new significance to self and to the cosmos.

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JPJRS 1/1 (1998) 150-163

The Church at the Service of the People of India

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In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World the Second Vatican Council has made a significant statement:

> Mindful of the Lord's saying: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35), Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men of the modern world ever more generously and effectively (*GS* 93).[1]

This is a challenge and invitation to the members of the Church to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the service of their brothers and sisters. In this paper I intend to investigate the theological basis of this service and examine the actual shape it should take in the concrete situation of our people today.

The paper begins with a brief survey of the Indian situation. It goes on to discuss the theological foundation of the Church's service. It then explores the concrete ways of rendering this service today. By way of conclusion it briefly describes the manner in which the Church should serve the people of India.

1. The Quest

Today India is a country in transition. Rapid and radical changes are taking place in every area of life. The new economic policy with its stress on liberalisation and globalisation is causing unprecedented changes not only in politics and economics but also in culture and mores. Conflicts and tensions are noticeable in all dimensions of personal and societal life. Underlying these tensions and conflicts is, I suggest, a three-fold quest of our people – the quest for human dignity, the quest for security and the quest for meaning in life.

1. The quest for human dignity is manifested in the cry of the poor of our land. The new economic policy has aggravated the situation of the poor. Now a large percent of the population of India live on or below the poverty line.[2] Poverty which is inflicted on people against their will is deeply dehumanising. The poor do not have the means of leading a truly human life. They are often politically powerless, socially discriminated against and culturally deprived. With its concomitant evils of hunger, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy, poverty makes people helpless and dependent. Deep down the poor long to be freed from their misery so that they can live in dignity and freedom.

All over the country one observes an upsurge of the Dalits. For centuries

they have been oppressed and demeaned by the upper caste people. Today they are refusing to be treated like doormats. They are raising their voices in protest against the indignities heaped on them and the atrocities perpetrated against them. They are organising themselves in order to regain their dignity and vindicate their rights.

Again, there is a growing awareness among women today that in many ways they are second class citizens in this country. From the cradle to the grave women suffer varieties of injustice and oppression. Female foeticide, the killing of the baby girl, neglect of the girl child, female illiteracy, male domination, discrimination against women in family and society, sex slavery, assault, rape, murder – these are some of the ways in which women are oppressed in our country today. Increasing numbers of women are now demanding that they be recognised as equal members of the human family and their dignity and rights as human persons be fully respected.

Further, there has been growing unrest in different parts of the country, especially in Kashmir, Chotanagpur and the Northeast. Various groups of people are clamouring for autonomy. Some seem to want total independence from India. There is reason to believe that most of these groups are really protesting against the injustices committed against them in the economic, political and cultural spheres of life. They demand that their ethno-cultural identity be recognised and respected, and that they be allowed to shape their life and destiny in accordance with their traditions and aspirations. In a meeting of the leaders of the Northeast held in Guwahati in the last week of September, 1997, "it was clearly stated that self-determination implied internal self-government, not secession."[3]

It is increasingly felt today that over the last decades there has been a tendency to strengthen the centre at the expense of the states. As B.G. Varghese has pointed out, "The field left to the states has been eroded over time, undermining the spirit of cooperative federalism."[4] This may explain why regional parties have been growing in influence and popularity in several states. These parties give expression to the hopes and aspirations of the people in different parts of the country and demand that the central government be responsive to them. In the last analysis this, too, manifests the quest of the different sections of the people for the recognition of their dignity and rights.

2. Human life is under serious threat because of the growing violence in several parts of the country. The land of the Mahatma is fast becoming a slaughter-house where innocent people are mercilessly butchered. It is undeniable that political and economic interests play a role in the growth of violence. For years now there has been a tendency among many political leaders to use religion and caste for the purpose of political mobilisation. These power-hungry men and women are often responsible for fanning the flames of communal and caste violence. There is also the growing phenomenon of the criminalisation of politics and the po-

litical involvement of criminals which lead to violent conflicts. The insurgency-related violence is also caused by political and economic interests.

Another factor contributing to the growth of violence is the increasing immorality of some sections of the people. Keen observers of the contemporary scene often wonder if our society is not in a state of moral disintegration. How else would one account for the naked power struggle in the political arena, the rampant corruption even in high places, the amoral business practices, the scandalous life of some of our religious leaders and the utter callousness with which human life is snuffed out for political or economic gain?

In this situation of serious threat to life, human beings feel a sense of insecurity. This sense of insecurity is aggravated by the acute ecological crisis we are facing today. Selfishness and greed, both individual and collective, as well as the unscrupulous exploitation of nature for economic profit have made the earth almost uninhabitable. Not only human life, but all life is threatened with extinction.

There is also an international dimension to this growing threat to life. Transnational terrorism and the possibility of a nuclear holocaust which can reduce everything to dust have made human life precarious. In the face of all these threats, human beings are engaged in an earnest quest for security.

3. We Indians have always been a deeply religious people. That is why our country is a land of many religions. It is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and many tribal religions. And it has welcomed to its shores Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The fact that all these religions have millions of devoted followers in our country bears witness to the relentless quest for meaning our people are engaged in.

This quest for meaning has become very acute today. Modernity has created in our people a deep sense of homelessness. They find it difficult to cope with the rapid and radical changes brought about by science and technology. Economic liberalisation and globalisation have radically altered the context of their life. Satellite television and other mass media of communication are exposing them to a variety of world-views and moral standards. All this is deeply disturbing to our people. In their bewilderment some people turn to godmen like Satya Sai Baba or Osho for help in their search for meaning in life. Others flock to the different meditation centres which are proliferating today. Yet others go in for therapies of various kinds.

Among the Christians the phenomenal growth of the charismatic movement bears witness to this quest for meaning. The retreat movement centred in Potta is attracting tens of thousands every week. The rapid proliferation of neo-pentecostal churches all over the country also points to the intense search for meaning that is to be found among sections of our people. According to a recent study:

> God experience is the most important factor that attracts believers to neo-pentecostalism. Eight out of ten respondents indicated God experience

as the reason for joining the sects. Correspondingly, the lack of God experience is the most frequently cited reason for their disaffection with the former church.[5]

There are also negative indicators of this quest for meaning. Thus the growth of alcoholism and drug addiction especially among the youth reveals the experience of meaninglessness. The increase in sexual promiscuity and other sex-related aberrations might be the result of a wrong kind of quest for meaning. One of the main reasons for the frequent suicides, especially in Kerala, is the growing sense of the meaninglessness of life. Thus in a variety of ways the human quest for meaning in life expresses itself in India today.

2. Perspectives

There has been some doubt as to whether the Church's servant role in the world has a biblical basis. According to Avery Dulles, " While service is often extolled, the Bible does not envision the task of the Church as service."[6] In his opinion, Jesus is the servant of God, not of humans. So, too, the Church is at the service of God, not of the world. Dulles is right in pointing out that the perspective of the Bible is different from that of contemporary theology. The Bible focusses on God's saving intervention in human history. It does not directly deal with the implications of this intervention for the Church's mission in the world. However, there are biblical themes which provide a strong, if indirect, foundation for the Church's servant role in the world. I shall now discuss some of these.

1. The Kingdom of God was central to the life and ministry of Jesus.[7] It was the main theme of his preaching (Mk 1:14-15), the referent of most of his parables (Mt 13:1-52), and the content of his symbolic actions like table-fellowship with publicans and prostitutes (Mk 2:15-17). And his miracles too were signs of the advent of the Kingdom (Lk 11:20). As has been pointed out, the Kingdom of God is not a concept with a precise meaning.[8] It is rather a polyvalent symbol which stands for Israel's long sustained hope of liberation, no matter in what form this hope was nourished. When Jesus announces the Kingdom of God, his hearers understand that their hope is being definitively fulfilled.

George Soares-Prabhu has shown that the Kingdom of God points to Jesus' vision of society, which is characterized by freedom, fellowship and justice.[9] And Vatican II teaches that the Church has received the mission to proclaim and establish among all peoples the Kingdom of God (see *LG* 5). The Council believes that our efforts to bring about a better ordering of human society is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God (see *GS* 39). It states:

> For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured *(GS* 39).

2. Closely connected with the Kingdom of God is the love-commandment of the New Testament. The Synoptics, John and Paul bear witness to the centrality of love in the life of a

Christian.[10] Rooted in his abba-experience, Jesus reveals to us God's unconditional love for sinful humans. Humans are invited to experience this love and be transformed by it, so that they become lovers of other humans. It is surprising that Jesus rarely spoke of our love for God.[11] Instead he insisted on our love for our neighbour. John gives us a neat summary:

> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:9, 12).

John makes it abundantly clear that love for one another is the characteristic mark of a Christian (Jn 13:35).

Now love for humans demands reverence for their person and respect for their rights. The Third Synod of Bishops unambiguously declares: "Love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbour".[12] If our response to God's offer of love in Jesus is to love other humans and if effective love implies that we respond to their genuine quest today, then the Church is meant to be at the service of people. In the words of Samuel Rayan:

> To God's radical love and Jesus' own radical obedience correspond the radical demands they make on us: that we renounce all selfishness, that we be ready to offer everything, that we wash one another's feet, that we risk our life for the liberation, dignity, freedom and well-being of every brother, of the broken neighbour, and of the oppressed and dishonoured masses.The movement Jesus started is a movement of radical love and radical action in favour of men and of basic human values which make life worthwhile, and for which God gave himself and went to extremes in Jesus Christ.[13]

3. Then there is the inaugural sermon at Nazareth which is "the occasion of a stirring manifesto through which Jesus announces his own understanding of his mission and proclaims the significance of all that he is to do."[14] By deliberately changing part of Isaiah 61:1-2 and adding a phrase from Isaiah 58:6, Luke has produced a programmatic statement which he places at the beginning of Jesus' ministry:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18-19).

Commenting on this passage George Soares-Prabhu says:

> For the manifesto which he makes his own (Lk 4: 18-19) is formulated in language of astonishing earthiness and actuality. Jesus announces his task of 'evangelizing' (proclaiming the good news of liberation to) the poor, of heralding freedom to captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed; and so of inaugurating a time of salvation prefigured by the Jubilee Year of Old Testament legislation, when debts were to be remitted, ancestral property returned, and slaves set free (Lev 25, 8-17, 25-28). His is thus a *social manifesto* with little that is 'spiritual' about it. Indeed its social thrust is intensified by the deliberate changes the Lukan Jesus makes in the Old Testament text he quotes.[15]

The Church's understanding of its mission needs to be patterned on Jesus' understanding of his mission. Like Jesus, the Church, too, is sent to be at the service of the people, especially the poor and the oppressed.

4. There was a time when the Church thought that it had no proper mission in the secular life of humans. Thus Pius XI wrote that "the objective of the Church is to evangelize not to civilize. If it civilizes, it is for the sake of evangelization."[16] And Pius XII spoke of the Church's "strictly religious, supernatural goal."[17] Vatican II seems to agree with this view when it states:

> Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order.The purpose which He set before her is a religious one (*GS* 42).

The Council, however, is not very comfortable with this position. Hence it adds:

> Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church not only communicates divine life to men, but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth. This she does most of all by her healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which she strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance. Thus, through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes she can contribute greatly toward making the family of man and its history more human (*GS* 40).

There is reason to believe that Vatican II has a deeper understanding of what is 'religious'. It does not look upon the 'religious' as one dimension among other dimensions of human existence. The religious dimension intersects with the other dimensions.[18] That is why the Council speaks of "the supremely human character" of the Church's religious mission (*GS* 11). In other words, the Church's mission is concerned with the totality of human existence and the entirety of human history.

This realisation made it possible for the later documents of the Church to affirm that the Church has a mission in the secular sphere of human existence. Thus the Third Synod of Bishops unhesitatingly declares:

> Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.[19]

Both Paul VI and John Paul II have stressed the secular dimension of the Church's mission. Thus Paul VI asserts:

> But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and

development – a message especially energetic today about liberation.[20]

Soon after he became Pope, John Paul II took up the same theme in an address to the General Assembly of Latin American bishops.[21] Throughout his pontificate John Paul II has taught that the Church is concerned with the temporal life of humans and she has a servant role in the world. In *Redemptoris Missio*, he says:

> The Church and her missionaries also promote development through schools, hospitals, printing presses, universities and experimental farms. But a people's development does not derive primarily from money, material assistance or technological means, but from the formation of consciences and the gradual maturing of ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. *Man is the principal agent of development*, not money or technology. The Church forms consciences by revealing to peoples the God whom they seek and do not yet know, the grandeur of man created in God's image and loved by him, the equality of all men and women as God's sons and daughters, the mastery of man over nature created by God and placed at man's service, and the obligation to work for the development of the whole person and of all mankind.[22]

3. Response

In the light of what has been said so far I wish to point out the kind of response the Church should make to the three-fold quest of the people of India.

1. The Christian message affirms the dignity of the human person. The book of Genesis describes the special creation of humans and shows how they are placed at the apex of all creation (see Gen 1:26-28). And Psalm 8:4 exclaims that humans are made only "a little less than God". The Old Testament bears witness to the truth that God looks upon humans as his partners in the dialogue of salvation and treats them with love and respect.

Jesus too shows love and respect for people. He invites and challenges them but never forces them to respond to his message. And he asserts that sabbath is for the sake of humans (see Mk 2:27-28). Referring to this saying of Jesus, Samuel Rayan observes:

> In his view sabbath is for man; sabbath and sacrifice, temple and altar, priests and hierarchies, churches, institutions, laws, liturgies, traditions, definitions, creeds and cultures are all for man, and the community of men and the wholeness of all.[23]

The Second Vatican Council repeatedly affirms the dignity of the human person. It notes with satisfaction the contemporary quest for human dignity: "A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man" (*DH* 1). Approvingly the Council points out that "According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their centre and crown" (*GS* 12).

Vatican II believes that the dignity of the human person is rooted in the truth that humans are created in the image of God and are called to communion with him. As the Council expresses it:

> An outstanding cause of human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin, man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it. And he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator (*GS* 19).

It is the Council's conviction that the acknowledgement of God does not go against human dignity (see *GS* 21).

The Council is happy that today people are becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity and the rights of the human person. It observes:

> At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom in matters religious too. Hence, the social order and its development must unceasingly work to the benefit of the human person if the disposition of affairs is to be subordinate to the personal realm and not contrariwise... (*GS* 26).

Hence, Vatican II is strongly opposed to all that goes against the dignity and the rights of the human person. In unmistakable terms it declares:

> Whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practise them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator (*GS* 27).

All this should impel the Church in India to take a firm stand for the dignity and the rights of the human person. Whenever and wherever the dignity of the human person is violated, the Church should raise her voice in protest. Since Christians are a small minority in our country, we can be effective in our work for the promotion of human dignity and the defence of human rights only if we join hands with others. Renouncing our ghetto mentality we should willingly collaborate with all those agencies and movements that are working for the liberation of the poor, the Dalits and women. As we may not always be able to agree with their ideology, our collaboration will often be a critical one.

Christians should also collaborate with those forces that are struggling for the realisation of constructive federalism in India so that different states, regions and ethnic groups can shape their

life and destiny according to their desires, without prejudice to the unity and integrity of the nation. It is true that we need a strong centre. But it is happy, contented and prosperous states, regions and ethnic groups that will make our country strong.

2. The Church's participation in the work for the removal of poverty can, to some extent, create a feeling of security among people. After all, poverty and oppression tend to make people feel insecure. However, the deeper quest for security, as we saw, occurs in the first place in the context of growing violence in the country. In response to this the Church in India should champion the cause of non-violence.

It is true that in the past theologians of the Church approved of the use of force in self-defence and just war.[24] In situations "where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country," Pope Paul VI appears to have condoned violence.[25] Today there is a growing consensus that violence breeds more violence and that it is no solution to human problems. More and more people are realising the futility of violence as a means to establish a just society. Besides, it is not compatable with the Christian message. According to Paul VI:

> The Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms – which is uncontrollable once it is let loose – and indiscriminate death as the path to liberation, because she knows that violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement which are often harder to bear than those from which they claimed to bring freedom. We said this clearly during our journey to Colombia: "We exhort you not to place your trust in violence and revolution: that is contrary to the Christian spirit, and it can also delay instead of advancing that social uplifting to which you lawfully aspire". "We must say and reaffirm that violence is not in accord with the Gospel, that it is not Christian; and that sudden or violent changes of structures would be deceitful, ineffective of themselves, and certainly not in conformity with the dignity of the people."[26]

Work for peace and reconciliation belongs to the core of the Christian message. The saving work of Christ is interpreted in the New Testament as reconciliation of humans with God and among themselves. As Paul says:

> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor 5:18-20).

The Letter to the Ephesians adds:

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us (Eph 2:13-15).

The Church, whose mission it is to carry on the saving work of Christ, is called to be an agent of peace and rec-

onciliation. This is of particular importance in India today, where growing violence, communal conflicts and ethnic antagonism are posing a serious threat to the life and security of our people. Christians as a minority community have, I believe, a providential role to heal the wounds of hatred and division and lead our people to unity and peace.

Equally important is the work for promoting peace and harmony among the nations of the world, since the threat of war, especially nuclear war, is one of the main causes of the people's feeling of insecurity. The Church in India should work in collaboration with national and international agencies to bring home to all the truth that nuclear war cannot solve the problems of humanity. It can only bring untold misery to people and unimaginable destruction to life and property. Humans need to learn to live in peace and settle their problems amicably. Greater understanding and trust should be fostered among the peoples of the world. Often it is injustice which is at the root of the tensions between nations. This needs to be rectified soon, if humankind is to enjoy just peace.

The Church has to make a serious effort to promote ecological balance in the world. She needs to make people aware of the enormous harm done to nature through the uncontrolled pursuit of economic development. Since selfishness and greed, both personal and collective, are at the root of the ecological crisis, people have to be helped to go beyond their petty self-interest for the good of humankind and the cosmos. In the last analysis, we cannot be satisfied with narrow environmentalism which strives for a more efficient control and management of the resources of the earth for the welfare of humans. This is a pragmatic and human-centred approach. Instead, we have to advocate deep ecology which teaches us to live in harmony and communion with nature because of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. Since the many religions of India often foster an eco-friendly attitude in their followers, the Church should engage in interreligious dialogue and collaboration for the promotion of ecological balance. She also needs to cooperate with those movements and associations which are committed to the preservation of the integrity of nature.

3. The Church is convinced that it is her God-given task to help humans to discover the meaning of their life. As Vatican II states:

> Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself. The Church truly knows that only God, whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer (*GS* 41).

The Church is meant to facilitate humans' communion with God (see *LG* 1). Through her life and activities she has to mediate to people today a genuine experience of God. In fact "it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit who renews and purifies her ceaselessly, to make God and His

Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible" (*GS 21*). It is primarily through the practice of love that the Church reveals God's presence in our day (see *GS* 21). Mother Teresa was a credible witness to God's presence in the world by her love and care for the poorest of the poor.

It is, however, true that the Church often fails to manifest God to the men and women of our time. While examining the growth of atheism in the modern world, Vatican II found that atheism is often a critical reaction against the way religious people lived. In the words of the Council:

> Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion (*GS* 19).

There is something puzzling in the way a lot of people in our country look at the Church. Many of them admire our missionary zeal. They appreciate the valuable contribution the Church makes in the field of education, health services and charitable works. But few people regard Christians as men and women of God who can assist them in their quest for God and meaning in life. Why is this? Most probably the Church has by and large failed to be a credible sign of God's presence in the world and mediate to our people a genuine experience of God. Unless the transforming power of God at work in us is manifest in the quality of our lives, we shall not succeed in being true witnesses of God in our country today.

What is still more puzzling is that the Church is not very successful in mediating God-experience even to the Catholic faithful. In a recent study of Neo-Pentecostalism, it was found that lack of God-experience was the reason that former Catholics most frequently gave for their leaving the Church and joining the Neo-Pentecostal groups.[27] This must be a cause of serious concern for the Church. Why does she fail to mediate an experience of God to people today?

There is also the question of the kind of God and God-experience we are talking about. We live in a country where at times in the name of God temples and mosques are demolished, and life and property are destroyed. God is sometimes projected as the defender of a social order which condemns the poor to a sub-human existence and tolerates the oppression of women and the exploitation of the Dalits. God is often depicted as the Supreme Being who offers salvation only to his devotees and who is not at all concerned about the others. He is also believed to condone, if not to foster, bigotry, fanaticism and intolerance. In such a situation the Church is called to bear witness to a God who sets people free, who lets his sun shine on the good and the evil, and who gives life and promotes the community of life.

4. The Way

The Church needs to adopt a new way of proceeding if it is to serve the people of India effectively. To begin

with, it should become part of the mainstream of life in the country. Referring to the inhuman treatment meted out to Fr. Christudas of Dumka on September 2, 1997, Frank Krishner recently wrote in *The Times of India*:

> Well-wishers of the community have criticised the Church leadership for turning a human rights issue into a "Christian minority" issue. A section of Christians felt that by focussing on the minority aspect, non-Christians, otherwise sympathetic, kept away.[28]

Time has come for us to make common cause with all people of good will and together with them protest against the violation of the dignity of the human person and the repudiation of his/her rights. This will demand that we be just as concerned about the injustices committed against non-Christians as we are about those perpetrated against Christians. What Vatican II says about collaboration in the promotion of peace applies to all the areas of the Church's service:

> Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all men, we are all called to be brothers. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, which is both human and divine, we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace (*GS* 92).

The Church also needs to be appreciative of the religious and cultural traditions of India. In a recent article on Mother Teresa, Abhas Chatterjee, while acknowledging that "the Mother brought succour to millions of afflicted, helpless, ailing Indians", points out that she showed little interest in and no appreciation of the religious heritage of the country. As Chatterjee observes:

> The walls of none of the numerous institutions set up by the Mother anywhere in India are known to have been adorned with portraits of figures that are sacred to Indians – Lord Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Guru Nanak or Shri Ramakrishna. None of her benedictions ever contained citations from texts that are sacred to India. There is no evidence that the Mother spent any worthwhile time trying to study or appreciate the sacred spiritual texts of our nation.[29]

One could ask how fair this criticism is. The more important point is that our people expect Indian Christians to know and cherish the riches of the spiritual and cultural traditions of the land.

There is another thing that we have to be aware of. If the Church seriously undertakes the task of promoting the dignity of the human person and vindicating his/her rights, she must be prepared to face opposition, even violent opposition, from individuals and groups which will not want her to render this service. Recent events in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and elsewhere in the country confirm this. Hence it is imperative for the Church to remember that to follow Jesus Christ is to make the kind of options that he made, options which can lead to the cross. But we have the assurance that the God who raised up Jesus will raise up the Church too.

I sometimes wonder if the apostolic institutions we run and the funds we administer have not become an obstacle to a radical commitment to the

service of our people. Obviously the Church needs institutions and material resources to fulfil her mission. All the same, is it not possible that the interests of the institutions militate against the values of the gospel the Church is called to live by? This calls for an honest self-examination.

Notes

1. *GS* = *Gaudium et Spes*. Unfortunately the Documents of Vatican II do not use bias-free language. So, too, the popes and some of the authors cited in this paper. Please do not hold me responsible for it.
2. It is difficult to get reliable information about the extent of poverty in India today. According to The World Bank, *World Development Report 1997*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 215, 52.5 percent of the population of India live below the poverty line.
3. B.G. Varghese, "A New Deal for the Northeast: Responsible Federalism," *The Indian Express*, Pune: October 8, 1997, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*
5. P. Parathazham, "The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism," *Vidyajyoti* 61 (1997) 5, pp. 312-313.
6. A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1974, p. 93.
7. See G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society," in D.S. Amalorpavadass, *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981, pp. 579-608, esp. pp. 584-607.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 598.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 601-607.
10. See Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-37; Jn 13:34; Gal 5:14; Rom 13:8-10. In *Jeevadhara* 74 (March-April 1983) there are three studies on the love-commandment: G. Soares-Prabhu, "The Synoptic Love-Commandment: The Dimensions of Love in the Teaching of Jesus", pp. 85-103; L. Nereparampil, "A New Commandment I Give You: Johannine Understanding of Love," pp.104-114; J. Pathrapankal, "The Whole Law Is Summed up in One Commandment: 'Love Your Neighbour as You Love Yourself' (Gal 5:14)," pp. 114-121.
11. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus speaks of our love for God only in Lk 11:42 and Mk 12:28-34 and the parallel texts in Mt and Lk.
12. Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 1971, n. 34.
13. S. Rayan, "Jesus and the Father," in *Jeevadhara* 21 (May-June, 1974), p. 246.
14. G. Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor: The Social Implications of the Message of Jesus," in *Biblebhashyam* 4 (1978) 3, p. 201.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.
16. As quoted in W.M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York: America Press, 1966, p. 264, n. 192.
17. See AAS 48 (1956) p. 212.
18. F.S. Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology*, New York: Crossroad, 1985, pp. 216-217.
19. *Justice in the World*, n. 6.
20. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 29.

21. See the full text in *The Tablet*, February 3, 1979, pp. 119-123. See especially p. 121.
22. *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, n. 58. See also his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, nos. 47, 48.
23. S. Rayan, "The Underlying Philosophy of Jesus Christ", in *The Rally* (Jan 1975), p. 5.
24. See G. Lobo, *Christian Living According to Vatican II*, Bangalore: TPI, 1980, p. 299.
25. *Populorum Progressio*, n. 31.
26. *EN* n. 37.
27. See P. Parathazham, "The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism," *Vidyajyoti* 61 (1997) 5, pp. 312.
28. F. Krishner, "The Last Straw for Christians," in *The Sunday Times of India*, Patna: Nov. 9, 1997, p. 10.
29. Abhas Chatterjee, "Mother Teresa Represented the Most Benign Face of Christianity," in *The Sunday Times of India*, Patna: *Nov. 9, 1997, p. 10.*

The Philosophy of the Human Person
An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology
Cyril Desbruslais, SJ

ज्ञानदीप विद्यापीठ

Who is the human person? Various attempts have been made to respond to this perennial and question, whose answer eludes us. Cyril Desbruslais, SJ attempts to formulate a relevant and integrative vision of the human person and points out its significant implications in our daily lives. His critico-phenomenologico-hermeneutic approach in dealing with the mystery of human being leads to existentially significant conclusions about human freedom, life before/after death and human love.

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Book Reviews

The Dharma of Jesus: Interdisciplinary Essays in Memory of George Soares-Prabhu, SJ, Francis X. D'Sa, ed. pp. 482 + x, Price: Paperback Rs. 215 ($ 15); Bound Rs. 230 ($17); *Published by:* Institute for the Study of Religion, C/o De Nobili College, Pune 411 014 & Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B. 70, Anand, Gujarat 388 001

George Soares-Prabhu, undoubtedly the most influential biblical scholar of India during the past quarter of a century, was an impassioned spokesman of contextual theologies. For him to do theology meant to contextualize one's faith. The context of the Indian theologian, according to him, was the 'Third-World situation of unimaginable poverty, the Asian situation of pluriform and increasingly competitive religiosity, and the specifically Indian situation of social discrimination based on hereditary caste.' He also believed that genuine theologizing must also be inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural. *The Dharma of Jesus* is a fitting tribute by friends and colleagues to the versatile personality of George Soares-Prabhu, whose dharma it was to discover the message of Jesus in the Indian context. The scholarly and inter-disciplinary essays in this volume are a pointer to his persistent attempt to employ the most diverse disciplines to aid his interpretation. Part one of the book contains mainly examples of biblical exegesis by friends and colleagues of George Soares-Prabhu, and part two deals with some of the themes that were dear to him as a theologian.

In his introductory article: "George M. Soares-Prabhu: A Theologian for our Times", Keith D'Souza has succeeded in highlighting the main strands of George Soares-Prabhu's thought. He considers him a liberationist exegete and biblical theologian in India and for India. Secondly, the article points out that for George, a liberationist reading of the bible is essentially a social reading. Another important contribution of George Soares-Prabhu, according to Keith, is his understanding of the concept of mission. George Soares-Prabhu has given us a much needed hermeneutic of biblical texts on mission, thus liberating it from its theological and historical burdens. Mission is Christian discipleship rather than missionary enterprise. Secondly, mission is neither ecclesiocentric nor christocentric but theocentric.

The liberationist reading of the Bible is exemplified by Samuel Rayan in his tribute to George Soares-Prabhu: "With us – with whom? – is God? Good News of God's Presence and Solidarity with the Oppressed." Written in his poetic style, this essay is a remarkable piece of exegesis and it should serve as a model for the social reading of the Bible. According to Rayan, Matthew's gospel presents Jesus' good news of God's presence and solidarity with us as his presence with the oppressed of every age in their life and death. Rayan's is a genuinely personal and committed reading of the Bible with great exegetical and theological acumen. Francis Pereira offers us another piece of exegesis, from the gospel of Luke, in his essay titled: "Jesus and the Good News of the Kingdom to the Poor (Lk 4:18ff, 43)." With his meticulous analysis he tells us who the poor in the gospel of Luke are. They are not merely the materially poor but those to whom Jesus preached the good news, the people who for the sake of the Kingdom of God do not place their trust or hope in any merely human or worldly resources as such, but trust and hope in God alone. The same theme of the poor is discussed from a different perspective by Yvon Ambroise

in his article: "The Empathy of God with the Poor." He analyses how we apply stereotypes to the poor without recognizing their inherent ability to transform themselves. This knowledge, according to him, is the essence of empowerment.

Another piece of exegesis is given by Fr. Scaria Kuthirakattel in his article: "Christ the Self-Emptying High Priest: The Meaning and Function of Heb 5:1-10." Here an attempt is made to establish similarities between the epistle to the Hebrews and the writings of George Soares-Prabhu. Scaria is of the opinion that just as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews was faced with a problem, the writings of George Soares-Prabhu, too, are charged with a profound multi-dimensional Christian concern: What does it mean to be a Christian in India? How should the Christian tradition be confronted with the contemporary Indian situation? From the writings of George Soares-Prabhu the author shows us how he answers these questions and the method he uses to answer them.

The article by Antony Da Silva: "Neither do I Condemn you: A Psychological Study of the Gospel Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery", and the one by Paul V. Parathazham: "Communal Stereotypes and Religiosity: An Empirical Study", are particularly relevant contributions because George Soares-Prabhu was one of the first to realize the importance of the social and anthropological coordinates of theology and the use of the methodology of the social sciences in the theologizing process. Walter Fernandes in his article: "Theologizing in Karnataka: Understanding the Background", offers us an excellent case study on the importance of analysing the social context as an essential pre-requisite for theologizing.

Coming to some of the important themes that emerge from George Soares-Prabhu's writings and how some of the contributions relate to them, we have first the critique of monarchy in Israel by Rui De Menezes in his essay: "Gone with the Whirlwind! Hoshea's Critique of the Monarchy." It is written as a tribute to George Soares-Prabhu who wrote repeatedly on the concept of authority as propounded by Jesus. The call to be prophets, another favourite theme of his, is taken up by Kurien Kunnumpuram who reflects on the prophetic function of the priest in India today in his article: "Priests as Prophets of the Lord" with some noteworthy practical conclusions regarding recruitment, formation and ministry of priests in India today. Another vital concern of George-Soarers Prabhu is addressed by Errol D'Lima in his essay: "The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian", a reflection on a document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from the year 1990 regarding the vocation of the theologian. George Soares-Prabhu condemned the imposition of the dominant western culture upon others under the guise of internationalism. This essay emphasizes the legitimate freedom for theological discussion and rejects the idea that the theologian is a willing or subservient ally of the magisterium. It says that stifling theological freedom can be perilous for the church.

George Soares-Prabhu in many of his writings emphasized the social dimension of spirituality. Individual spirituality is good in so far as it leads to a social commitment and social transformation. This theme is taken up by the excellent essay of Rudolf Heredia: "The Need of a New Hermeneutic for the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola." He says that spirituality is the living out of the mission of faith. It calls for the transcending of the understanding of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as mere private exercises by a liberationist perspective and a new hermeneutic. It is imperative today because our

mission today, derived from a liberationist theological understanding, demands a social commitment. Such a mission needs an equally committed and conscious spirituality which the Exercises can provide.

Anand Amaladass' article: "Kavya as Theology: Aesthetic Experience as Quest for the Ultimate" is a fitting tribute to George Soares Prabhu, the aesthete and artist. Aesthetics has to do with the symbolic expression of reality from which theology could profit enormously. Anand Amaladass presents an Indian understanding of aesthetics as the symbolic expression of the experience of the mystery of being in the world, and asserts that it is a vehicle of theology. Art, according to him, is formative, liberative and transformative. Particularly enlightening is the section on humour and theology. One is reminded of Umberto Eco's bestseller *The Name of the Rose* and the dispute in a medieval monastery over whether Jesus ever laughed. The blind man Jorge sacrifices the life of several monks and finally the whole monastery so that a book of Aristotle on comedy doesn't come to light. "Laughter", he says, "is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh." Perhaps he betrays much of Christianity's attitude toward humour. George Gispert-Sauch's essay: "*Purusartha* and *Krathvartha*: Freedom and Structure in Ancient India" is a valuable addition to George Soares-Prabhu's own insight into this central facet of Indian culture on which he has reflected from the New Testament perspective. It attempts to give the original context which gave rise to the category of *Purusartha*. Raymond Panikkar's contribution: "The Power of Words" is his recognition of George Soares-Prabhu's appropriation of Indian culture in reading the Bible. Panikkar says that a truly cross-cultural theology often implies a radical mutation. He sees George Soares-Prabhu as one of those who have initiated this process by his use of indic words in the reading of Christian scripture. This he considers a revolutionary act.

Dharma was one of the favourite indic words of George Soares-Prabhu. Francis D'Sa, colleague and friend of George Soares-Prabhu, gives us an interpretation of it in his important essay: "Dharma of Jesus." He analyses the different aspects of the worlds of Hindu dharma and Christian dharma. Underlying these two worlds are two world-views, two myths, Samsara and Salvation History. In one, the cosmos is the locus of revelation and in the other, the historical Jesus. One is cosmocentric, the other anthropocentric. Values of the Christian dharma, freedom, fellowship, and justice will be perceived and understood by the other tradition differently. Religions and their world-views suffer from this inherent limitation. There is at the same time in the contemporary world, a gradual subordination of religion to a more overriding concern, namely, what it means to be human in the world, and a viewpoint that transcends both the cosmic and the anthropocentric perspectives. He calls it the secular perspective, the secular myth, and the cosmotheandric view point. It is in this context that one must articulate the "mythemes" contained in the myths of Samsara and Salvation History. Theology needs a different language. Expressions like the dharma of Jesus are but a beginning in this direction.

At the end of the book, there is a list of publications of George Soares-Prabhu. It will prove useful to all those who want to read more about the theology of George Soares-Prabhu. Unfortunately, one misses a feminine contributor and a feminist theological point of view, and secondly, the ecological concern which George Soares Prabhu increasingly shared towards the end of his life. A social reading of

the bible necessarily calls for these important elements. Not all the essays in the volume are of the same quality. In a collection where many perspectives and viewpoints are represented, this cannot be expected. Barring a few minor errors and omissions, this beautifully laid out book is a fitting tribute and a loving memorial to George Soares-Prabhu whose memory is ever fresh and ever challenging.

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

The Church in India: In Search of a New Identity. *Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ, Errol D'Lima SJ, Jacob Parappally MSFS*, eds., Bangalore, NBCLC, 1997. pp. 408.

The papers collected in this volume were originally written for the 19th Annual Meeting of the *Indian Theological Association* held in Bangalore in May 1996. They have some sort of unity in so far as they are related to the theme of the Meeting: *The Church in India in Search of a New Identity.* These papers reflect three great concerns of Indian ecclesiology today: The Church's *Christian* identity, its *ecclesial* identity and its *Indian* identity.

Some papers deal with the *Christian* identity of the Church in India and show that it is rooted in Scripture and Tradition. A.R. Ceresko points out how Israel's search for identity in different historical situations can be a model for the Church in its search for a new identity. J. Pathrapankal discusses the understanding of the Church in the New Testament and its relevance for us in India today. In his paper, J. Kavunkal examines "the presumed identity and self-perception of the Church behind its missionary outreach down through the centuries, as there is a correlation between the model of the Church we hold and the way we approach mission" (p. 84). It is D. Valiath's contention that in the documents of Vatican II there is "a definite shift from essentialistic to a relational understanding of Christian identity"(p. 109).

Other papers are concerned about the Church's *ecclesial* identity. They deal with such topics as the autonomy of the Indian Church (K.Kunnumpuram), its prophetic mission (P. Mekkunnel), the place and role of women in the Church (S. Balthazar), the sacramentality of the Church (G. van Leeuwen and F.X. D'Sa), the ecumenical dimension of the Indian Church and the Indian Church's communion with the universal Church (T. Kuriacose). In their own way, these papers shed light on different aspects of the *ecclesial* life of the Indian Church.

Yet other papers deal with the Church's *Indian* identity. Inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and commitment to justice and liberation are their main concerns. Thus Puthanangady invites the Church in India to redefine her identity in the multi-cultural context of this country. J. Kuttianimattathil asks the Church to journey together with other religious groups. P. Arockiadoss examines if the Church in India can become a people's movement. T.K. John describes the various images of the Christian, the people of our country have.

Included in the book are: the thought-provoking keynote address of Bishop Bosco Penha titled: *"Challenges Facing the Indian Church as She Enters the Third Millennium,"* in which he argues that the *parish* is "the arena in which the challenges facing the

Indian Church are to be met as we enter the third millennium"(p.11); and the Final Statement of the 19th Annual Meeting of Indian Theological Association, which gives us a glimpse of the kind of thinking that emerged from the discussions at that meeting.

All in all, this volume is a rich mine of ecclesiological insights. A few lapses in editorial work and proof-reading slightly mar the text of the book, which has an excellent get-up. I have no hesitation in recommending it to all those who have the future of the Indian Church at heart.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu, SJ

Interrelations and Interpretation: *Philosophical reflections on science, religion and hermeneutics. Festschrift in honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe,S.J.*, Job Kozhamthadam, S.J., ed., New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997, pp. xx + 305, Rs. 300.00.

It is a pleasant task to review a work of joy and appreciation. It is a tribute in a bouquet of Essays. Assuredly, the Dean of Philosophy, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, has done an excellent job.

The stock of this bouquet is made up of three elements: a succinct introduction of the Essays by the Editor; the late Richard De Smet paints a portrait of Jean de Marneffe in intellectual strokes; in contrast, Jean de Marneffe highlights the intellectual Richard as a friend of many and sundry: truth, Christ, students, poor and colleagues - in that order.

The Eleven Essays make a volume of rich variety. Their market value is clearly determined not by the fine international standard of binding and presentation, but, evidently, their inter-disciplinary nature. Integral reflection on science, religion and hermeneutics is the quest of the post-modern age. Rightly then *Interrelations and Interpretation* seem to be the strong strings that bind human quest to ultimate wholeness and meaning. From science to religion, to philosophy, to theological anthropology, to *Vedānta*, to Nyāya, to Lonergan are, indeed, a rich but scattered fare of interpretations are offered in this volume.

The inter-disciplinary nature of the attempts at interpretation serves to classify the independent essays as emanating from the existentialist concept of Time, the concerns of Science and Philosophy, Panikkarian perspective on Science, Philosophy and Theology, an attempt at christianizing Phenomenology, the Indian perspective of *Vedānta* and Nyāya

In "Lived Time" V.C.Thomas works on the existentialist concept that human experience of time is in terms of the unity of the retention of the past, the expectation of the future, and that both intersect in the present. Since self is prominent in existentialism, lived time is necessarily ego-centric. The quest is to know if it can be shared time. The essay could gain in insight if the phenomenon of the relational nature of human time and existence were analyzed.

Science itself is a difficult enterprise without concepts. Einstein's contribution as highlighted by S. Azzopardi is that religion and science must examine their conceptual language with intellectual transparency, if they seek to be partners in dialogue. G. Karuvelil

maintains that, generally, the main tool used in the trade of philosophers is reason. He suggests that experience and language are two other resources in the modern philosophy of religion. He examines epistemic circularity and autonomous religious games as two sides of the same coin and contends that they undermine the role of reason in religion and lead to unacceptable forms of relativism. The earlier purpose and goal of epistemology may have been to "settle disputed questions". Perhaps, that is a doubtful possibility in a world of diversity. Epistemology may seek to be content to keep open the channels of communication, to enter into dialogue amidst diversity. If J. Kozhamthadam's conclusion, after arguing well the points of the Einstein-Bohr debate, is true, then the root of the inconclusiveness of that debate is the disagreement with respect to their philosophical commitment and understanding of the nature and goal of science. It is a clear case of antagonism between philosophies which spills over into antagonism between science and religion.

The Panikkarian perspective evident in the three essays of A. Pamplany, J. Parapally and F.X.D'sa tries to project the way antagonism leads to disharmony in the entire realm of relationships. They project a holistic vision of science, philosophy, and theology in dialogue. The starting point of the "Eco-Vision of Reality" is stated as "the drama of existence began as a cosmos of harmony and solidarity" (p.53). One wonders where it leaves all the recent theories about chaos to cosmos. The essay does analyze successfully the fragmentation and distortion in the vision of reality. J. Parapally explores the integral anthropology in Panikkar's Cosmotheandric insight. Its integrity is realized in the radical relativity of all beings, that is, their interdependence. This conclusion from a theological viewpoint poses a challenge to philosophical anthropology. In "Re-Searching the Divine" with the Panikkar paradigm, F.X. D'sa searches the ontological foundation for authenticity as a search for the "whole" real. He interprets that the cosmic, the human, and the depth-dimension correspond to science, philosophy, and theology. It is evident that agreement and dialogue are often possible at the ontological level. The problems of fragmentation, independence, inauthenticity, antagonism crop up at the ontic level of human interactions in the world. The essays are valuable attempts at interpreting the ideal without prejudicing the real.

The interpretation of Husserl's Thought of transcendental phenomenology in a sectarian way is a worthy attempt. However, it seems to violate the quest of the Father of Phenomenology for a philosophy as a "rigorous science" from an ethico-religious point of view of life regulated by pure rational norms.

In the Vedanta view one becomes what one understands. Understanding is one's becoming non-dual. It is the foundational concept in S. Anand's hermeneutics which starts from the Brahma-Sutra and is elucidated by the *Upaniṣṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.Such an interpretation is undertaken to highlight the parameters of dialogue among peoples of different religious persuasions. The Indian perspective is further enhanced by J. Vattanky's quest to create a theory of interpretation based on the Nyaya contributions to the philosophy of *Śabda* as a means of valid verbal knowledge. Within this theory he focusses on the significatory function of the denotative (*śakti*) or implication (*laksana*). These functions are in the form of relations that exist between words and their meanings.

In Lonergan's *Insight*, understanding and interpretation is beset by two problems: the conflict of interpretations, and the relativity of interpretations to audiences. I.V. Coelho has limited himself to the former. Lonergan's approach is that correct interpretation depends on the attainment of a universal viewpoint which can be gained by adequate knowledge of the self and not merely of ontic traditions.

The value of the *Festchrift* for the scholarly reader is enhanced by a select Bibliography of the writings of Richard De Smet, SJ and Jean de Marneffe, SJ, and an Index at the end.

Rosario Rocha, SJ

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Pune Journal of Religious Studies

The second issue of this new Journal will appear in July 1998. The theme of the issue is: *Beyond the Colonial Past: Journeying to the Future* and will be treated in an interdisciplinary manner.

This is an attempt at an in-depth examination of the impact of colonialism on the life and mission of the Church in India. Decolonisation is a moment in the Church's journey towards a truly Indian identity. Various dimensions of this identity will also be discussed in the second issue of the journal.