இந்து மதத்தின் கையேடு

பண்டைய காலத்திலிருந்து தற்கால

- **இந்து மதம்**: ஒரு காந்திய முன்னோக்கு (2 வது பதிப்பு)
- **நமது நெறிமுறைகள்**: காந்திய பார்வையில் கட்டுரைகள்

இந்து மதத்தின் கையேடு

பண்டையதற்கால

காலத்திற்கானகாலத்திற்குளம்.வி.நட்கா்னி அனே

இந்து மதத்தின்கையேடு: பண்டைய முதல் தற்கால
எம்.வி.நட்கர்னி

இந்த புத்தகத்தை தயாரிப்பதில் ஆசிரியரும் வெளியீட்டாளரும் தங்கள் சிறந்த முயற்சிகளை மேற்கொண்டுள்ளனர் என்பதைத் தெரிவிக்கவும். . உள்ளடக்கங்களின் துல்லியத்தை உறுதிப்படுத்த ஒவ்வொரு கவனிப்பும் எடுக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. எவ்வாறாயினும், அதற்காக நாங்கள் எந்த உத்தரவாதமும் அளிக்கவில்லை, எனவே எந்தவொரு இழப்புக்கும் அல்லது வணிக ரூதியான சேதங்களுக்கும் பொறுப்பேற்கவோ அல்லது பொறுப்பாகவோ இருக்க மாட்டோம். பொருத்தமான இடத்தில் ஒரு நிபுணரை அணுகவும்.

அச்சிடப்பட்டது:

ராமகிருஷ்ணா கணித

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பிப்ரவரி 18, 2013

┐

ஆசீர்வாதங்கள்

இந்து மதம் என்பது பொதுவாக புரிந்துகொள்ளப்பட்ட ஒரு மதம் அல்ல அதற்கு ஒரு நிறுவனர், ஒரு புத்தகம் அல்லது தேவாலயம் அல்லது ஒரு சீரான வாழ்க்கை முறை இல்லை. சிறந்தது, இதை நாம் பல பிரிவுகள், வழிபாட்டு முறைகள், குழுக்கள் அல்லது மதங்களின் கூட்டமைப்பு என்று அழைக்கலாம். இருப்பினும், அவை அனைத்தையும் கடந்து ஒரு அழகான பல வண்ண மாலையாக ஒரு பொதுவான நூல் உள்ளது.

ஸ்ரீ எம்.வி.நட்கர்னி தனது சமூத்திய படைப்பான 'இந்து மதத்தின் கையேடு', இதுபோன்ற 'சிக்கலான' மதத்தை அதன் அனைத்து அம்சங்களையும் கையாளும் ஒன்பது தகவல் அத்தியாயங்களில் விளக்குவதில் பெருமளவில் வெற்றி பெற்றுள்ளார். இந்து மதத்தின் தார்மீக தத்துவத்தையும், சாதி அமைப்பின் சரியான படத்தையும் அவர் நடத்தியதைப் பற்றி சிறப்பு குறிப்பிடப்பட வேண்டும், இது ஒரு சமூக ஏற்பாடு என்பதை தெளிவாகக் காட்டுகிறது, மதத்துடன் எந்த தொடர்பும் இல்லை.

அனைத்து நவீன இந்து இயக்கங்களுக்கும் ஒரு பயனுள்ள மற்றும் தகவலறிந்த கணக்கை அவர் வழங்கியுள்ளார்.

இந்து மதம் குறித்த தற்போதைய இலக்கியங்களுக்கு அவரது புத்தகம் ஒரு பயனுள்ள கூடுதலாக இருக்கும் என்று நம்புகிறோம்.

சுவாமி **Harshananda**
-Adhyaksha
ராமகிருஷ்ண மடம்
பெங்களூர் 560019

முன்னுரை

இந்த புத்தகம் ஒரு புதிய, மேலும்உருவாக்கப்படுகிறதுஎன்பதுடன்: *avatஆர்* என் முந்தைய புத்தகம்,ஒரு *இந்து மதம் ஒரு காந்தியபார்வை*,மேலட்டைத 2006 முதல் பதிப்பை அதே வெளியீட்டாளர்கள் நடத்தப்படுகிறது, மற்றும் இரண்டாவது பதிப்பாக 2008 இல் மென்மையான அட்டையில். இது அதன் மூன்றாவது பதிப்பாக இருந்திருக்கலாம், ஆனால் அதில் மாற்றங்கள் பல இருந்தன, ஒரு புதிய தலைப்பு போதுமான அளவு நியாயமானது என்று தோன்றியது. புதியது, குறிப்பாக பகுதி I இல் நிறைய இருக்கிறது. இதன் பொருள் முந்தைய புத்தகத்தில் வெளிப்படுத்தப்பட்ட எனது கருத்துக்களை நான் மறுக்கிறேன் என்று அர்த்தமல்ல; முந்தைய பதிப்பிலிருந்து எதுவும் இழக்கப்படவில்லை, ஆனால் நிறைய சேர்க்கப்பட்டுள்ளன.

குறிப்பாக, முந்தைய பதிப்பை வழிநடத்திய மற்றும் ஊக்கப்படுத்திய காந்திய முன்னோக்கு இங்கே அதே பாத்திரத்தைத் தக்க வைத்துக் கொண்டுள்ளது என்பதை நான் வலியுறுத்த வேண்டும், இருப்பினும் 'காந்திய பார்வை' என்ற சொற்கள் இப்போது தலைப்பில் இல்லை. இந்த புத்தகத்தில் காந்தி புறக்கணிக்கப்படவில்லை அல்லது குறைத்து மதிப்பிடப்படவில்லை, ஆனால் இது காந்தியின் கருத்துக்களுடன் பொருந்தாத பிற யோசனைகளையும் உள்ளடக்கியது. குறிப்பாக, உலக மதங்களிடையே மரியாதைக்குரிய இடத்தைப் பெற வேண்டுமானால் இந்து மதம் என்னவாக இருக்க வேண்டும் என்பது குறித்த டாக்டர் பி.ஆர்.அம்பேத்கரின் கருத்துக்களுக்கு இது இடமளிக்கிறது, இது காந்தி இந்த விஷயத்தில் என்ன நினைத்ததோ அதற்கு முரணானது. டாக்டர் அம்பேத்கர் தலித்துகளின் தலைவர் மட்டுமல்ல, இந்து மதம் பற்றிய ஒரு கூர்மையான அறிஞரும் கூட. சீர்திருத்தப்பட்ட இந்து மதத்தை எவ்வாறு அகற்றுவது என்று காந்தி கவலைப்பட்டாலும், டாக்டர் அம்பேத்கரின் அக்கறை அதன் அர்த்தமற்ற மற்றும் மனிதாபிமானமற்ற குறியீடுகளை அழிப்பதாக இருந்தது. மரபுவழி இந்து மதத்திற்கு பதிலாக ஒரு மனிதாபிமான மற்றும் தார்மீக அர்த்தமுள்ள மதத்தை உருவாக்குவதற்கான பொதுவான நோக்கத்திற்காக இருவரும் பணியாற்றினர். 'சாதியை நிர்மூலமாக்குதல்' (1936) பற்றிய தனது புகழ்பெற்ற கட்டுரையில், டாக்டர் அம்பேத்கர் கொள்கைகளுக்கும் விதிகளுக்கும் இடையில் வேறுபாடு காட்டினார், மேலும் ஒரு மதம் கொள்கைகளில் தங்கியிருக்க வேண்டும் என்றும் விதிகளின் மதமாக இருக்கக்கூடாது என்றும் வலியுறுத்தினார். இது பகுத்தறிவு மற்றும் தார்மீக பொறுப்புக்கு நோக்கம் கொடுக்க வேண்டும், இது விதிகளின் ஒரு மதத்தால் முடியாது. எவ்வாறாயினும், சாதி, தூய்மை மற்றும் மாசுபாடு குறித்த கடுமையான விதிமுறைகளின் நிலைக்கு இந்து மதம் இறங்கியிருப்பதாக அவர் வருத்தம் தெரிவித்தார். இந்த செயல்பாட்டில், தார்மீக கொள்கைகளுக்கும் கொள்கைகளுக்கும் விசுவாசம் தியாகம் செய்யப்பட்டது, மேலும் பகுத்தறிவு கைவிடப்பட்டது. சமத்துவம், சகோதரத்துவம் மற்றும் சுதந்திரம்

ஆகியவற்றின் நவீன மதிப்புகளை அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்ட இந்துக்கள் தங்கள் மதத்திற்கு ஒரு நெறிமுறை-கோட்பாட்டு அடிப்படையை வழங்க வேண்டும் என்றும், மத நடைமுறையை அதனுடன் ஒத்துப்போக வேண்டும் என்றும் அவர் அழைப்பு விடுத்தார். இந்த பணியில் இந்துக்கள் மேற்கு நாடுகளிடமிருந்து கடன் வாங்கத் தேவையில்லை என்று அவர் சூசகமாகக் குறிப்பிட்டார், ஆனால் உபநிடதங்கள் போன்ற தங்கள் சொந்த வளங்களிலிருந்து பெற முடியும் (ரோட்ரிக்ஸ் 2004: 263-305 இல் மறுபதிப்பு செய்யப்பட்ட கட்டுரையின் 20 மற்றும் 21 பிரிவுகளைப் பார்க்கவும்). ஆகவே, இங்குள்ள திருத்தப்பட்ட புத்தகம், இந்து மதத்தின் வளங்களுக்குள், மகாத்மா காந்தி மற்றும் டாக்டர் அம்பேத்கர் இருவரின் எதிர்பார்ப்புகளையும் பூர்த்தி செய்யக்கூடிய ஒரு மதம் எவ்வாறு உள்ளது என்பதைக் காட்டுகிறது. முந்தைய பதிப்பும் (2006, 2008) இதை முயற்சித்தது, ஆனால் தற்போதைய புத்தகம் இந்த உண்மையை அதிக சக்தி, ஆதரவு மற்றும் தெளிவுடன் வெளிப்படுத்துகிறது.

புத்தகம் வலியுறுத்தும் ஒரு அடிப்படை அம்சம் அதன் சுறுசுறுப்பு மற்றும் இலவச ஓட்டம். ஒரு நதியின் உருவகம் இந்து மதத்திற்கு மிகவும் பொருத்தமாக இருக்கிறது - அது நிலையானது அல்ல, இடைபபாய்கிறது மாற்றம் மற்றும் தொடர்ச்சி இரண்டுமே அதை வகைப்படுத்துகின்றன. பல நீரோடைகள் அதில் இணைகின்றன மற்றும் பல நீரோடைகளும் அதிலிருந்து வெளியேறக்கூடும், ஆனால் அது அதன் அடையாளத்தைத் தக்க வைத்துக் கொள்ளும். அது தன்னை சுத்திகரிக்கும் மற்றும் புதுப்பிக்கும் திறனைக் கொண்டுள்ளது, நாம் அதை பிடிவாதம் போன்ற மாசுபடுத்திகள் மற்றும் தூய்மை மற்றும் மாசுபடுத்தும் விதிகளால் அதிக சுமை செய்யாவிட்டால் மட்டுமே. இது தடைகளைத் தவிர்ப்பதற்கும் அதன் போக்கைத் தொடர்வதற்கும் வழிகளைக் காண்கிறது. இது அனைவருக்கும் உயிர்வாழும் மற்றும் அனைவருக்கும் சொந்தமானது, இது தேர்ந்தெடுக்கப்பட்ட சிலரின் சொத்து அல்ல. ஆகவே, சாவ்குர் ஷியாம்சுந்தரின் அழகிய நூல் வண்ணத்தை அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டு, மலைகளிலிருந்து ஒரு நதி பாயும் ஒரு அட்டை வடிவமைப்பை இந்த புத்தகம் கொண்டுள்ளது.

குன்னர் மிர்டால் இந்திய மாநிலத்தை மென்மையாக வகைப்படுத்தினார். அவர் சரியானவரா என்று எனக்குத் தெரியவில்லை. ஆனால் நாட்டின் பெரும்பான்மையான மக்கள் பின்பற்றும் மதத்தை மென்மையாக வகைப்படுத்தலாம் - இந்த வார்த்தையின் நல்ல அர்த்தத்தில், நிச்சயமாக. திடமான பல சிக்கன நடவடிக்கைகள்எதிர்பார்க்கப்பட்ட, *sadhaks* (ஆன்மீக கோருவோர்) ஆனால் Ajamila, பொதுவாக அவப்பெயர் பெற்ற பாவி, உயர்ந்த மாநில எட்டகூறப்படுகிறது(*பாரமா-பாத*)மொத்த ஒப்படைத்தது மற்றும் இதயப்பூர்வமான ஒரு உணர்வு, இருமுறை வெறுமனே நாராயண என்ற பெயரில் சுமத்தப்பட்டார் அவரது மரண படுக்கையில் மனந்திரும்புதல். சதாக்களிடமிருந்து எதிர்பார்க்கப்படும் கடுமையான சைவம், ஆனால் பழங்குடி தெய்வங்கள் ஆடுகளையும் கோழியையும் தங்கள் பக்தர்களால் பிரசாதமாக ஏற்றுக்கொள்வதைப் பொருட்படுத்தவில்லை, அவற்றின் பிரதான உணவு இந்த மற்றும் பிற வேட்டையாடப்பட்ட விலங்குகளைக் கொண்டுள்ளது. கடவுளின் ஒற்றுமை பண்டைய காலங்களிலிருந்து தொடர்ச்சியாக வலியுறுத்தி வந்த ஒரு மதம் *மனநிலையும்*அவரது பன்மடங்கு -வணங்க அனுமதிப்பதில் எந்தவிதமானஇல்லை *பஹுதா* , பக்தர்களின் விருப்பத்திற்கு விட்டுச்செல்லப்பட்ட- வடிவங்களை. ஆனால் இந்த தரையில் இந்து மதத்தை உரிமம் பெற்ற, ஒழுக்கமான அல்லது கொள்கை ரூதியானதாக வகைப்படுத்துவது மிகவும் தவறானது. ஆயினும்கூட, இந்த மென்மையானது இந்து மதத்தை படிப்பதற்கும் புரிந்து கொள்வதற்கும் ஒரு சவாலான மதமாக ஆக்குகிறது. இந்த புத்தகம் இந்த திசையில் ஒரு தாழ்மையான முயற்சி.

புத்தகத்தில் இரண்டு பாகங்கள் உள்ளன. பகுதி I இந்து மதம் என்றால் என்ன, எது இல்லை என்பது பற்றியது. இது வெறுமனேஉள்ள மெட்டாபிசிக்ஸ், தார்முக தத்துவம் மற்றும் *சாதனா* இந்து மதத்தில்ஆகியவற்றை மட்டுமல்லாமல், இந்து மதத்தின் சமத்துவ, தாராளமய மற்றும் சமூக ஈடுபாடு கொண்ட அம்சங்களையும் உள்ளடக்கியது, இது தற்போதைய காலத்திற்கு மிகவும் பொருத்தமானது. இந்து மதம் ஏன் பிராமணத்துவம் மற்றும் சாதி அமைப்பு அல்ல என்பதை ஒரு தனி அத்தியாயம் காட்டுகிறது. பகுதி II இந்து மதத்தின் இயக்கவியலை உள்ளடக்கியது, பண்டைய காலத்திலிருந்து சமகால காலம் வரை அதன் வளர்ச்சியை விவரிக்கிறது மற்றும் விளக்குகிறது. கையேடு அதன் முந்தைய பதிப்பை விட விரிவானது. முந்தைய புத்தகத்திலிருந்து ('வளர்ச்சிக்கான இந்து அணுகுமுறை' மற்றும் 'மதத்தின் எதிர்காலம்') கடைசி இரண்டு அத்தியாயங்களை அவற்றின் அத்தியாவசிய புள்ளிகளை மற்ற அத்தியாயங்களில் இணைத்து விட்டுவிட்டேன். எளிமையான புரிதலுக்காக முந்தைய மொழியையும் விளக்கக்காட்சியையும் தக்க வைத்துக் கொள்ளும்போது, உரையை இன்னும் சுருக்கமாக மாற்ற முயற்சித்தேன். வாசகர்கள் ரசிக்கக்கூடிய நிகழ்வுகளும் பாடல்களும் உள்ளன. கருத்துக்கள், குறிப்பாக சமஸ்கிருத சொற்கள் தேவைக்கேற்ப விளக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன, வெறுமனே ஆங்கில சமமானவற்றைக் கொடுப்பதில் திருப்தி இல்லை. முந்தைய பதிப்பில் மீண்டும் பணிபுரிவது புதிய எண்ணங்கள், மேலும்

தெளிவு மற்றும் பகுத்தறிவு ஆகியவற்றைக் கொண்டுவர எனக்கு உதவியது. தற்போதைய புத்தகம் கலைக்களஞ்சியமாக இருக்க விரும்பவில்லை என்பதையும் நான் தெளிவுபடுத்த வேண்டும். இந்து மதம் மற்றும் அதன்நடைமுறையில் பயன்படுத்தப்படும் பல கருத்துக்கள் *சன்ஸ்காரங்கள்* புத்தகத்தில் இல்லை, அதே போல் இந்து தெய்வங்கள் மற்றும் யாத்திரை செய்யும் இடங்களின் விவரங்களும். இந்து மதம் குறித்த கூடுதல் விவரங்களுக்கு, வாசகர்கள் சுவாமி ஹர்ஷானந்தாவின் (2008) நினைவுச்சின்னப் பணிகளைக் குறிப்பிடலாம்.

இந்து மதத்தை அனைத்து மதங்களுக்குமான இலட்சியமாக அல்லது மிகப் பெரியதாக அல்லது எந்தவொரு குறைபாட்டிலிருந்தும் இல்லாத ஒரு அதிசய நிலமாக முன்வைப்பது புத்தகத்தின் நோக்கம் அல்ல. காந்தி வலியுறுத்தியது போல எந்த ஒரு மதமும் சரியானது என்று சொல்ல முடியாது. இதற்கு ஒவ்வொரு மதத்திலும் அவ்வப்போது அடிப்படை மற்றும் உலகளாவிய விழுமியங்களை தொடர்ந்து கண்டுபிடிப்பது தேவைப்படுகிறது, இதனால் ஒழுக்க ரீதியாக வெறுக்கத்தக்க நம்பிக்கைகள் மற்றும் பழக்கவழக்கங்கள் வளர்ந்து வருகின்றன. சாதி

தடைகள் மற்றும் தூண்டத்தகாத தன்மை, வறுமை மற்றும் பிறரின் துன்பங்களுக்கு அலட்சியம், மற்றும் பெண்களை ஒரு குறைந்த நிலைக்கு கண்டனம் செய்தல் மற்றும் அவர்களை சுரண்டுவது ஆகியவை இந்த வெளிப்பாட்டின் தெளிவான எடுத்துக்காட்டுகள். மூண்டும் கண்டுபிடிப்பது திரும்பப் போவதில்லை; தூய்மை குறித்த சில மரபுவழி கருத்தை திணிப்பது ஒரு அடிப்படைவாத நடவடிக்கை அல்ல. மாறாக, தன்னைப் புதுப்பித்து, பகுத்தறிவு மற்றும் உரையாடலுக்குத் திறந்திருத்தல், மனித உரிமைகள் - குறிப்பாக பலவீனமான மற்றும் சாந்தகுணமுள்ளவர்களின் உரிமைகள், ஒருவரின் ஆளுமை மற்றும் திறனை வளப்படுத்த அனைவருக்கும் சுதந்திரத்தை உறுதிசெய்வதன் அவசியத்தை அங்கீகரிப்பது. , மற்றும் சுற்றுச்சூழல் அக்கறையில் தீவிரமாக இருப்பது. அத்தகைய முயற்சி முக்கியமானது, ஏனென்றால் எந்தவொரு மதத்திற்கும் மிகப்பெரிய சவால் வெளியில் இருந்து அல்ல, உள்ளிருந்து வருகிறது. நமது சொந்த சமுதாயத்தில் உள்ள பலவீனங்களைப் பற்றி ஆராய்வது, குறிப்பாக சமூகத்தில் உள்ள அனைவரின் தார்மீக இழைகளை வலுப்படுத்துவது மட்டுமே நம்மைக் காப்பாற்ற முடியும். இதைச் செய்ய, வெளியில் இருந்து வரும் ஆபத்துகள், குறிப்பாக பிற மதங்களின் ஆக்கிரமிப்பு பற்றி சித்தமாக இருக்க வேண்டிய அவசியமில்லை.

பெங்களூரில் உள்ள ஸ்ரீ ராமகிருஷ்ணா கணிதத்தின் தலைவர் சுவாமி ஹர்ஷானந்தாஜியிடமிருந்து எனது புத்தகத்திற்கு 'ஆசீர்வாதம்' கிடைத்திருப்பது எனக்கு பெரும் பாக்கியம் மற்றும் மரியாதை. அவரது ஆழ்ந்த புலமை மற்றும் இந்து மதம் பற்றிய அறிவுக்கு அவர் மிகவும் மதிக்கப்படுகிறார். நான் அவருக்கு ஆழ்ந்த கடன்பட்டிருக்கிறேன்.

வேறுவிதமாகக் குறிப்பிடப்படாவிட்டால், அசல் வசனங்கள் மற்றும் கவிதைகளின் ஆங்கில மொழிபெயர்ப்புகள் என்னால் செய்யப்பட்டுள்ளன. இருப்பினும், பேராசிரியர் ஆர்.எஸ்.தேஷ்பாண்டே, திருமதி ஷரதா ராவ் மற்றும் திரு வி.கே.ஜெயின் பல மராத்தி மற்றும் இந்தி கவிதைகளின் பொருளை தெளிவாக புரிந்துகொள்ள எனக்கு உதவினார்கள். முந்தைய பதிப்புகளில் எனது நண்பர்கள் மற்றும் குடும்பத்தினரிடமிருந்து நான் பெற்ற ஊக்கம் இதையும் வெளிக்கொணர எனக்கு உதவியது. முந்தைய பதிப்புகளில் அவர்களின் உதவியை நான் ஒப்புக் கொண்டேன், ஆனால் அவற்றில் சிலவற்றை இங்கே குறிப்பிடுகிறேன் - பேராசிரியர்கள் வி.ஆர்.பஞ்சமுகி, வி.எம்.ராவ், கே.டி.பண்டுரங்கி மற்றும் சி.டி.குரியன்; என் மகள் சரஸ்வதி மற்றும் மகன்கள் - அனிருத் மற்றும் மகரந்த் மற்றும் அவர்களது குடும்பங்கள்; என் சகோதரர் கிஷோர் மற்றும் அவரது குடும்பத்தினர்; என் மைத்துனர்கள் கிரிஜா மற்றும் சாந்தா மற்றும் அவர்களது குடும்பங்கள். என் மருமகன் சின்மே வெளிநாட்டில் வெளியிடப்பட்ட பல மதிப்புமிக்க புத்தகங்களை எனக்கு வழங்கினார், அவை பெரிதும் உதவின. டி.அமர்நாத் சில அத்தியாயங்களை விடாமுயற்சியுடன் தட்டச்சு செய்தார். ராஜேஷ் வோர்கடி புத்தகத்தில் தீவிர ஆர்வம் காட்டினார்.

பிரதப் சக்ரவர்த்தியும் எனது சகோதரர் கிஷோரும் தயவுசெய்து முழு எம்.எஸ்ஸையும் கடந்து சென்று பல எழுத்துப்பிழைகள் மற்றும் கவனக்குறைவான தவறுகளை சரிசெய்து எனது புத்தகத்திற்கு அருளைச் சேர்த்தனர். சுனிதா நட்கர்ணி தனது மறைந்த கணவர் விவேகானந்தின் தொகுப்பிலிருந்து பல விலைமதிப்பற்ற புத்தகங்களை பரிசளித்தது மட்டுமல்லாமல், கையெழுத்துப் பிரதியை ஒரு நிபுண் மற்றும் நுணுக்கமாக திருத்தியதையும் தயவுசெய்து செய்தார், இதன் விளைவாக எனது விளக்கக்காட்சி நேர்த்தியுடன் கிடைத்தது. அவர்கள் நல்ல ஆலோசனைகளையும் வழங்கினார். எஸ். சுப்பிரமணியன் வலைத்தளங்களிலிருந்து தேவையான குறிப்பு பொருட்களை உடனடியாக வழங்குவதன் மூலம் உதவினார். சுபாஸ்ரீ பன்னர்ஜி - எனது 'பெரிய மாணவி' மற்றும் கருதப்பட்ட மகள், கணினியில் பல வழிகளில் உதவினார்கள். கவர் வடிவமைப்பிற்காக அவரது நீர் வண்ணப் படத்தைப் பயன்படுத்த என்னை அனுமதித்த என் உறவினர் எஸ். ஷ்யாம்சுந்தர் உட்பட அனைவருக்கும் எனது மனமார்ந்த நன்றி.

என் அன்பான மனைவி கங்காவின் நினைவகம் இந்த வேலையிலும் தொடர்ந்து உத்வேகம் அளிக்கிறது.

முரண்பாடாக, நான் அவளை மிகவும் மோசமாக இழக்கிறேன், ஆனால் அவள் எப்போதுமே என்னுடன் இருப்பதை உணர்கிறேன்.

முந்தைய பதிப்புகளின் வாசகர்கள் மற்றும் விமர்சகர்களுக்கு நான் குறிப்பாக நன்றியுள்ளவனாக இருக்கிறேன், அதன் கருத்துக்கள், எதிர்வினைகள் மற்றும் பரிந்துரைகள் இந்த புத்தகத்தை மறுசுரமைப்பதில் எனக்கு கணிசமாக உதவியது.

எனது வெளியீட்டாளர்களுக்கும் நன்றி தெரிவிக்கிறேன் - அனே புக்ஸ் பிரைவேட் லிமிடெட் லிமிடெட், குறிப்பாக அதன் தலைமை நிர்வாக அதிகாரி, ஜே.ஆர். கபூர், இந்த பதிப்பை ஒரு புதிய தலைப்பு மற்றும் அட்டை வடிவமைப்போடு தயாரிக்க என்னைத் தூண்டினார், அதை வெளியிடுவதில் ஒரு நல்ல வேலையைச் செய்தார்.

உரையை கடந்து செல்வதற்கு முன், என் வாசகர்கள் ஒலிபெயர்ப்பு மற்றும் உச்சரிப்புக்கான விசையை (இந்த முன்னுரையைப் பின்பற்றுகிறார்கள்) தயவுசெய்து கவனிக்கலாம். நான் எனது சொந்த விசையை வகுத்துள்ளேன், அடிக்கோடிட்டுக் காட்டுவதை மட்டுமே நம்பியிருக்கிறேன், இது மிகவும் எளிமையானது மற்றும் எந்த சிறப்பு மென்பொருளும் தேவையில்லை. சிறப்பு மென்பொருள் இல்லாத உரையை ஒரு கணினியிலிருந்து இன்னொரு கணினிக்கு மாற்றுவதன் விளைவாக உரையின் சிதைவை இது தவிர்க்கிறது.

க்கு மின்னஞ்சல் மூலம்வாசகர்களிடமிருந்து கருத்துகளையும் பரிந்துரைகளையும்நான் மகிழ்ச்சியடைகிறேன்,   நன்றியுள்ளவனாக Mvnadkarni1968@gmail.comஅனுப்பக்கூடியபெறுவதில்இருப்பேன்.

எம்.வி.நட்கர்னி

ஏப்ரல், 2013

இந்திய மொழிகளில் சொற்களுக்கு ஒலிபெயர்ப்பு மற்றும் உச்சரிப்புக்கான திறவுகோல்இந்திய மொழிகளின் (அகர வரிசைப்படி)

உயிரெழுத்துக்கள்

a - aa - உறைவிடத்தில்; அல்லது r என u**un** **என்பது** - ப**ஒருஒரு**LM

நான்- நானாக இருந்தால் என | நான் - ┌┌┌┌**FR**ப,

U-என u ஊ**ull** | u ப**போல் ஒ**ஒ-**ஒஒ**எல்

ஆர்-ஆர் போல் Krshna (கே**ஆர்**ishna)

இ - இ என ப**இ**டி | இ - மாதங்கள் எம் போன்ற**மாதங்கள்**

ஓ -ஆக கிராம்**ஒஒ**டி இளன OW -OU**OW** | ஓ ஓ திறந்த, ஆடுளன -

மெய்யெழுத்துகள்

என கே -கேகிங் | **கே**மணி - கூட்டணி என CKH**KH**ead

கிராம் - உங்கள் பயணத்திலேயேபோல் கிராம் | **கிராம்** மணி-GH உள்ள யோபோன்ற**GH**URT

சங்கிலின சாப்டர்-சாப்டர் | chh-CA என tchh**tchh**IM

நூதிபதின J-J | JH -என dgehஅவர்**dgeh**மற்றும்

டி -பத்துன டி | டி ம ஒருளன வது-**வது**மோசமாக

ஈ -ஈ கடவுள்என | DH- டிஹெச்

பயணத்தின்உள்ள,**டிஹெச்**OOD n -n, uஎன;**N**டெர் nஉச்சரிக்கப்படுகிறது பின்னால் இருந்து மேல்நோக்கி நாக்குடன்.

டி - டி ஐ.ஐ. என**டி**ஒரு | வது - வதுஎன **வது**இல்

d- போன்ற வது **வது**en | இல் வது-டிஹெச்

வதுN உள்ளது - nஎன **NO**, Si**N**புவிக்காலஇருக்க**N**சாப்டர்

போன்ற ப -**ப** பவரை **ஊ**அதுஅல்லது கழிவறைக்குச் செல்லவோபுரட்சிகரக்**pH**ஒலே | pH -கட்சியை கட்டியெழுப்புவது என்பது pH

ஆ எழுத்து போன்ற-ஆ **b**அனைத்து | BH-BH ஒருளன**BH**அல்லது

y-அல்லது **ஒய்**oung போல் **ஒய்**ARD | ஆர் என ஆர்- **ஆர்**அன்

எல்-எல்ன **எல்**uck | v, w - v ஒரு**vert** sh -

sh cheri**sh**, **sh**ow

s - s சூரியனைப் போலவே | h - h **h**um

l - (ஆங்கிலத்தில் அல்ல; l நாக்குடன் உச்சரிக்கப்படுகிறது. வாய் மற்றும் கூழ்)

குறிப்பு: உச்சரிப்புகளை விளக்குவதற்கு ஹர்ஷானந்தா (1999: 11-2) உதவியாக இருந்தது, ஆனால் இங்கு பயன்படுத்தப்படும்

முக்கிய அம்சம் வேறு எந்த சின்னங்களையும் பயன்படுத்தாமல் அடிக்கோடிட்டுக் காட்டுவதை நம்பியிருப்பது எளிமைப்படுத்தப்பட்டுள்ளது. குறுகிய e மற்றும் o ஆகியவை சமஸ்கிருதத்தில் பயன்படுத்தப்படவில்லை, ஆனால் கன்னடம் போன்ற சில பிராந்திய மொழிகளில் பயன்படுத்தப்படுகின்றன.

பொருளடக்கம்

PART –I

என்ன ஹிந்துவிசம் மற்றும் என்ன இல்லை

அத்தியாயம் 4குறிப்புகள்:எஸ்ஒருதண்ஒரு இந்து மதம்   **79-112**

அத்தியாயம் 5: சாதி அமைப்பு இந்து மதம் அ்ல   **113–148**

PART-
II

வரிந்துயிஸம்எண்ணிக்கைடைனமிக்ஸ்

இந்து மதம்-தொடர்ச்சி மற்றும் மாற்றம் டைனமிக்ஸ்அத்தியாயம் 6   **149-172**

Part-I

என்னமற்றும் என்ன

- Introduction
- Theology and Metaphysics of Hinduism
- Moral Philosophy of Hinduism
- Sadhana of Hinduism
- Caste System is not Hinduism

அறிமுகம்

'... ஹின் மௌதான எனது மரியாதை ஆயினும், அதன் அழகுகள் மற்ற மதங்களுக்கு எதிராக என்னைப் பாரபட்சம் காட்டவில்லை.

- எம்.கே.காந்தியின் (1927: 133)

1. ஏ ஆர்ELIGION டபிள்யூithout ஏ என்AME ஒருND டிEFINITION?

இந்து மதம் மிகவும் தனித்துவமான மதம். பிற மதங்களுக்கு செய்யப்பட்ட பிஞ்சர் போன்ற டி-னிஷன்களுடன் அதைப் பிடிக்க விரும்பினால், அது நழுவுகிறது. மதங்கள் பொதுவாக அவற்றின் நிறுவனர்களால் அடையாளம் காணப்படுகின்றன, பொதுவாக ஒற்றை, தவிர்க்க முடியாத ஆளுமைகளாக; ஒற்றை வேதம்; மற்றும் வரலாற்று ரூதியாக பதிவு செய்யப்பட்ட ஆரம்பம். இந்து மதத்தில் இந்த அம்சங்கள் இல்லை, பின்வருவனவற்றில் இருந்து தெளிவாகத் தெரிகிறது. பொது சகாப்தத்தின் (கி.பி.) இரண்டாம் மில்லினியத்தின் நடுப்பகுதி வரை இதற்கு எந்த பெயரும் இல்லை. அதன் பரிணாம வளர்ச்சிக்குப் பின்னர் சில நூற்றாண்டுகளாக ஒரு தனி தனித்துவமான மதத்தைப் பற்றிய விழிப்புணர்வு கூட அதற்கு இல்லை. சிந்து சமவெளி நாகரிகம் நிலவிய மற்றும் பொதுவான சகாப்தத்திற்கு (கி.மு.) முன், மூன்றாம் அல்லது இரண்டாம் மில்லினியத்தின் முடிவில் இந்து மதம் துவங்கியதிலிருந்து பல நூற்றாண்டுகளாக தனித்துவமான அடையாளங்களைக் கொண்ட பிற மதங்கள் தோன்றவில்லை என்பதற்கான எளிய காரணம் இதற்குக் காரணமாக இருக்கலாம். வேத நாகரிகம் தொடங்கியது. வரலாற்று ரூதியாக பதிவு செய்யப்பட்ட ஒரு காலகட்டத்தில் மற்ற மதங்கள் 'பிறந்தன' என்றாலும், இந்து மதத்திற்கு இதுபோன்ற வரலாற்று பிறப்பு காலம் இல்லை, அது பல நூற்றாண்டுகளாக உருவானது. எந்த ஒரு நபரையும் அதன் வரலாற்று நிறுவனர் என்று கருத முடியாது.என்று அழைக்கப்படும் பல புனித முனிவர்களால் பெறப்பட்ட தெய்வீக வெளிப்பாடுகளின் கலவையிலிருந்து இது உருவானது ஆர்ஷிஸ், அவை விவடிவத்தில் தொகுக்கப்பட்டனஇதாஸ். வேதங்கள் அபுருஷன்று கருதப்படுகின்றன,இபா (மனிதனால் உருவாக்கப்பட்டவை அல்ல)ஏனெனில் அவை எந்தவொரு மனிதனின் (புருஷா) பிரத்யேக உத்வேகம் அல்லது வேலையின் விளைவாக இல்லை, ஆனால் முனிவர்களுக்கு தலைமுறையிலிருந்து தலைமுறைக்கு வழங்கப்பட்ட தெய்வீக கிருபையின் விளைவாக, தலைமுறை தலைமுறையாக, ஒன்று அல்லது இரண்டு நூற்றாண்டுகள், இது துதிப்பாடல்களுக்கு வெளிப்பாட்டைக் கண்டது.

விழுதல் இந்த மதம் போதனைகளைஇதாஸ் மற்றும் உபநிடதங்கள்ஒரு தனித்துவமான மதம் தொடர்ந்து ஒரு குறுங்குழுவாத குழு பிரத்தியேகமாக அல்ல, ஆனால் அனைத்துமே மனித உள்ளது.போன்ற இந்த

போதனைகள் ஆர்கவேத சொற்கள்- *ஈகாம் சத்விப்ர்அஹ பஹுஃத்ஒரு வதந்தி* (ஒரு உண்மை ஞானிகளால் பல வழிகளில் வெளிப்படுத்தப்படுகிறது) அல்லது *Ano bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah* (உன்னதமான எண்ணங்கள் உலகம் முழுவதிலுமிருந்து வரட்டும்)

அல்லதுMundaka உபநிஷத் சொல்லிக்கொண்டிருக்கிறேன்.உன்னை - *சத்யம்இVA Jayatமின் n,nஆர்TAM* (வாய்மையே வெற்றி, பொய்யுடன்), அல்லதுசொல்லிக்கொண்டிருக்கிறேன்.உன்னை *புரடிஜ்னகஒருஷயாIIA - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (முழு உலக ஒன்று குடும்பம்), - ஒருபோதும் ஒரு மதம் அல்லது நாகரிகத்தின் பிரத்தியேக ஏகபோகமாக இருக்க முடியாது அல்லது ஒரு குறிப்பிட்ட காலத்திற்கு மட்டுமே பொருத்தமானதாக இருக்க முடியாது. அவற்றில் நித்திய மற்றும் உலகளாவிய உண்மைகள் உள்ளன.

முரண்பாடாக, ப Buddhism த்தம் மற்றும் சமண மதம் போன்ற பிற மதங்கள் தனித்துவமான அடையாளங்களுடன் தோன்றிய பின்னர் இந்த மதம் சரியான நேரத்தில் வேறுபட்டது. எனவே எஞ்சியவர்களுக்கு ஒரு தனித்துவமான அடையாளமும் கொடுக்கத் தொடங்கியது. ஒரு மதத்தை விவரிக்க மிக நெருக்கமாக வந்த இந்திய சொல் தார்ம் அல்ல, பிரபலமாக நம்பப்பட்டது, ஆனால் *மாதா* (ஒரு பார்வை புள்ளி, கருத்து) அல்லது *சம்ப்ராட்அயா* (ஒரு பாரம்பரியம்). தார்ம் என்ற சொல் முற்றிலும் வேறுபட்ட அர்த்தத்தைக் கொண்டிருந்தது, இது ஒரு தார்மூக் கடமை அல்லது நெறிமுறைகளின் நெறிமுறையாகும், மேலும் தார்மத்தின் கருத்து அனைத்து இந்திய மரபுகளுக்கும் கண்ணோட்டங்களுக்கும் பொதுவானது.மற்றும் சமண மதம் தவிர, எஞ்சியிருக்கும் மதம்தொடங்கியது *மாதா அல்லது ப Buddhism த்தம்வைதிகாவைதிகா சம்ப்ரத்அழைகக்த்தாஸைஅயா* (வேத மதம் அல்லது பாரம்பரியம்) என்று, ஏனெனில் இது விஅடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டதாக கருதப்படுகிறதுஇ, மற்ற மதங்கள் அவ்வாறு கூறவில்லை .

ஆனால் இதை வேத மதம் என்று சொல்வதில் சிக்கல்கள் உள்ளன, ஏனெனில் அதன் பரிணாம வளர்ச்சியின் ஆரம்ப கட்டத்தில் கூட அது மூப்பட்டது, நிராகரிக்கப்படவிட்டாலும், விஇதாஸ். உபநிஷத்துகள் விஇறுதிப் பகுதியாக எடுத்துக் கொள்ளப்பட்டாலும்இதாஸின், அவை அவற்றின் தொனியிலும் ஆவியிலும் மிகவும் வித்தியாசமாக இருக்கின்றன, அவை தனித்து நிற்கின்றன. இருவருக்கும் இடையிலான வேறுபாடுகள் குறித்து நாம் பின்னர் விரிவாகப் பேசுவோம், ஆனால் வித்தியாசத்தின் கூட்டுத்தொகை மற்றும் பொருள் இது என்று கூறலாம்: அதே நேரத்தில் விநோக்கம்இதாஸின்சடங்குகள் மற்றும் சடங்குகள் மூலம் கடவுள்களைப் பிரயோகிப்பதே (முக்கியமாக வடிவத்தில்)மற்றும் *Yajnas*)இங்கே மற்றும் பரலோகத்தில் இனி இல் சாதாரணமாக நன்மைகளை அடையும் தங்கள் பாராட்டு பாடுதல் உபநிடதங்கள் நோக்கம் உண்மை ஒற்றை எண்ணம் நோக்கத்தில் இருந்தது. இரண்டுமே தார்மத்துடன் தொடர்புடைய நெறிமுறைகளைக் கொண்டிருந்தன, அவை பொதுவானவை, ஆனால் அவற்றின் மதம் வேறுபட்டது. வேதங்கள் மேம்பட்டதாக செயல்முறை உச்சக்கட்டத்தை அடைந்தது *Bhagavadgitஒருரு* (கூதை இனி), இதுமாறுபட்ட கருத்தை அளித்தது *யஜ்ஞத்தின்* மற்றும் கடவுள்-உணர்தல் அல்லது சுய-உணர்தல் அல்லது விடுதலைக்கு மாற்று பாதைகளை அமைத்தது, - இவை அனைத்தும் வேதங்களுக்கு முன்னால் ஒரு தனித்துவமான அணிவகுப்பை அமைத்தன. வேதங்களைத் தாண்டி நகரும் செயல்முறை சமகால காலம் வரை தொடர்கிறது, இது இந்திய சமுதாயத்தின் சாதி அமைப்புக்கு எதிரான பல எதிர்ப்பு இயக்கங்களுக்கு சாட்சியாக இருந்தது (தவறாக விஇதாளிடம் கூறப்படுகிறது). இந்து சமூகம் மற்றும் மதத்தின் கட்டமைப்பிற்குள் வேதங்களைத் தாண்டி நகர்வதற்கு பக்தி இயக்கங்கள் மிக முக்கியமான எடுத்துக்காட்டு. அவை இடைக்கால காலத்தில் இந்தியாவின் முழு நீளத்தையும் அகலத்தையும் உள்ளடக்கியது, - பக்தி இயக்கங்கள் குறித்த ஒரு தனி அத்தியாயம் இந்த புத்தகத்தில் அவர்களுக்கு அர்ப்பணிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. இதன் விளைவாக ஒருவர் வேதங்களைப் பின்பற்றாவிட்டாலும் நிச்சயமாக ஒரு இந்து என்று அழைக்கப்படலாம்.

தங்கள்உள்ள சடங்குகள் மற்றும் வேதங்களின் சடங்குகள்கூட *KarmakஒருருNDA* (வேதங்கள் சடங்குகள் மற்றும் சடங்குகள் கையாள்வதில் ஒரு பகுதி) அனைவரும் ஏற்கக் கூடிய இருந்திருக்கும் இருக்கலாம், மற்றும்உபநிடதங்கள் *(போஒருNAKஒருNDA* வேதங்களின்) இருந்திருக்கலாம் சாமானியரின் புரிதலுக்கு அப்பால், வேதங்கள் மற்றும் உபநிடதங்கள் இரண்டின் நெறிமுறைகளும் இருந்தன, அவை சாமானியர்களுக்கும் அன்றாட வாழ்க்கைக்கும் மிகவும் பொருத்தமானவை. இந்த நெறிமுறை பகுதியை வலியுறுத்துவதில், இந்த மதத்திற்கு மற்றொரு பெயர் வழங்கப்பட்டது - *சான்அடானா தார்ம்*. இந்த சொல் எந்த உரையில் முதலில் உருவாக்கப்பட்டது என்று எனக்குத் தெரியவில்லை, ஏனென்றால் அவற்றில் பல உள்ளன. ஆனால் இந்த

மதத்திற்கு அதைப் பின்பற்றிய ஞானிகளால் வழங்கப்பட்ட பாரம்பரிய பெயர் இதுதான், மேலும் ப Buddhism த் _introduc__ ம் சமண மதத்திலிருந்து வேறுபடுவதில் அதிக முக்கியத்துவம் கொடுக்கப்படவில்லை, அனைவருக்கும் பின்பற்றப்பட வேண்டிய தார்மீக விழுமியங்களைப் போல. ஒரு விளக்கம் *சான்ஒருதானா தாம* என்ன *Brahm*உள்ள,ஈஒரு புர்ஒருஒரு (. II.33 37-38)உள்ளது:

adr␣hashch␣r␣pya எல்␣bhascha கு␣␣o BHutaday␣ru damah
/ Brahmacharyam tath␣ru satyam anukr␣shah kshama␣ dhṛtih /
Sanatanasya தர்மஸ்யா mtadulameudahṛtam //

இதன் பொருள்: சனாதன தர்மத்தின் சாராம்சம் என்னவென்றால், ஒருவர் தூமை மற்றும் பேராசை ஆகியவற்றிலிருந்து விடுபட வேண்டும், கடுமையானவராக இருக்க வேண்டும், சுய கட்டுப்பாடு, கற்பு, உண்மை, மென்மை, மன்னிப்பு, தைரியம் மற்றும் அனைவருக்கும் இரக்கம்.[1]

இந்த மதத்தின் அசல் பெயர் 'இந்து மதம்' அல்ல என்பதை மகாத்மா காந்தி அறிந்திருந்தார், மேலும் அவர் 'ஏற்றுக்கொண்டார்*சான்எடானா தர்மத்தை*'. 'இந்து மதம்' என்ற வார்த்தை பிரபலமாகிவிட்டால் அதைப் பயன்படுத்துவதை அவர் தவிர்க்கவில்லை, இந்துக்களும் இந்து அல்லாதவர்களும் ஒரே மாதிரியாக ஏற்றுக்கொண்டனர். ஆனால் அவர் ஒருபோதும் மதத்தை விவரிக்க 'வேத' அல்லது பிராமண 'என்ற சொற்களை முன்னொட்டாக பயன்படுத்தவில்லை என்பது குறிப்பிடத்தக்கது. இந்து மதத்தைப் பற்றிய காந்தியின் பார்வை என்னவென்றால், இது அடிப்படையில் நெறிமுறை, வெறும் சடங்குகள் அல்லது உள்நோக்கங்களை விட ஒழுக்க ரீதியாக நேர்மையான வாழ்க்கை வாழ்வது, உண்மை மற்றும் அகிம்சை கொள்கைகளில் வேரூன்றியுள்ளது.

'*சான்எடானா தர்மம்*' என்ற வார்த்தையின் பயன்பாடு இந்து மதத்தை சமஸ்கிருத மரபுடன் மட்டும் கட்டுப்படுத்துவதை நோக்கமாகக் கொண்டிருக்கவில்லை, ஆனால் அதன் நீடித்த தன்மையை வெளிப்படுத்த மட்டுமே பயன்படுத்தப்படுகிறது. '*சான்எடானா*' என்பது பழமைவாத அல்லது மரபுவழி என்று அர்த்தமல்ல (சில இதை தவறாகக் கருதுகின்றனர்), ஆனால் இதன் பொருள் நீடித்த அல்லது நித்தியமானதாகும். காந்திய முன்னோக்குக்கு உண்மையாக, இந்த புத்தகம் இந்து மதத்தை வேதங்கள் மற்றும் உபநிடதங்களை மட்டுமே அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டதாகக் காணவில்லை, மேலும் பல ஆயிரம் ஆண்டுகளில் அதன் வளர்ச்சியைப் பற்றி மிகவும் மாறும் பார்வையை எடுக்கிறது. சமஸ்கிருத அல்லாத *பக்தி* சாந்தர்கள் வேதங்கள் மற்றும் வேதாந்தங்களைப் போலவே இந்து மதத்தின் இயக்கவியலின் ஒரு பகுதியாகும், காந்தியைப் போன்ற அதன் நவீன உரைபெயர்ப்பாளர்களை குறிப்பிடவில்லை. எனவே, சமஸ்கிருதத்தில் உள்ள மத மற்றும் தத்துவ இலக்கியங்களுக்கு மேலதிகமாக, பிற இந்திய மொழிகளிலிருந்தும் இலக்கியங்கள், என்னால் முடிந்தவரை அசலில், சில சமயங்களில் மொழிபெயர்ப்பிலும் கணக்கில் எடுத்துக்கொண்டேன்.

அத்துடன் அறியப்படுகிறது, சொல்(சிந்து)'இந்துக்களின் இந்தியாவில் முஸ்லீம் படையெடுப்பாளர்கள், முதன் முறையாக 11 இல்பயன்படுத்தப்பட்டது.வது நூற்றாண்டு CE[2] சிந்து 'நதி அருகிலும் அப்பால் வாழும் முஸ்லிம் அல்லாதவர்களுக்கு குறிப்பிடும் இந்துக்களின் மதமாக 'இந்து மதம்' என்ற சொல் மிகவும் பிற்காலத்தில் ஆங்கிலேயர்களால் உருவாக்கப்பட்டது. இந்த மதம் பிரிட்டிஷாரால் கண்டுபிடிக்கப்பட்டது என்பதையோ, ஆங்கிலேயர்கள் இந்தியாவுக்கு வருவதற்கு முன்பே அது இல்லை என்பதையோ இது நிச்சயமாக அர்த்தப்படுத்துவதில்லை. சுவாரஸ்யமாக, 'இந்து மதம்' என்ற சொல் அதன் பின்பற்றுவர்களையும் ஏற்றுக்கொண்டது.[3] அதுசான் அவர்களை அழைக்க இருந்திருக்கும்!ஒரு'சனாதன Dharmians' என இன்னும்tanisஒற்றைப்படை,அல்லது மோசமாக இந்து என்ற சொல் குறுகியதாக இருந்தது, உச்சரிக்க எளிதானது, அது தொடர்ந்தது. அப்போதும் கூட, 'இந்து' என்பது பல இந்துக்களுக்கு சுய அடையாளம் காணும் காலமாக மாறவில்லை, பொ.ச. இரண்டாம் மில்லினியத்தின் நடுப்பகுதி வரை. சாதி அல்லது துணைப்பிரிவின் அடிப்படையில் சுய அடையாளம் அதிகமாக இருந்தது. எவ்வாறாயினும், இந்தியாவின் நீளம் மற்றும் அகலம் வழியாக முஸ்லீம் ஆட்சி நீடிக்கப்பட்டால் இந்துக்களாக சுய அடையாளம் காணப்படுவது மேலும் மேலும் வெளிப்பட்டது, இது இந்து சமுதாயத்தில் சமூக சீர்திருத்தங்களை அடுத்து மேலும் உத்வேகம் பெற்றது, இந்து மதத்தின் நவீன சாவடிகளால் தொடங்கப்பட்டது மற்றும் ஆதரிக்கப்பட்டது ராஜா ராம்மோகன் ராய் மற்றும் சுவாமி விவேகானந்தர். முரண்பாடாக, இந்து சமுதாயத்தில் சீர்திருத்தங்களின் தேவைக்கான நனவு இந்துக்களுக்கும் இந்து அல்லாதவர்களுக்கும் இடையிலான வேறுபாட்டின் நனவை விட இந்துக்களாக சுய விழிப்புணர்வை ஏற்படுத்தியது.

ஆயினும்கூட, இந்து மதம் என்பது வரையறையை மீறும் ஒரு மதம்.இந்து மதத்தை கட்டுப்படுத்துவது கடினம் ஒரு பொதுவான வேதம் மற்றும் தத்துவம், பொதுவான கடவுள், அல்லது பொதுவான பாரம்பரியம், அல்லது தெளிவானஆகியவற்றின் அடிப்படையில்

எல்லைகள். ஆயினும்கூட, இந்து மதத்தின் பரந்த நிறமாலையில் வெவ்வேறு வண்ணங்கள் ஒருவருக்கொருவர் தொடர்பில்லாதவை. அவை மிகவும் நுட்பமான மற்றும் விழுமியத்தின் ஒரு முனையலிருந்து மக்கு கசா மற்றும் மோசமான மற்றொரு முனையிலிருந்து பரவுகின்றன. இந்து மதம் வேதங்கள், உபநிடதங்கள்,அடிப்படையில் 'கிரேட் பாரம்பரியம்' 'பாரம்பரிய இந்து மதம்' என அழைக்க முடியும் என்ன பிரதிநிதித்துவம், தங்கக்கூடிய எஸ்எம்ஆர்னாளை, *புரூஷூ*அறியப்படுகின்றது, *ராம்ஒரூப்யாண என்று*பாத்திரத்தில்,: *MahஒரூBHஆகியவைவிகிதத்தின்*, *Brahmasu*tras,கூதை, ஒய்ஓகா எஸ்u͟tras சில தத்துவ பங்களிப்புகளை அத்துடன்ch.ஒருryas, பக்தி இயக்கங்கள், மற்றும் இந்து மதம் நவீன விளக்கங்கள் சுவாமி விவேகானந்தர், ஸ்ரீ அரவிந்தோ, மகாத்மா காந்தியும் பல மற்றவர்கள் அதே நேரத்தில், பிரபலமான, நாட்டுப்புற மற்றும் பழங்குடி மத நடைமுறைகள் மற்றும் நம்பிக்கைகள்,முறைகளின் 'சிறிய பாரம்பரியத்திற்கு' இந்து மதம் இடமளிக்கிறது *தந்திரம்* மற்றும் பல தெளிவற்ற வழிபாட்டு. 'சிறிய பாரம்பரியம்' சில சமயங்களில் 'கிராம இந்து மதம்' என்றும் அழைக்கப்படுகிறது. இரண்டு மரபுகளும் நீர்-இறுக்கமான பெட்டிகளாக இருக்கவில்லை. அவர்கள் ஒருவருக்கொருவர் தாக்கத்தை ஏற்படுத்தியுள்ளனர். ஒரு காலகட்டத்தில், சிறிய மரபுகளின் பல கூறுகள் சுத்திகரிக்கப்பட்டு பெரிய மரபுக்குள் கொண்டுவரப்பட்டன. இதற்கு ஒரு முக்கிய உதாரணம் *அதர்வ விடிடா*. மாபெரும் பாரம்பரியத்தை பிரபலப்படுத்தும் செயல்பாட்டில், பல நம்பிக்கைகள் மற்றும் சடங்குகள் மக்களால் ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்டன. இரண்டு மரபுகளுக்கும் இடையில் நிச்சயமாக மோதல்கள் உள்ளன. உதாரணமாக, காந்தி விலங்கு தியாகத்தை இந்து மதத்திற்கு முரணானது என்று இழிவுபடுத்தினார், ஏனெனில் அது அகிம்சையின் அடிப்படைக் கொள்கையை மீறியது. இதேபோல், கிராம இந்து மதத்தில் சூனியம் மற்றும் சூனியம் ஆகியவை இந்து மதத்திற்கு அடிப்படையான சத்தியத்தின் கொள்கையுடன் முரண்பட்டன. பெரிய பாரம்பரியத்தின் உயர்ந்த மற்றும் அதிநவீன விமானங்களுக்கு கிராம இந்து மதத்தை உயர்த்துவதற்கான வரலாற்று ரீதியாக நீண்ட செயல்முறை உள்ளது, ஆனால் இது ஒரு மெதுவான செயல்முறையாகும். எவ்வாறாயினும், கிராம இந்து மதத்தில் உள்ள அனைத்தும் மோசமானவை அல்லது மூடநம்பிக்கை என்று கருதுவது தவறானது. சத்தியத்தை மதித்தல் மற்றும் அகிம்சை மற்றும் பிறருக்கு தன்னலமற்ற சேவை உள்ளிட்ட தார்மீக மதிப்பீடுகளின் அடிப்படையில், இரண்டு மரபுகளுக்கும் இடையில் ஒன்றுடன் ஒன்று ஒன்று உள்ளது. சிறிய பாரம்பரியம் அல்லது கிராம இந்து மதம் அதன் சொந்த தெய்வங்களைக் கூட கொண்டிருக்கலாம், ஆனால் இது இந்த பாரம்பரியத்தை இந்து மதத்திலிருந்து பிரிக்கவில்லை, பிற்காலத்தின் பன்மைத்துவம் மற்றும் தாராளவாதத்திற்கு நன்றி. சிறிய பாரம்பரியத்தை நம்பாத கல்வியறிவற்ற மக்களுடன் மாபெரும் பாரம்பரியத்தை உயரடுக்கினர் மட்டுமே நம்புகிறார்கள் என்பதல்ல. இரண்டு மரபுகளைப் பின்பற்றுபவர்கள் மிகவும் பரிமாறிக்கொள்கிறார்கள் (சில நேரங்களில் வெளிப்படையாகவும் சில சமயங்களில் ரகசியமாகவும்) இருவருக்கும் இடையில் வேறுபாடு காண்பது கடினம்.

அனைத்து பன்முகத்தன்மையுடனும், சமூகங்கள் முழுவதும் மட்டுமல்லாமல், சமூகங்களுக்குள்ளும், அனைத்தும் நித்திய மற்றும் உலகளாவிய விழுமியங்களின் அடிப்படையில் ஒரு தார்மீக ஒழுங்கிற்கு உட்பட்டவை. இந்த பொருத்தமற்ற கலவையின் மத்தியில் சில வரையறுக்க முடியாத ஒற்றுமை உள்ளது. நிராத் ச ud துரிக்கு "வெளிப்படையான முரண்பாடுகள் இருந்தபோதிலும், இந்து மதம் ஒன்றுதான்" (ச ud துரி 2003: 1) என்று அறிவிப்பதில் எந்த தயக்கமும் இல்லை. ஃபெரோ-லுஸி (2001: 294) கூறுவது போல்: "இந்து மதம் என்ற சொல்லைக் கைவிடவோ அல்லது ஒரு மதத்தின் நிலையை மறுக்கவோ தேவையில்லை [அதை வரையறுப்பதில் சிக்கல் இருப்பதால். அதற்கு பதிலாக கைவிடப்பட வேண்டியது என்னவென்றால், எல்லா கருத்துகளையும் வரையறுக்க முடியும் என்ற நம்பிக்கை, ஏனெனில் அவை பொதுவான பண்புகளையும் தெளிவான வெட்டி எல்லைகளையும் கொண்டிருக்க வேண்டும் ". விட்ஜென்ஸ்டனிடமிருந்து அவர் ஆதரவைப் பெறுகிறார், அவரின் கருத்துக்கள் பொதுவான பண்புகளையும் தெளிவான வெட்டி எல்லைகளையும் கொண்டிருக்க வேண்டிய அவசியயில்லை, ஆனால் "ஒன்றுடன் ஒன்று மற்றும் சிக்கலான குறுக்குவெட்டு ஒற்றுமைகளின் சிக்கலான வலையமைப்பால்" ஒன்றாக இணைக்கப்படலாம்.[4] Hinduism is such a network. Ferro-Luzzi observes that concepts formed in such a way may be called 'polythetic', which cannot be defined but only

exemplified. [5]As Balagangadhara remarks: "what makes Christianity into religion is not what makes H_____o a religion" (1994:22). He clarifies further that "Though the existence question of religion is cognitively interesting, it is not a definitional question" (*ibid*: 516).

Freedom to have diversity is itself an important feature of Hinduism, which can even be taken as one of its defining characteristics. This became an important feature of India itself as a country and of its culture, thanks to the influence of Hinduism. No other religion has permitted such pluralism and manifold diversity in scriptures, philosophical view points and practices as Hinduism. BP Singh (2011) calls this as *Bahudha* approach, which means respect (not merely tolerance) for pluralism and diversity amidst an environment of peaceful co-existence, harmony and mutual understanding. The Bahudha approach follows logically from belief in the two Rgvedic sayings quoted in the second para of this section. It has permitted diversity not only within Hinduism, but also in relation to other faiths. Not merely tolerance but also respect for other view points, other faiths and other peoples, and openness, have characterised Hinduism almost as its most distinguishing characteristic since its very beginning. There is evidence of it not only in Sanskrit texts but in regional language literature as well. The earliest discovered (10th Century CE) Kannada text, *Kaviraja-marga* by Nrpatunga, says (in 3.177):

> *Kasavaravembudu nere sairisalarpede para-vicharamam para-dharmamam.*

> (Tolerance of ideas and faiths of others is gold itself.)

It is noteworthy that there is advocacy of this not only in texts or literature, but it was observed also in the day-to-day conduct of people, as BP Singh has shown (2011: 192-221).

The Bahudha tradition, however, made Hinduism rather amorphous, which meant that it became difficult to define it in terms of its distinctive features, other than respect for diversity. There have, however, been some foolhardy attempts to define Hinduism in terms of its belief in (*a*) the infallibility of the Vedas, (*b*) *Varnashrama* system confused with the caste system, (*c*) polytheism and (*d*) Nature worship including cow worship.

However, one can be a Hindu without following any of the above four features. One can be a Hindu without believing in the infallibility of the Vedas. Gandhi did not believe in their infallibility and explicitly said so, and yet declared himself to be a Hindu, even a Sanatani Hindu. I have already explained above why Hinduism cannot be called as just a Vedic religion. I may add here that even in the early phase of Hinduism, there were many who followed the non-Vedic tradition of the *Tantras*. During the Bhakti Movements in the medieval period, there were many sant-poets who did not swear by the Vedas or their infallibility, and yet contributed immensely to the dynamics and development of Hinduism.

As for the caste system being an intrinsic feature of Hinduism, as well as the attempt to describe Hinduism as Brahminism, I have refuted these contentions in a separate chapter in the book. I may only observe here that it is wrong to think that the Vedas, the Upanishads, or the Gita vindicated the caste system; on the contrary, the Hindu sacred scriptures have denounced the birth-based caste system. The caste system emerged for reasons that had nothing to do with the principles and teachings of Hinduism.

> Hinduism is more than polytheism and it is misleading to call it polytheistic. The Rgvedic saying quoted on page 1, which in translation means that one Truth has been expressed variously by the

wise, is a powerful refutation of the commonly held view of polytheism. 'Polytheism' of Hinduism, if it can be so called at all, was only a way of permitting people to worship God in any manner or form they chose. Similarly, Hinduism is not the same as Nature Worship or animal worship, though of course Hinduism traditionally has a tremendous reverence for Nature since Vedic times. Cow worship and protection reflect respect and compassion to the animal world and at the same time our gratitude to the generosity and gentleness of the cow. Yet, there were, at any time in the long history of Hinduism, sections of people who ate beef within the Hindu society. Textual evidence suggests that beef eating was permitted even among Brahmins during the Vedic period.

What then are the distinguishing features of Hinduism that make it a religion? This elicits the question – What is religion? William James (1997: 48-74) in his celebrated lectures on '*The Varieties of Religious Experience*' warns against simple definitions of religion. Defining religion in terms of a belief in one super-human transcendental person called God, an organised institution which controls beliefs and practices of worship and conduct of followers, a single scripture, a single founder etc. are examples of simplistic ways of defining religion, based on the experience of a few selected religions like Christianity. These definitions do not fit other religions which are no less genuine. Some of the 'secular' and leftist intellectuals in India question the status of Hinduism as a religion on these grounds. Their attack on recent trends of intolerance among some followers of Hinduism is quite understandable, but not their questioning the very status of Hinduism itself as a religion. A better strategy is to remind these errant followers of Hinduism how they are defying the very characteristic of Hinduism which distinguished it from other religions. Toynbee observed: "*One of the most prominent characteristics of Hindu religion was the spirit of live and let live* and, in this respect, of all six higher religions, Hinduism is the one that has been the most frank in acknowledging its continuity with the past and the most pious in cultivating it" (Toynbee 1961: X: 220; emphasis added).

However noble and laudable the philosophy of 'Live and Let Live' may be, it cannot be the only or exclusive criterion for a religion. Belief in an all-powerful, all-controlling intervening personal God cannot be a criterion since there are religions like Jainism and Buddhism, which are religions in their own right, but are agnostic. The concept of God can vary from religion to religion, and each concept can give a sublime religious experience and fulfillment. There is no verifiable way to assert that only one concept is true and others are false.

William James took religion to mean "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [and women] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (1997:53). However, as a definition, this is unduly restrictive, as it requires faith in the Divine, and rules out community or collective scope for religious behaviour. A religion can be termed as a particular system of faith and worship, but this would not do justice to a religion like Hinduism which is pluralist in character and incorporates several systems of faith and worship.

Swami Vivekananda treated religion both as a science and an art. He said, "Religion is the science which discovers the transcendental in nature through the transcendental in man" (CWSV Vol.8: 20). "Religion is [also] the art whereby the brute is raised unto a man" (CWSV Vol.5: 409). Though both

these statements are very insightful, describing important roles of a religion, they may not serve as *definitions* of religion. I think it is enough for a religion to be treated as a religion, if it meets the following requirements in a mutually complementary way: (1) It should have a philosophy (– not necessarily a singular one) or, more accurately, metaphysics, which deals with pursuit of Truth, – Truth as found or experienced by the savants of the religion, its different expressions, including day-to- day life. This metaphysics would also go into basic but abstract questions like what is Being, what is Knowing, the relations between the Truth, the phenomenal Universe and human beings. Gandhi asserted that Truth is God, and there is no God other than Truth. Metaphysics is intermeshed with Theology. Theistic religions have a belief in God, personal or impersonal, or both, and also in related beliefs. (2) It should have moral philosophy to guide its followers in day-to-day conduct, not only towards other persons, but also towards one's own self. (3) It should show a way of Realisation of Truth, of transcending the day-to-day struggle of life and thus achieving liberation, or salvation – either in this world itself or the other world after death, or both. In other words, it should explain how to do '*Sadhana*' as we call it in Hinduism. All major religions including Hinduism meet these requirements. The subsequent Chapters in the first part of this book explain how Hinduism meets these requirements. In the process, the question of 'What is Hinduism' is answered. The first Part also has a chapter on *what is not Hinduism*, and takes up the issue of why Hinduism is not Brahminism, and why it is not Caste system either.

2. WHy gANDHIAN PeRSPecTIve?

This book views Hinduism from a Gandhian perspective, but is not confined to what he said or wrote. It is his *perspective* which is used basically. What characterises Gandhian way of looking at Hinduism is to take it as a dynamic, rational, tolerant, liberal, cosmopolitan, humane, compassionate, egalitarian and democratic faith, given to the pursuit of Truth and Non-violence both in conviction and practice. Such a perspective does not view religion as cast in a static or rigid mould defined by given scriptures and customs, but treats it as a living, vibrant force. Even religions coming from a given founder and based on a given scripture cannot afford to be static in their character. Gandhi refused to see religions, particularly Hinduism, as rigid. This is not to question the relevance of scriptures and the teachings of founders and path makers of religions; nor is it to treat the teachings of scriptures as relative or symbolic, having only heritage value. They certainly have continuing relevance, which Gandhi willingly acknowledged and insisted on reciting portions of scriptures of different religions during prayer meetings, so that we continue to remember their teachings and get inspiration from them to lead a moral life. What he objected to was a fanatical acceptance of literal meaning of all that is said in scriptures, and insisted on applying one's reasoning and taking in to account modern humanist and democratic values in interpreting them. He asserted:

> "*Every formula of every religion has, in this age of reason, to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for a universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world*".
>
> — MK Gandhi (*Young India*, 26 February, 1929, p.74)

Gandhi is supported by no less authority than the Gita in this respect. It says, '*Vimarshyetad asheshena yathecchasi tatha kuru*' (XVIII.63), which means: 'Critically and fully think over this [what all was said] and then do what you want to do'. The *Mahabharata*, of which the Gita is a part, reflects what Gandhi believed, practised and preached, when it says: "Regard all religious faiths with reverence and ponder over their teachings, but do not surrender your own judgement' (in *Shantiparva*; as quoted in Madan ed. 1992: vii). Gandhi respected the scriptures of all religions, but did not consider them as infallible or as exclusive repository of truth. He did not contest their divine revelation, but observed that they were after all revealed to the human media – however high and exalted – and therefore handed down to us, and so can give only a partial, fragmented view of the truth, and are, thus, not infallible.

But Gandhi would not rely *only* on reasoning either. He sought a creative and constructive balance between reason and faith, both to solve life's problems and for spiritual guidance. Life would be very difficult if we exclude faith altogether and insist on applying verification and reasoning at every step. Gandhi was a rationalist among believers, and a believer among rationalists. He taught respecting religions in so far as they preached basic moral values, in which we ought to have faith. But we need reasoning in interpreting and applying these moral tenets, which can conflict with each other at times and create ethical dilemmas. In this situation, it helps in distinguishing between what is basic and what is only instrumental and hence relative. If there is a conflict between what is only of instrumental value and what is basic, the basic values would prevail.[6] Gandhi gave a simple test to come out of ethical dilemmas: Do I have my own axe to grind in this task? Am I being selfish?

In spite of his love and admiration for Hinduism, Gandhi was unsparing in his criticism and condemnation of the system of untouchability in the Hindu society. When some orthodox scholars pointed out to textual support for this practice, he was clear in denouncing such parts of the scriptures that supported it. He even said that he would renounce the Hindu faith itself, if he found that it supported this practice, but clarified that he believed that there is no support for untouchability in the Hindu religion. His opposition to untouchability was not so much based on sympathy or compassion, as on justice and the right to dignity of the oppressed. There was no basic conflict between Gandhi and Dr BR Ambedkar as far as the issue of untouchability was concerned. In a Gandhian perspective, it is possible to identify and determine those tenets of a religion which, even if not followed, even if consciously flouted, there would be no harm to its basic character. There could be such parts in the scriptures of other religions too which flout basic values of respect for human dignity, democracy and equity, which, therefore, could be consciously disregarded, without harm to the basic essence of these religions. It is possible that at certain times and in certain circumstances, certain practices were adopted as instrumentally useful, such as confining women to the safety of homes in periods of violence and insecurity. Such practices cannot, however, be held to be sacrosanct and universally valid, as they conflict with other basic values. As for the practice of untouchability, there was no moral justification for it at any time and could not have had the support of any genuine religious scripture. The customs that supported it were and are absolutely immoral and needed to be rectified before further harm was done. Gandhi was clear also in condemning the hierarchical and inegalitarian

features of the caste system in the Hindu Society and strove hard to give dignity to the lowly, exploited and the meek all his life.

Gandhi thought over a lot about how to resolve conflicts between the teachings of scriptures and the contemporary notions of democracy, justice, fairness, equality and dignity of all human beings. In any moral dilemma, he relied on unbiased and unselfish reasoning and his "Inner Voice". By this he did not mean that the rules of ethical conduct could be left to individual convenience and caprice. He believed that anyone can tune in to the inner voice by shedding egoism and selfishness. Gandhi was really more concerned with ethics and pure spirituality than with religion in a narrow sense of the term. His perspective, because of its undogmatic and liberating potential even in the mundane world, transcended religion. But he did not decry religion in general, or any specific religion for that matter, because he was convinced of the powerful potential of religion to inspire and sustain moral conduct.

Non-violence (*ahimsa*) of Hinduism in Gandhian perspective was not just a passive concept of avoiding violence; in fact, it required its practitioner to be socially engaged, proactively kind and caring. An important aspect of the Gandhian perspective thus is its emphasis on selfless social service. For Gandhiji, Truth or God was not something to be sought on some desolate and distant mountain peak, but to be sought only through removing the sorrow of others, empowering them in the process. Many others in the modern phase of Hinduism shared his views; nevertheless Gandhi was the most distinguished. He did even more. Even as he believed in non-violence as a basic value to be followed for its own sake, he also saw its potential to be used as the means of fighting injustice and oppression. JB Kripalani, a close follower and co-worker of Gandhi, tells Fred Blum when interviewed: "There are two kinds of non-violence. One is the non-violence of Christ. It has no social implication, it is for the salvation of the soul. … What distinguishes Gandhiji is that he made non-violence as an instrument for correcting political, social and economic wrongs." (see Thakkar and Mehta 2011:75). Gandhi's distinctive contribution was to initiate and sustain constructive social and political change on a large scale, to revolutionize thinking among millions not only in India but also outside, and empowering them. His pro-active non-violence had a liberating potential, and enabled not only himself to find truth but also many others. When he was in South Africa, he recognised his life's mission – to work for the oppressed and the deprived and end their oppression through a non-violent struggle (*satyagraha*), with no ill will against the oppressors. He could easily see the similarity in apartheid in South Africa and untouchability in India and strove to end both. He derived inspiration for selfless service as much from Christianity and Islam, as from Hinduism and Jainism. He saw in this the very core of religion and true spirituality. Indian religions, including Hinduism, have a long tradition of, and scriptural backing to selfless service which Gandhi rediscovered.

This makes the Gandhian perspective socially engaged and explicitly so. He did not look upon Hinduism, or any religion, as a bundle of rituals and metaphysical texts. A religion has to be lived in a way that brings out our love, compassion, and altruistic nature to the fore. It has to make us socially engaged to eradicate poverty, hunger, ill health, illiteracy and ignorance in the society at large. It is not enough to meditate in isolation and attain individual liberation. It is more important to selflessly strive for the uplift of our society and help the needy.

The relevance of the Gandhian perspective becomes conspicuous in interrelations between different faiths or religions. He insisted upon mutual respect and understanding and not mere tolerance. He admitted that each religion had a key to the understanding of Truth, and it is erroneous and even harmful to make comparisons and claim superiority of particular religions. No religion has a monopoly over God or salvation. He therefore was a bitter critic of proselytisation and conversions, which only spoil mutual trust and respect and create bitterness. While he deplored conversions, he welcomed convergence, though he ruled out any idea of a universal religion common to all as the end product of such a convergence process. Separate religious identities would remain and even be cherished, but as Amartya Sen (2006) said, religious identity is only one of the many identities of a person, and we should not allow this one identity to obliterate all other identities and even the idea of a common human identity. Sen's advice is entirely consistent with the Gandhian perspective on religion.

The Gandhian perspective on Hinduism is not his innovation or invention. This is so in all its aspects – its emphasis on reasoning combined creatively and constructively with faith, on openness to fresh thoughts and view points, on ethics of Truth and Non-violence as the core of Hinduism, on mutual respect between religions, on being socially engaged, and on the dignity of each individual human being. It is Hinduism which imparted these values to his perspective, and it is through this perspective that he viewed Hinduism. It was an utterly mutual relation. As Fischer observes, 'Gandhi's intellectual receptivity and flexibility are characteristics of the Hindu mind' (1998: 427). Gandhi was a chip of the old block of Hinduism. It is not possible to understand Gandhi without his Hinduism; nor is it possible to really understand Hinduism without a Gandhian perspective.

3. Is Religion Necessary?

Religion had a sway over man almost since the beginning of civilisation everywhere. It pervaded almost all the spheres of man's life – food, marriage, social relations, dress code, education, entertainment and polity. In the process, it also became too powerful and even tyrannical. Though, as Swami Vivekananda observed, religion raised the brute to the status of a human being, the reverse also took place. Heinous brutalities took place in the name of religion consciously and deliberately. – flaying human beings alive, burning people alive, unjustified incarceration, blinding and maiming. Europe during its 'Dark Ages' before the Enlightenment Era, had so many of these cruelties routinely perpetrated in blind belief that questioning religious dogmas became an important task of the thinkers who led the Englighenment Era. These cruelties were perpetrated on all who dared to differ, particularly the scientists who came up with new findings and perspectives. Hatred of people following other religions provided another alibi for cruelties against the so-called heathens or infidels. Though oppression of other faiths and violent resistance to new ways of thinking was not a conspicuous feature of ancient India, Hindu society (if not Hinduism) cannot escape from blame in regard to at least discrimination against *Shudras* and untouchables. Thus, ultimately, the question of whether religion is necessary, or an evil best avoided, depends much on what we mean and imply by religion.

It was against this background of the Dark Ages when blind religious belief dominated, that Immanuel Kant, eminent philosopher of the 18th Century and a leader of Enlightenment, gave the clarion call to people to dare to think for themselves (*Sapare Aude!*). The Enlightenment Era ushered

in the age of modernisation and stimulated new thinking on rationalism and secular humanism, which did not need – at least as claimed – religion to make human beings morally aware and sensitive. Religion had always been thought to be the fountainhead of moral values for humanity, but now religion seemed to be a very mixed bag turning out to be more a factor of hatred and sadism than peace. It was, therefore, thought that it was not needed to keep man moral. Secular humanism could do it without the evils which accompanied religion. Rational Humanism asserted that morality was derived from human experience and was meant for human survival and progress and not sourced from God or religion. It was, therefore, hoped that rationalism and secularism would take the place of religion henceforth and guide the affairs of human beings. Jurgen Habermas argued that three developments reduced the relevance and influence of religion: "First, the progress in science and technology made causal explanation possible [without recourse to metaphysical and theocentric world views]. Secondly, the churches and other religious organisations lost their control over law, politics, public welfare, education and science. Finally, the economic transformation led to higher levels of welfare and greater social security".[7]

Yet, religion almost everywhere has not only survived, but seems to have come back with a bang, not excluding public and political arena. TN Madan (2001: 12-22) gives detailed instances of how this 'the return of the sacred to the secular' took place. He refers to the Iranian Revolution, the Pope's contribution to the collapse of the Soviet Communism, the role of 'liberation theology' in Latin America and emergence of religious fundamentalist movements. Even countries which were not known to be very religious, such as Japan, Russia and China, have witnessed this return of the sacred. Madan notes that the midnight Christmas mass in St. Peter's Square in Rome is watched by millions of Christians as well as non-Christians all over the world, and there is hardly any decline in the number of people doing the annual Haj Piligrimage to Mecca. In India, there is a tremendous upsurge of masses of pilgrims attending the *Mahakumbha mela* at Prayag (named the 'greatest show on earth'), the Sabarimalai shrine in Kerala, Vaishnodevi shrine in Jammu, and the Tirupati temple. India is not alone or unique in this 'return of the sacred'.

Why did such resurgence of religion take place, in spite of the unprecedented progress in science and technology, which gave so much more power to human beings to control, manipulate and even maim nature? It seems obvious that all this progress in science and technology has only increased uncertainties, making man more insecure than before, and thus more prone to appeal to the unseen power for protection. In the Indian metropolitan cities, traffic congestion has increased so much that accidents are common. When a person goes for work in the morning, she or he is not sure to come back safe in one piece in the evening. While old types of epidemics may have declined, new illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and AIDS – more life-threatening than before
– have increased. Nuclear stockpiles and plants have added to these insecurities. Tensions both at workplace and home have aggravated to such an extent that they have made us more impatient and psychologically unstable. Road rages are frequent which often lead to physical violence in addition to verbal abuse. Advertisements, TV serials, films and fashions have aroused the erotic so much that cases of sexual assault and even rape have become more frequent. With increased science and technology, peace has become much more elusive on all fronts. It seems obvious again that science

and technology (including progress in psychology and psychiatry) have been of little help in taming the human mind and its temptations and weaknesses. There may be drugs and techniques to deal with depression and other psychological problems in a few 'abnormal' individual cases. But they provide no solution to treat problems of the mind of the 'normal' people whose number is very large. That is where religion seems to hold promise. All religions teach taming the mind and controlling emotions like anger, lust, jealousy and hatred. Patanjali's *Yogasutras* define yoga as '*Chitta-Vṛtti Nirodhah*' (control of the wayward tendency of the mind). A disciplined mind is a powerful asset; when it is not, it can also be a source of moral degradation and ruin for others and also one's own self. Religion has a rich potential to impart such discipline.

While science and technology have made our life comfortable, it is doubtful if they have led to or can lead to real and lasting happiness. Max Weber observed that science and its techniques do not raise the basic questions of 'whether life is worth living and when', and 'what shall we do and how shall we live?'[8] Hinduism and other religions have acknowledged that the purpose of life is to seek happiness, but happiness does not consist of merely personal want-satisfaction. Such narrow self-centred satiation may give some momentary happiness, but it only whets further desires and wants endlessly. The result is unhappiness and discontent rather than happiness. There is more happiness when one transcends self-centredness and identifies one's own happiness with the happiness of others. Sharing others' sorrows and joys, helping others to enhance their happiness adds meaning to one's own life. Such a person can overcome life's disappointments, frustrations and sorrows with greater ease than a self-centred discontented man. The former type of a person has a much more expanded Self than that of a narrow self-seeker. One does not have to renounce this world or life in this world for this purpose. Nor does one have to reject scientific progress and technological and economic advance. Even while living in this world, such a person can find inner contentment and peace through a disciplined and mature mind, and can contribute to making material progress such as in science, technology and economy much more meaningful, humane and sustainable.

The emphasis on inner contentment and peace by religions is quite likely to be misunderstood. Karl Marx, for example, termed religion as the opiate of the poor, making them accept their oppression and exploitation without any murmur or protest. However, religions, especially Hinduism, have never glorified involuntary poverty, nor have endorsed injustice and exploitation, though they may have lauded voluntary poverty, austerity and simple living. Swami Vivekananda went so far as to declare that teaching Vedanta to the poor and the hungry is a cruelty, a sin. A restraint on the wants of the rich on the one hand and giving generous help for the poor unassumingly on the other are the two mutually complementary ways by which religions, including Hinduism, have tried to tackle the problem of poverty and hunger. It may be conceded, however, that religions till at least the 20th century did not try to provoke the poor to rise against their oppressors, because they could not have endorsed violence even if it was against injustice. It was Gandhi's unique idea to use non- violence itself as the means to morally subdue the oppressors making them yield to the demands of the oppressed. This idea would have looked ridiculous to Marx, but Gandhi actually used it against the British Empire itself. It was his religious and moral fervour and commitment that lay behind his success. Gandhi was followed in this respect by several such attempts later, as for example by the Liberation Theology in Latin America which was also inspired by religion.

But can secular or atheistic humanism and rationalism do what Gandhi did? Humanism cares for the dignity of the human, emphasizes enterprise by the human, and deplores exploitation of man by man, oppression, injustice and discrimination. It stands for peace and condemns war as the means to settle disputes. If religion is the fountain-head of moral values, commitment of secular humanism to them is no less intense. Its atheism or agnosticism is by no means rejection of ethics. Where then is the necessity of religion – a mixed bag after all? Mahatma Gandhi had pondered over this question and thought of atheistic rationalism as the Sahara desert. For this purpose, he tried to distinguish true religion based on ethics from fanaticism and narrowness, and found that in the sheer ability to inspire moral commitment, religion scores over rationalism incomparably. By nature, the humans are selfish and without the inspiring role of religion, our reasoning is more likely to be confined to serving selfish ends rather than humanistic goals. These goals cannot be served if only a few enlightened persons believe in them. The large masses of people need to have such moral commitment on a sustained basis. Mere moral exhortations and preaching may not be of much help. Using an Indian adage, morals heard through one ear, go out of the other without registering in the brain! It is in this that religion can be a great inspiration. As we will see in the chapters that follow, morality and spiritual striving (_sadhana_) complement and reinforce each other, provided that religion is understood in its genuine sense without fanaticism. If secular humanists take up such a role for the masses, they are certainly welcome. They are equally welcome to fight superstition and harmful and inhuman practices based on mistaken understanding of religion. In such a task, the roles of true religion and secular humanism also would be complementary and mutually reinforcing. But if rationalism confines itself merely to attacking faith in God, and to deploring rituals and traditions found effective in inducing faith and moral commitment and accepted as being beneficial to humanity through experience of centuries, then such rationalism may well be socially counter-productive. It may only produce hypocrites and opportunists who have faith neither in God nor in moral commitments. Social change for the better comes through participation of the masses, for whom appeal to religion can be a powerful mobiliser, though we need to be cautious about any misuse of religion for political and ulterior purposes.

The ultimate justification for a place for religion lies in the fact that human beings have an inner urge to know what lies beyond and behind the visible and the finite, and to connect our lives to it, making them more meaningful. As Nandy (1988) says, we need a theory of life and a theory of transcendence to give meaning and purpose to our lives. This is what religion provides. It can, however, be argued that it is spirituality which plays this role, and not the organised or institutionalised religion. Organised religion divides humanity into 'us' and 'them', while spirituality does not. This is certainly a valid point, but it is important to remember that the purpose of religion is to facilitate spirituality, and since there are various paths to spirituality, there are various religions. True religion is essentially spiritual and humane, and not ritualised to the extent that external forms of worship obliterate spirituality and humanism. It is often the external forms of worship which divide people, but religious leaders should remember that external symbols and rituals of religion are only instruments and not _essentials_ of a religion. If there is any conflict between spirituality and

being humane on the one hand and religion or its external forms on the other, the latter should give way to the former. Any attempt to organise and institutionalise spirituality results, however, in the establishment of a religion. Philosophers like Jiddu Krishnamurthy endorsed spirituality and humane compassion, but not organised religion. His skepticism about the latter was so much that he urged pursuing spirituality individually without even relying on a Guru. But religion can have a place of its own so long as it is subservient to spirituality and humane compassion. Religion can even help spirituality in being socially engaged, and prevent it from being escapist. Religion when combined with politics, however, can become a dangerous cocktail; it drives out the best in religion and brings in the worst of politics. It crushes reasoning and enthrones fanaticism. It is neither true religion nor good politics. Religion is at its best only when away from politics.

Ultimately, the question of justification of religion zcannot be reduced to the issue of faith vis-à-vis reason. Though religion involves faith, it cannot be a blind, fanatical and unreasonable faith. For example, if a religion says that a person born in a certain community can have no human rights and no right to dignity and equal treatment just because of birth, it cannot be a true religion. Similarly if a religion says that all people not believing in it should either be converted or killed or deported or treated as second class citizens, it cannot be a true religion. Wrongs owing to such irrational and inhuman beliefs in religions cannot, however, be attributed to true religions which stand by reasonableness, humaneness and universally accepted moral values. Since all religions are mixed bags, there is need to separate the grain from the chaff, the genuine and reasonable from the false and irrational. Even faith cannot be devoid of reason, which was Gandhi's belief, as seen from the preceding section. But Gandhi also felt that 'attribution of omnipotence to reason' is as bad as idolatry. He said:

"I do not know a single rationalist who has never done anything in simple faith. … But we all know millions of human beings living their more or less orderly lives because of their child-like faith in the maker of us all. … I plead not for suppression of reason, but for due recognition of that in us which sanctions reason itself." (quoted in Fischer 1998: 308).

Notes To Chapter 1

1. Translation is by the author, from the original quoted in Kane 1990, Vol. V, Part II, p.1629, fn 2612.

2. We find the use of the word, 'Hindus', for the first time perhaps in *Tarikku'l Hind* or *Kitabul Hind* by Al-Biruni (973-1048CE), an Iranian by origin, who became well known as a mathematician and astronomer. He came to India in the wake of invasion by Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th Century. See Qeyamuddin Ahmad (2005).

3. There is written evidence to this in '*Hindu-Turk Samvad*' by the Marathi Sant, Eknath (1533-99 CE). See Wagle (1997: 139-41)

4. As quoted in Ferro-Luzzi (2001: 295), taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein (1976) – *Philosophical Investigations*, Tr. By GEM Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Para 66.

5. Ferro-Luzzi (2001) lists some features of Hinduism such as worshipping Rama, Krishna, Shiva and Ganesh and belief in *Karma*, *dharma* and *moksha*, and respect for (not necessarily adherence to) asceticism and vegetarianism as 'prototypical'. Her insistence on avoiding claims to essentiality of different criteria for defining Hinduism and absolute statements, is helpful in understanding Hinduism.

6. For example, code of ethics (*dharma*) common to all *varnas* was supposed to be basic and absolute. The separate *dharmas* applicable to respective *varnas* could be said to be relative. The whole system of *varnas* could be said to be of only instrumental value, in so far they contributed to the stability and sustenance of the *then* society. When the *varna dharma* conflicted with the basic values of compassion, dignity of all human beings, equity and equality, there could be no doubt that the basic values would prevail.

7. Jurgan Habermas's views in his book *Between Naturalism and Religion* (esp. the last chapter on 'Religion in the Public Sphere') as paraphrased by KN Panikkar (2009).

8. Weber said this quoting Leo Tolstoy. cf. Madan (2001: 10).

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2

Theology and Metaphysics

of Hinduism

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Purnamadah Purnamidam,
Purnat Purnamudachyate /
Purnasya Purnamadaya
Purnam evavashishyate //

(Invocation in the *Isha Upanishad*)

That [the Transcendental] is full; this [the world] is full.

The full comes out of the full.

Taking the full from the full, the full itself remains.

(The translation is by S Radhakrishnan, 1994, p.566; parentheses added.)

1. THE DIVINE AND THE WORLD

Theology and metaphysics are intimidating words, but I assure my readers that this is not the purpose of using them here. They are expressive and useful words in conveying broadly the scope of this Chapter. Theology means the study of the concept or concepts of the Divine in a given religion, and related religious beliefs and theories. It may not be a matter of *belief* or *faith* alone, but also of experience of the Divine. Hinduism stresses the experiential and intuitive aspects of religion, without, however, sparing the discursive aspects of advancing particular concepts. The great Acharyas of Hinduism were formidable debaters as well. Even while stressing experiential side of the concepts, they did not shy away from the spoken and the written word. Theology is deeply interrelated with metaphysics as in Hinduism, which is reflected in the present Chapter too. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, metaphysics is 'the branch of philosophy concerned with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being and knowing'. When we go deeper into the nature of being, we cannot help exploring its relation with the Divine. The term *Adhyatma* philosophy, in Hinduism,

includes in itself both theology and metaphysics, and hence could have served as the title of this chapter. But *Adhyatma* also includes *Sadhana*, ways of spiritual practice or pursuit, dealt with in the fourth chapter below. *Sadhana* follows from our understanding of *Adhyatma*, and therefore, the two are closely related. *Sadhana* also cannot be separated from dharma (fulfilling our moral responsibilities). But moral philosophy is so important, that the next chapter is devoted exclusively to it. The three are treated separately in respective chapters only for the convenience of presentation, and wherever necessary, their inter-relations will also be presented.

A problem in presenting the theology and metaphysics of Hinduism is that there are many schools of thought or philosophy within Hinduism, and we cannot say that a particular school represents the whole of Hinduism. The doctrinal differences between them have been bitterly debated, and it is difficult to strike a common ground which does justice to all schools. A full treatment of all philosophies requires not a book, but several volumes. A complete work on Indian philosophy, for example by S Radhakrishnan runs in to two bulky volumes (1996; first published 1923), and by Surendranath Dasgupta (1975; first published 1922) runs into five volumes. It may, therefore, appear as foolhardy to attempt to devote only a chapter here on this. What is attempted here is a simple introduction, without claiming either comprehensiveness or representativeness. The attempt may appear somewhat subjective, but I shall try to be fair to at least the main schools of philosophy by not ignoring them. Fortunately, the differences arise mainly in the theology and metaphysics parts of *Adhyatma* philosophy, and not in either *Sadhana* or discussions on dharma (moral philosophy). The common ground between different philosophies of Hinduism is thus fairly significant, which is what makes this book possible.

The invocation in the *Isha-Upanishad* quoted at the beginning of this chapter gives a deep insight into one of the important (but not popular) conceptualisations of the Divine in Hinduism and its relation with the physical universe. This is the *Advaita* (non-dual view). The Divine is viewed as *Purnam* – the Full, the Complete, the All, without a second (*Ekamevadvitiyam*, as said in *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.2.1). There is nothing else besides this. This is *Ekam*, the One Absolute. It includes the cosmos, and because it is from the Full, the Cosmos also is full. *Purnam* is the Fundamental Reality, Absolute Reality and other realities that are tried to be distinguished from It, are conditional, relative or secondary. Viewing the world as a separate reality would have diminished the absoluteness and fullness of the Brahman. The Brahman is the only ultimate and essential reality. That is how Shankaracharya (Shankara henceforth) called the world (*jagat*) as *mithya*, which is neither real nor unreal. Why it is neither real nor unreal becomes clear when we try to understand how the One became manifold or appears so. There can be different expressions and manifestations of the Brahman. The expressions are *bahudha* (manifold) but the basic, the fundamental substance is *Ekam*, the One. The phenomenal world is one of name and form – *nama* and *rupa*. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.14.1) asserts clearly
– *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* ('verily, all this world is the Brahman').

The Upanishad makes it further clear in the words of Uddalaka to his son, where he takes the examples of clay, gold and iron and their respective different forms (.6.1.4-6). The forms are also real, but the basic realities behind these forms in these examples are clay, gold and iron. (Radhakrishnan 1994: 391, 446-7). The examples are used in the Upanishad only to convey that similarly the world is a gross form of Brahman. Rambachan clarifies this further: 'What Shankara emphatically denies is that the world has a reality and existence independent of Brahman. The world derives its reality

from Brahman, whereas the reality of Brahman is independent and original' (Rambachan 2006: 77). The names and forms are neither false nor an illusion, but they do not constitute the essence. Swami Dayananda (2007) also gives other examples of the ocean, its waves and water to explain the Advaita view. Water, though one entity, takes three distinct forms – ice, liquid water and vapour. All the three are real, but they are only forms of water.

Interestingly, there are several accounts in different texts of how the cosmos or the world came into being. But none of them suggest that the world is false or illusory. For example, in two places of *Rgveda* (10.81.1 and 10.5.7), God is said to have brought the world out of himself and entered into it. In the famous *Purushasukta* of *Rgveda* (10.90), the world is said to have come out of the Purusha or the Primeval Being, using the allegory of a sacrifice. The *Taittiriya Brahmana* implies that God is both the material and efficient cause of the Universe. That is, the world was created out of God himself as his own part (material cause), and He created it out of his will and intelligence (efficient cause).Thus there are both accounts – the world as a creation resulting from the Divine will (as in the *Nasadiya Sukta* of *Rgveda*, x.129), and evolution of the world from God himself. (Harshananda 2008, Vol.I: 438). Though Shankara used the world *Maya* to indicate how the real nature of Brahman is projected upon and is thus hidden by the world of name and form, *maya* has been used by others to indicate the power of God by which He created or brought forth the world out of himself. The world is thus his manifestation. It is, therefore, important not to be misled by Shankara's choice of words, *mithya* and *maya*. The misunderstanding that *Advaita* views the world as false or illusion has led to serious criticisms of Hinduism (and even other Indian religions) that we are so other-worldly that we have no serious interest in the world, that we are therefore indifferent to poverty, hunger, illness and such other human deprivations, and that such a view of the world cannot provide any basis to any code of ethics or a theory of ethics.[1] As argued here, this criticism is not valid even for Advaita. But even if what the critics said were true of Advaita (which actually is not), such critics have unfairly assumed that the Advaita view is representative of the whole of Hinduism with all its various schools and even of all Indian religions at least in this respect (which again is not true).

Support to Advaita view of basic reality comes from an unexpected source – the Quantum physics, according to which the basic reality consists of particles (see Capra 1992). But does it mean, therefore, that the matter as we see is illusory and false? The table which I use for writing this is very real and of immense significance to me, though the reality behind it may be quanta. Similarly the world also may be a matter of form even if its basic essence is the Brahman. In the practical day-to-day world, called *vyavahara*, I cannot afford to ignore the world, because in such a world 'I' operate as a part of this world. Shankara acknowledges this and recognizes two forms of reality – *Vyavaharika Satya* (the reality of the practical world) and *Paramarthika Satya* (the ultimate reality). Where else but through this world can we realise the ultimate reality? Shankara was emphatic on the point that even if the world is a play or a drama of the Brahman, we have to play our role as morally responsible human beings. There is an anecdote from the life of Shankara about our practical roles. As is well known, he travelled extensively throughout the length and breadth of India to propagate his philosophy. In a forest he was passing through, he and his disciples spotted an elephant coming and they immediately took to their heels. Once they reached a place of safety, one of the disciples asked him in a lighter vein why he ran, wasn't the elephant *mithya* (false)? Shankara replied, 'So was my running' (*mama palayanam api mithya*)!

Though there is a separate chapter in the book on the moral philosophy of Hinduism, we may briefly note an ethical implication of the Advaita view here: since everything is divine, non-human beings and nature have to be treated with respect and dignity due to them. I have to treat others in the same way I would like others to treat me and wish well of others. I have to have faith that these wishes will be effective and materialize both for me and others.

Interestingly, in the very conceptualisation of the nature of this ultimate reality, there are moral dimensions. Though the Brahman is said to be beyond description and even *nirguna*, that is, beyond attributes, certain attributes have always been assigned to It. The Upanishads describe the Brahman as *Sat* (existence, Being), *Chit* (consciousness or pure awareness) and *Ananda* (Bliss, ecstasy, pure joy). These three are said to be not just attributes but they constitute the very essence of Brahman. There is also the concept of *Saguna* Brahman which becomes relevant particularly when in manifestation. Reality is often paradoxical and may not always be subject to the criterion of consistency at a mundane level. Thus Brahman is both *Nirguna* and *Saguna*. This dilemma comes out clearly in a very insightful and charming Marathi poem by Sant Jnaneshwara (also called Jnanadev) who started the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra in the 13th Century CE. It is given below both in the original and in translation.

Tuza saguna mhanu ki nirgunare, Saguna

nirguna eku Govindure/ Anumanena

Anumanena

Shruti 'Neti Neti' mhanati Govindure / Tuza

sthula mhanu ki Sukshma re, Sthula

sukshma eku Govindure /

Tuza drshya mhano ki adrshya re,

Drshya adrshya eku Govindure / Nivrtti

prasade Jnanadeva bole, Bapa

Rakhumadevivaru Vitthalure /

What shall I call you - Saguna or Nirguna?

Both Saguna and Nirguna Govinda are one and the same! With

lot of thought upon thought

Shruti said 'Not This, Not This', Oh Govinda ! What

shall I call you - Gross or Subtle?

Both Gross and Subtle Govinda are one and the same! What

shall I call you - Visible or Invisible?

Both Visible and Invisible Govinda are one and the same! Blessed

by Nivrtti, Jnanadeva says,

Our Father, the Spouse of Rakhumadevi,

Vitthala is the same!

Whatever you call Him, *Saguna* or *Nirguna*, Gross or Subtle, Visible or Invisible, Vitthala, the Supreme is the same. This is the conclusion of the mystic poet Jnanadeva. He was also a great philosopher and the author of *Jnaneshwari*, a Marathi version of the Gita, which is more of a poetic commentary than a mere translation. Jnaneshwara's conclusion about the Brahman being both *Nirguna* and *Saguna* is put in a different expression by Arvind Sharma. He takes the simile of H_2O which is in a sense *nirguna*, but becomes *saguna* once it takes the form of ice, water or vapour (Sharma – 2000: 3). The same Nirguna Brahman becomes a personal God too, and becomes Saguna Ishwara of the relative or dualistic world amenable to devotion and love from those who seek Him. Even Shankara saw no contradiction or inconsistency between his Advaita philosophy and his composition of stotras (verses of devotional praise) for several popular deities of Hinduism. These stotras by him are known for their lucid language and mellifluous poetry, and at the same time serve as stepping stones to the realisation of the Ultimate. There has, thus, been no difficulty in conceptualising the ultimate Nirguna Brahman as personal God or deity, an intervening God, who can bring peace, prosperity and happiness to devotees who propitiate Him.

The Brahman, is represented by the mystic sound of Om or Aum. It is believed that it was the primordial sound emanating from the Brahman, and was the first step towards His manifestation as cosmos or cosmic creation. Om is the symbol of vibrations of the primal energy which pervades the whole cosmos, including vibrations which may not be heard by the human ear (the ultrasonic and the subsonic). It is the symbol of His transcendence as well as immanence in the world. Om is a combination of three sounds – A, U and M, which reflect the Brahman's essence – *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. Hindus while conveying their deep respect and adoration for their respective favourite deities, invariably use Om as prefix to the deity's name, because they take their deity as the One Supreme. For example, *Om Namah Shivaya* (I bow to the Supreme – Lord Shiva), or, *Om Namo Vasudevaya* (I bow to the Supreme – Vasudeva), or *Om Namo Ganapataye* (I bow to the Supreme - Ganapati). This incidentally also shows that Hindus, even while worshipping many deities, take each of them to be the forms or versions of the One Supreme. It is thus misleading to call Hinduism as polytheistic in the Western sense of the term.

Om is called as Pranava, and referred to as 'It' or 'That' (*Tat*), rather than as 'He' or 'Him'. The Supreme is beyond gender. But it does not mean that the Hindu conception of the Supreme One is only the Primal Energy which brought forth the creation. The Supreme in the Hindu conception is not only Energy (*Shakti*), but also *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. The Supreme is pure consciousness, while physical energy is not considered to have a consciousness of itself. The Supreme, even in the aspect of Chit, is also pure intelligence, compassion and love for devotees (*Karunanidhi, Bhakta-vatsala*). Its love is pure bliss, *Ananda*. It is out of this supreme blissful love, that creation took place with the Divine permeating and manifesting in all life forms. That is why the Supreme can be worshipped not only as Father, but also as Mother, or even in animal forms! Animals, like humans, are also permeated by the Brahman. The Supreme is seen in all these forms and as also beyond them. Hinduism has male deities – Rama, Krishna, Shankara, Ganapati, Shanmukha, Ayyappa and so on. It has female deities too, especially in Village Hinduism or folk Hinduism. In Village Hinduism, goddesses greatly outnumber male gods to the extent that the latter are rare. These goddesses have both a community-wise and region-wise variation. They often have different roles, each goddess with a separate 'portfolio'. Goddess Maramma

protects her devotees from epidemics that used to take a heavy toll of both human and animal life in villages and impose immense economic deprivation as well. Goddess Kattamaisamma ensures that village tanks are full. Goddess Polimeramma guards the village from robbers and invaders. Kancha Ilaiah has listed several such village deities, whom he calls Dalit gods and goddesses. They have important economic or mundane roles to fulfill. They are intimately connected with this world and its suffering which they alleviate. Ilaiah observes that the female deities are tough and robust in Village religion (Ilaiah 1996: 90-101). The Tantra school, which is close to Village Hinduism, sees the Supreme as *both* male and female – Shiva and Shakti being its two dimensions. Hinduism gives freedom to its followers to conceptualise God in any form they like. God in Hinduism is not a jealous one who spites those who worship other gods. The Lord assures in the Gita that whatever form devotees seek to worship with dedication. He accepts their worship and grants their desires.[2] There is no question of any quarrel between Gods, because God is one and the same. It may be noted that the belief that all forms of God are of the same one God, need not necessarily mean acceptance of the *advaita* view that all or everything is One. Unity of God holds irrespective of whether this world is treated as separate from Him/Her or only as a manifestation of His/Her.

The *dvaita* view, for example, regards the cosmos as separate from God but as dependent on Him, and yet believes in the unity of God, even if worshipped in different *saguna* forms of the devotee's choice. Visible or invisible, he is *saguna*, an intervening personal God, accessible to each and every devotee. Among the qualities attributed to him are that he is all-powerful (*Sarva-shakta*), all-knowing (*Sarvajna*), and present everywhere (*Sarva-sthita*). He is also compassionate and merciful (*Karunamayi, Dayaghana*) to all irrespective of any distinctions and without discrimination, but is especially loving and lovable for His devotees (*Bhakta-vatsala*). He is also *Satyam* (Truth), *Shivam* (auspicious, good) and *Sundaram* (beautiful, charming, with magnetic personality). These epithets correspond to *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* referred to above. Satyam arises from the existence principle, *sat*, since Truth alone exists. *Chit* as consciousness or awareness can be interpreted in terms of three dimensions: existential consciousness, moral consciousness and aesthetic consciousness (which can appreciate *Sundaram* and leads to *Anandam*).

Interestingly, all these above mentioned virtues including those of power and strength, are sought among people themselves. All civilisations have been striving to inculcate what is true, good and beautiful since ancient times. Dialogues of Socrates with friends and disciple basically centred around questions of what constitutes truth, goodness and beauty.[3] Unfortunately we are not very certain about what constitutes these virtues, and even to the extent we know it, we are aware that we are not perfect in inculcating them. But if they are ideals to be followed, there should be some model where they are present in a perfect form, and thus they were sought in God. This is what Hinduism also did. This was an ingenious way of combining the ethical with the religious or spiritual. Our search for truth, goodness and source of beauty led inevitably to search for God. What is more, God was viewed as a repository of all these virtues, in harmony with each other. In the case of the human world, there can be discordance between them; a truth may not necessarily be good or beautiful. But there is no such discordance in God, since He is perfect in whom everything is reconciled. The attribution of perfection to God is an admission of our own yearning for perfection.

The significance of *Satyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram* as attributes of the Divine, for understanding any religion, particularly Hinduism, is great enough to justify some elaboration. **Satyam** is the first

attribute of the Divine, which means not only the existence principle, but also the moral principle. Gandhi defined Hinduism as constant search for truth.[4] Initially he used to say that God is truth, and search for God is search for truth and living a life of truth. Later he said Truth is God, and there is no other God, and everything other than Truth is illusion. The pursuit of truth is itself the pursuit of God. In his own words, "Instead of saying that God is truth, I say that Truth is God. …My conduct has been unconsciously based on that realisation. I have known God only as Truth. There was a time when I had doubt about the existence of God, but I never doubted the existence of Truth. This Truth is not something material but pure intelligence. It rules over the Universes; therefore, it is Ishwara (the Lord)".[5] He also believed that God in everyone means that every human being is capable of following truth, and thus he trusted every one. His trust, as Fischer observes, exalted ordinary human beings including illiterate peasants and workers (Fischer 1998: 374), and gave them such moral strength that shook a whole empire and won them freedom. Truth for Gandhi, was not just an abstraction, but an agenda for action. The search for truth meant that wherever there is untruth in the form of injustice and corruption, it must be fought so that the truth can reign.

Consistent with the culture of constantly seeking Truth, open, frank and free dialogues have played an important role in the development of Indian religions. The search for truth leads to tolerance and humility, and also therefore, to liberalism and pluralism. It also made Hinduism open to new streams of thought consistent with the principle of truth. As Gandhi said, the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all- embracing inclusiveness and whatever substance is there in any religion, is also found in Hinduism.[6]

The question of what is truth has bothered Indian thinkers right from the Vedic period. The concept of satyam is cognate with the concept of *rtam*. The term Rtam occurs in the *Rgveda* more often and also with multiple meanings depending on the context, - cosmic law behind the functioning of the physical universe, the moral law which makes for the smooth functioning of humanity and achieves welfare for all, and aesthetic law that lends beauty and harmony both to the world of nature and human beings. The term *satyam* was initially used in ontological or existential context and, in its ultimate and absolute sense, Truth and God were the same. Knowledge by itself was not Truth, but only a means of striving for Truth. Even the Vedas were aids to know Truth, but were not themselves Truth per se. With the passage of time, the term *satyam* began to be used more often than rtam and, in the process, acquired moral dimension too. While philosophically the existential aspect of *satyam* was stressed - derived from *sat* (being, existing), when it came to be applied to mundane matters the moral aspect was stressed. It does not mean that the moral aspect of truth is different from Truth as God, but only that the moral aspect is also part of the same Truth. As conflicts between values became apparent, the *Mahabharata* took a consequential or welfare view of ethics, or of what constituted moral truth. It becomes clear in the following verse in its *Shantiparva* (329-13):

> *Satyasya vachanam shreyah satyadapi hitam vadet /*
> *Yadbhutahitam atyantam etat satyam matam mama //*

(It is good to speak the truth; to speak what does good is still better. What is ultimately good for the welfare of all beings is what I consider as Truth.)

Though search for truth can be endless for humanity, Hinduism believes that for an individual it need not be so at least as far as the spiritual truth is concerned. Every person can realize truth intuitively,

which is also the goal of human existence. When this truth is realized, it is liberation (*mukti*) even while leading a normal life. What distinguishes human beings from animals is not only the observance of *dharma* (ethical code of conduct) by the former, but also that while a human being has this goal, animal life is mired in day-to-day struggle for survival. Swami Anandashram (1902-1966) expressed this goal in the following words:

> 'Our sages have held in the Upanishads that the emancipation of our soul lies in its realizing the ultimate truth of our existence. When we know the multiplicity of things as the final truth, we try to augment ourselves by the external possession of them; but when we know the Infinite Self as the final truth, then, through our union with it we realize the joy of our Soul. Our sages could not think of our surroundings as separate or inimical. Their view of truth did not emphasise the difference, but rather the unity of all things.' [7]

Any person, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or level of learning can attain this Truth and experience the joy that comes with it. The study of the Vedas is not indispenasble for it. When the untouchable saint poet of Maharashtra, Chokhamela (14th century), realised it, he expressed his experience in the following poem:

> '*Filled with joy is the whole self, I*
> *saw He Himself within me.*
> *Seeing ceased, Looking*
> *was erased,*
> *He filled my being with wonder*' [8]

Shivam means auspiciousness benevolence or goodness in the sense of promoting welfare. Goodness in the sense of moral integrity comes under the connotation of truth, but goodness in the sense of taking care of, nourishing and creating happiness comes under the attribute of *Shivam*. Once God takes such an attribute, She/He becomes a personal God, amenable to prayer and personal communication, merciful and loving. It is because of the loving nature, God is seen as Mother, for whom all living beings are children. Grace is another English equivalent close to *Shivam*. *Shivam* is not confined exclusively to Lord Shiva or Shankara, though both 'Shiva' and 'Shankara' mean the auspicious and the gracious one, who does good. *Shivam* is an attribute of God in every religion where there is a belief in personal God. He or She need not necessarily be visible in some form, but may also be formless or invisible. A personal God stimulates or inspires devotion and love, or Bhakti, to use the popular Sanskrit word. Whether such personal God is in one or many forms is entirely upto the devotee in Hinduism. It is the form which makes the devotee closest to the Divine that is selected, which thus is truly personal. The metaphor of *Rasalila* brings out the 'personal' aspect of Shivam clearly. In *Rasalila*, each *Gopi* (milkmaids who adore Krshna) feels she is physically close to her Lord who is dancing with her only.

When the Lord is so good, compassionate and merciful to us, we are also expected to reciprocate it, and one way of this reciprocation is for us also to be similarly good, compassionate and forgiving. If Satyam requires us to have truthfulness, Shivam requires us to be kind and considerate, and be

helpful. If Satyam asks us to be pure at heart, in deed and speech, Shivam asks us to be generous in action and friendly in mind and conduct. That is how we find and realise God in humanity and even in nature at large.

Sundaram is the third important dimension of God, which means Beauty. Because She/He is Beauty, She/He is also Bliss (*Anandam*). It is this beauty of the Divine that inspired Vedic Rshis and made them poets too. The following hymn from *Rgveda* (II. 13-7) illustrates the tribute paid to the Divine who is the source of beauty in nature:

> "*Thou who by Eternal Law hast spread about*
> *flowering and seed bearing plants,*
> *and streams of water;*
> *Thou who has generated the matchless lightning in*
> *the sky;*
> *Thou, Vast, encompassing vast realms, art a fit subject for our song*" [9]

There is another verse which looks upon God as a poet and the universe as his poem. Manifold forms (*pururupa*) of the beauty of nature and its elements are His poems.[10] God is seen as the Supreme artist who expressed himself in terms of the Universe for the mere joy of creation, just as a human artist would do. The natural elements like wind, fire and the Sun so fascinated the Vedic Rshis that they conceptualised them as deities or gods, and sang hymns in their praise though, at the same time, they were taken as the manifestation of the One (*Ekam*). Probably, the Vedic Rshis were the first in the world to see God as Beauty and to realise that an aesthetic experience was also an authentic spiritual experience. They also expressed their awe and appreciation in beautiful lyrical form - the first known poetry in the world literature. It is no surprise that Hindus developed music, dance, painting, sculpture and architecture as different ways of worship of the Divine Beauty. The language of music is probably more suitable to invoke divinity than the language of words in prose. That was why the Vedas put so much emphasis on music, as did the Bhakti movement through its devotional songs. Though secular art also had its place, especially in Hindustani Classical Music, most of the art forms were expressions of religious devotion. Hinduism thus encouraged music and other art forms quite liberally.[11]

The awe and appreciation for nature has also expressed itself in the form of nature worship, including worship of plants and animals. Nature or universe itself (including all its life forms) is not God in Hinduism but only a partial manifestation of God. God, according to Hinduism, is not only immanent in the universe, but also transcends it. God is not the same but greater than the universe. The universe shines because of Him, as is clear from a verse in the *Mundakopanishad* (II. 2-10): '*Tameva bhantamanubhati sarvam, tasya bhasa sarvamidam vibhati*.' (All shine by the reflection of His shining, and by His splendour, all the World is splendid).[12] As such, Hinduism is more sublime and complex than simple Pantheism. Hinduism does not have to disown either Pantheism or Paganism; they are a part of the rich tradition of Hinduism. "In the pagan vision, the gods, nature and mankind were bound together in sympathy" (Armstrong 1999: 41).[13] Though Hinduism transcends both Pantheism and Paganism, it involves respect to nature and to the cause for its conservation, living as close to nature as possible, opening the mind to subtle cosmic laws through yoga, and appreciating the oneness of

all sentient beings. *Prani-daya* (compassion for animals) and looking upon *nara* (human being) as a manifestation of *Narayana* (God) follow from this world-view. The so-called Hindu polytheism is essentially due to the diversity of nature, which is recognised as the several ways in which God manifests himself (*Rupam rupam pratirupo babhuva, Rgveda* 6.47.18). One can realise God as Beauty only through such a conceptualisation.

Nature is not only beautiful, but it can also be terrifying (*Ramya-bhayankara*, using Kannada poet Bendre's words). Human beings need nature to survive, but are also vulnerable to its fury. A Rgvedic hymn to the Sun God, while expressing awe and devotion, also prays to Him not to scorch the people with his overpowering heat. A hymn to Mother Earth (*Prthivi Sukta*) in the Atharva Veda, while praising her for her munificence, also prays to protect us from her anger (natural disasters). In the eleventh chapter of the Gita, the 'Cosmic Vision' of the Lord (Vishwarupa-darshana) terrifies Arjuna, for what Arjuna sees is not a gentle, compassionate vision of God, but of one who dissolves the Universe, whose flaming mouth swallows whole worlds from every side. A few Western scholars have termed it as highly problematic, finding it difficult to reconcile it with the Lord's concern for *lokasangraha* (welfare and maintenance of the world) expressed in the same Gita elsewhere (Nelson 2001: 146). But this cannot lead us to conclude that the Supreme Being is cruel. Just as plants, animals and human beings go through a cycle of birth, life and death, whole solar systems, galaxies and the Universe itself undergo a cycle of creation, sustenance and dissolution as per Hinduism. The Supreme looks after all these three aspects. Without this dynamics of creation, preservation and dissolution, it is difficult to conceive of the universe, and life-cycle itself. Though, according to popular or Puranic Hinduism, these aspects are looked after respectively by Brahma, Vishnu and Ishwara, philosophical Hinduism sees all the three of them as one God only. The point is that however much human beings may want the universe/nature to be only or exclusively compassionate and kind, all the three aspects of creation, preservation and destruction are a part of the same Divine process.

It is interesting, however, that Krshna of the same Gita who showed the terrifying spectacle of Vishwarupa to Arjuna is also a very popular deity - loved, adored and worshipped by Hindus (at least by most of them) and is looked upon as a manifestation of the Beauty of the Supreme Being. It is significant that Rama and Krshna are taken to be the most handsome and captivating, particularly the latter, and personification of the Beauty of the Supreme Being. Kabir, a Muslim weaver turned devotional poet, and accepted by Hindus as a saint, defined Rama as one in whom we can rejoice and have supreme enjoyment (based on the Sanskrit verb 'Rama', both 'a's pronounced as 'u' in 'cup'). Chaitanya and his followers and the present day ISKCON also look upon Krishna as an embodiment of love, beauty and bliss, who bestows infinite grace on his devotees. The *bhakti-marga* - the path of devotion - developed right from the *Rgveda* to the medieval Bhakti movement, which continued further on, has emphasised God as a source of supreme happiness both in this life and for liberation or bliss thereafter. God takes an intensely personal form here, loved and worshipped as a *sakha* (friend), father, mother, lover, guru, or simply as the Master.

Let us recall that attributes of God like *Satyam* and *Shivam* have also been looked upon as ethical values for inculcation amongst us. It holds in the case of *Sundaram* too. Creating beauty and joy in our lives means pursuit of God as *Sundaram*, subject of course to consistency with *Satyam* and *Shivam*. That is, we beautify our lives in a morally acceptable way and by doing good to others and

not by harming others. We have much avoidable ugliness in our lives, without even being aware of it. Indians are notorious for spitting and littering on the roads, breaking queues, noisy talking, and mindlessly polluting rivers. We do not even keep our temples and their surroundings clean and tidy. We have such a noble, inspiring and holistic conception of God, but we don't bring its implications in to our behaviour.

The conceptualisation of **God as Love** is typical of the *Bhakti-marga* (the path of devotion and love to God). God in *Bhakti-marga* transcends all the above concepts and is simply symbolised as love. This love is intensely personal and mutual and, at its highest level, is for its own sake without expectation of any material reward. The relation between devotee and God here is not one of a helpless devotee persuading a hard-to-please god to grant favours. Such a relation may be true at the initial level in *bhakti* till the devotee is sincere, but it grows itself to a higher stage where God Himself/Herself is devoted to the devotee in all compassion and love. Nirad C Chaudhuri observes:

"No Hindu god or goddess, except a minor or local goddess... in the Little Tradition, has been represented as pursuing any human being with the vindictiveness of Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite. Siva [Shiva] is the god of destruction in mythology, but in worship he is the god who guarantees welfare and safety, and is easily pleased. Kali, so terrifying in her image as killer of demons, is a mother full of love and mercy. What characterises the god-man relationship in Hinduism is benignity on one side and devotion on the other" (Chaudhuri 2003: 18).

More about the *Bhaktimarga* will be discussed in the chapter 4 on 'Sadhana' as one of the several paths to God realisation. The chapter 8 is about the Bhakti Movements which created a revolutionary phase of Hinduism, projecting religion as simply one of devotion to God, diminishing the significance of rituals and the priestly class in the society. As Bhakti was accessible to and possible for all, it opened to door to the masses as never before. Bhakti-marga added more attributes to God, as *Dinabandhu or Dinarakshaka* (Protector of the poor), or *Dinoddharaka* (Uplifter of the poor). Love of God also combined with humility, honesty and readiness to help others. Love of God meant love of all, making the devotee compassionate in disposition.

Let me overview different perceptions of God in Hinduism. Hinduism cheerfully permits all imaginable perceptions of God within its fold, found in different religions of the world. Its most sophisticated and highest perception achieved in its search for Truth is that of Ekam (the one) Brahman, who is both transcendental and immanent. Billington (2002: 63) translates the Brahman as 'the ground of being', a rather cumbersome phrase, but it indicates that the Brahman is the source of all being. The Brahman is *Purnam*; nothing can be added to it, and nothing subtracted. There is nothing else beside it. It is boundless, or infinite (Anantam). It is not void or *shunyam*, as sometimes wrongly interpreted. It can be felt or experienced but cannot be described. The search for God here is not outward, but inward. Even a prayer to God is more to invoke internal strength and potential, rather than to appeal to an external source, for ultimately the Self is the Brahman in the Advaita or monistic view. In this view, neither the self nor the world is separate from of the Brahman. (We shall discuss in the next section what is Self and how it is viewed differently by different schools in relation to the Divine).

Hinduism, including Advaita Vedanta, mercifully permits the Brahman to co-exist with other perceptions of God, including personal gods and deities. A believer has an earnest need to establish a personal relationship with the Supreme, and the concept of an impersonal Absolute is not convenient

here; it is not emotionally satisfying. The devotee wants a God whom he or she can love, and experience His/Her love in return. Thus Hinduism also has a monotheistic conception of God like Christianity and Islam, - a personal God called variously as *Ishwara* or *Bhagavan*. It can be perceived as formless (*Nirakara*), or as with some form (*Sakara*) but with attributes in either case – compassionate, responsive to prayers, and upholder of justice, apart from being omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. While worshipping or meditating upon, such a personal God is taken to be the same as the Brahman. There are personal gods in feminine form also – Durga or Shakti or Devi (Goddess of strength and power), Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (Goddess of learning, knowledge and arts).

Hinduism is 'ditheistic' too, a term used by Billington (2002:23) - not to be confused with Dvaita or dualistic philosophy in Hinduism. Ditheism in Hinduism consists in seeing God, whether personal or impersonal, as two principles rather than a single one - male and female, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* or Shiva and Shakti, corresponding to Yang and Yin in Taoism. It was the recognition of this ditheism which dominated *Tantra*, and led to the exploration of spiritual significance of sexuality. Though mainstream Hinduism has regarded this interest in sexuality as an aberration, ditheism is not an insignificant feature of Hinduism. *Lingam* is, for example, a symbol of union of Shiva and Shakti. Krishna is also normally worshipped together with Radha; Narayana or Vishnu with Lakshmi, and Rama with Sita, rather than alone in male form. Billington's ditheism is, however, in another context - God *vis-a-vis* Satan, characteristic of particularly Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. Popular Hinduism also has the concept of *rakshasas*, evil spirits and forces, one of God's numerous tasks being to destroy them. But in Hinduism, there is no concept of a single evil force corresponding to Satan constantly tempting humans to sin. Sin is seen more as a result of one's own ignorance.

Polytheism has been regarded almost as a defining characteristic of Hinduism in popular imagination, particularly in the west, but wrongly so. Seeing the enormous diversity in nature, a perception developed, no doubt, during the early Vedic period, that different gods controlled different aspects of nature, but a unity (*ekam*) behind this diversity was also perceived. Polytheism is more the result of liberalism in Hinduism, permitting its followers to worship God in any form they like. Thus, different people may have different images of God, and possibly some persons may like to have more than one image of God. Polytheism in Hinduism is also a reflection of the Hindu tendency to assimilate different traditions and customs, allowing at the same time continuation of their identity. Narasimha, Rama, Krshna, Tirumala (Venkatesha), Shiva, Ganapati, Murugan, Ayyappa and many forms of Devi were all probably local folk gods and goddesses who were assimilated into the mainstream of Hinduism and accepted by many more people than the original devotees of respective deities. Some of them may have been local heroes, eventually worshipped as *avatars* or gods. Hinduism thus became colourful and interesting, and drew many people in to its fold, though without any deliberate or self-conscious missionary zeal.

Hindus do not hesitate to crack jokes about their gods even while worshipping them, indicating a relaxed relationship between the human and the divine. A person harassed by bed bugs and unable to sleep has this to say:

Kamale Kamala shete Harah shete Himalaye/ Kshirabdhou
cha Harih shete manye matkuna shankaya //

(Lakshmi sleeps on the lotus, Shiva on the Himalayas, and Hari sl]eeps on the Milky Ocean, – I think, because they are all afraid of bed bugs!)

The Hindu *Puranas* even mention 330 million gods. It is clear from their account that these 'gods' hardly correspond to God as such, but rather to more evolved beings in the scale of evolution than humans. These gods often get into trouble with *rakshasas*, personifications of evil forces, and are described in *Puranas* as approaching Vishnu to solve their problems. Even Buddhism, regarded as atheistic, has concept of several gods. These gods, both in Hinduism and Buddhism, correspond to angels in Semitic religions.

Freedom to worship God in any form also led to idol worship. This was actually a post-Buddhist development, since *Vedas* and *Upanishads* did not have idol worship. As Karen Armstrong has observed, "Despite the bad press it has in the Bible, there is nothing wrong with idolatry *per se*: it only becomes objectionable or naive if the image of God, which has been constructed with such loving care, is confused with the ineffable reality to which it refers" (Armstrong 1999: 64). Idols or icons help in concentration and, to relate and communicate to personal God in a form the devotee likes. This is considered helpful particularly in *bhakti*, if not in *jnana* and *karma*, as pathways to God-realisation.

The tendency to have a number of images of God on the part of the same set of persons created what Max Muller has termed as 'henotheism' or 'kathenotheism'. Even if a person has several gods in mind, he worships one god at a time and, at that time, the worshipped God is the Supreme, others stepping back to make way for him or her, and wait for their turn with all civility! However, the real reason behind this is the conviction that in whatever form a person worships God, it reaches Him who is the One behind all forms and images. Polytheism in Hinduism is thus only an outward layer of diversity beyond which there is unity of Godhead, the ultimate or Supreme. Both idol worship and polytheism, which are interrelated, are only a stepping stone to greater and higher realisation.

A verse from *Shrimad-Bhagavatam* (1.2.11, as cited in Prabhupada 1983:75)) is of interest in this context:

> *Vadanti tat tatva-vidah tatvam yaj jnanam advayam / Brahmeti*
>
> *Paramatmeti Bhagavan iti shabdyate //*

> The Truth (Essence) is termed [variously] as *Brahman, Paramatman*, or as *Bhagavan*
> by those who know, but the Truth (*tatvam*) is the same One (*advayam*)'

The abstract Absolute can be perceived as *Paramatman* (Supreme Soul) or in a personalised form as *Bhagavan*,, worshipped either as formless or in image form.

Non-Hindus, however, may feel shocked at what they may consider as trivialisation or vulgarisation involved in image worship. Printing the images of deities on calendars and in advertisements leads invariably to littering and disposing off the pictures in ways that can hardly be called respectful and sacred. That is perhaps one of the reasons why Semitic religions and even Sikhism and Arya Samaj in India forbade idol worship. Image worship may be only a transition and a step to more serious forms of *sadhana* like contemplation and meditation. But the inherent risk of getting bogged down to idolatry, and worse still of trivializing the idols, is real. Hinduism has met the risk of profanity of idols and pictures of worship by first praying and inviting the deity being worshipped to invest its life

force or power in the idol, and at the end of worship saying goodbye to it through *visarjan pooja*. This procedure is strictly followed in all ritual worship meant to have a feel of the sacred and performed with ritual purity. Being busy with daily routine, most Hindus, however, do not have time for it. What they do is to bow before their favourite deity after morning bath, lighting an oil lamp, burning an incense stick, offering flowers, and reciting a *stotra* or two in prayer. Women do it again at dusk. In all this, only the idols or pictures installed for worship are considered sacred, but not all the pictures around in calendars and advertisements.

Even more serious risk in idol worship is viewing God as something external to us, instead of seeking Him within. In such a view, the source of strength is outside rather than within us. The Upanishadic tradition, particularly *Advaita Vedanta*, and yoga, however, have taken care of this by emphasising that idol worship at best is only a transitional or preparatory stage and God realisation is achieved when seeking is turned within. Idol worship is not at all mandatory or essential in Hinduism, and more advanced or serious seekers are encouraged to directly realise God within. But they do not frown upon or condemn idol worship, and realise its value in orienting us to the Divine.

Pantheism or animism in popular Hinduism is also a reflection of deeper realisation that God is immanent in the Universe and manifests Himself in various forms. Adoration and worship of elements of nature as deities has been an important feature of Hinduism, especially in the Vedic period. But they were all regarded either as subservient to or manifestation of the Supreme. Since Hinduism regards God as transcending the Universe, being greater than the Universe, it is misleading to define Hindu perception of God in terms of pantheism or animism.

A very interesting aspect of Hinduism is that it has permitted even atheism within its generous space. Whether *Advaita Vedanta* is regarded as atheism depends on how theism and atheism are defined. If theism is narrowly defined as belief only in a monotheist exclusive, external personal god, all the six major orthodox schools of Hindu Philosophy (*Shatdarshanas*) can be termed as atheist including even *Advaita*. But this would be too restrictive a view of theism. *Advaita Vedanta* is monistic rather than monotheist and believed in the impersonal Absolute, though it did not preclude faith in personal gods as a preparatory step to *Jnana* or Realisation. These schools were not concerned with a simple exclusive external personal god. Moreover, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* schools developed a logically argued secular philosophy, and even Yoga could be considered to be universal and secular as it did not need belief in a personal external god, though it also did not exclude those who have such belief. The general opinion about the six schools is that they are theist, explicitly or implicitly, and are, therefore, regarded as 'orthodox' (*astika*), in contrast to heterodox (*nastika*) schools. Leaving aside the six schools, there has been a scope for atheism in Hinduism. The most prominent of atheists were the followers of *Lokayata* propounded by Charvaka, who were rank materialists. We have more to say about the six orthodox schools and three heterodox schools in chapter 7. Though the mainstream of Hinduism has been theistic, it is important to remember that Hinduism also gave room for secular philosophy.

A question arises whether persons not believing in a personal intervening God could be called religious at all. Yes, says Billington (2002) if they are not rank materialists believing that the physical world is the end of everything. If we believe that there is something in us, which is more than purely physical, we can be religious. Buddhism and Jainism are religions, though atheistic. It is also not correct to presume that there can be no morality without believing in a personal, intervening, punishing

God. Buddhism and Jainism are no less moral than theistic Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. *Advaita Vedanta* also is no less moral than *Dvaita Vedanta*. There can be humanism and harmony even without faith in God or religion. On the contrary, narrow-minded views on religion and God (such as Christian God, Muslim God or Hindu God/s as separate from each other; or, salvation taken as possible only in one - their own - religion) have harmed the cause of world peace. Instead of compassion, such views have promoted cruelty. There is thus no case for believers in God or religion to feel superior and condemn non-believers.

2. THE SELF AND THE DIVINE

If the discussion in the preceding section seemed a bit abstruse, let me first summarise it briefly in a simple manner. There are at least three points of view of the Divine and Its relationship with the world. From the point of view of the Advaita (Monism) Vedanta, there is the Unity of All Existence, the Divine is *Purnam*, and there is nothing else beside It or before It or after It. The World is only a manifestation of the One Absolute Brahman, and this manifestation does not affect the Brahman a bit. It remains the same. The Supreme is immanent, and not merely transcendental. The whole cosmos is suffused with the Brahman. Once this is accepted, it is superfluous to add that it also means oneness of God (monotheism) and that viewed in whatever form, God is the same. In Vishisthadvaita (Qualified Monism), the world is a part of God; it is incorporated into God as a part of His. The world is controlled by God's will. The world is more real in this view than what is implied by treating it as only a manifestation. In the Dvaita (Dualism) philosophy, God and the world are separate from each other, neither having beginning or end, but the latter is completely dependent on God, subject to His control and its modifications by Him. But He is present everywhere in the World, and the world is very much real.

Now, where do the individual selves come in? What is the status of the individual Self? What is its relationship with the Divine? The answer is different in the three schools of Vedanta. In the case of the Advaita Vedanta, the One appears as many only through manifestation or *Maya*, and the individual self in its pure state unaffected by *Maya* is called *Atman*. At the micro or individual level, *Maya* becomes *Avidya* (ignorance or misunderstanding), and when the self is caught in the *Vyavaharik* (practical) world and identifies itself with body, it is called *Jiva*. When the misunderstanding is removed and the self realises its true and pure nature, it is the same as the Brahman itself in its essence as *Sachchidananda*. So, Atman is the same as the Brahman.

In the Vishishtadvaita view, the *jivas* are also parts or constituent elements in the Supreme, like droplets in the ocean, or sparks from fire. They do not have an independent existence. But they are endowed with consciousness of their own, and it is possible for them to realise their true nature as parts of the Divine, rather than as helpless entities trapped in *Sansara* (the mundane world) separated from God. Thus in both Advaita and Vishishtadvaita school, divinity of the self is accepted. In the Dvaita view, Jivas are different from God and also from the world as separate entities, but are entirely dependent upon and controlled by God. There are billions of them, and each Jiva is different from another Jiva, irrespective of whether the Jivas are of human beings or of animals. The Dvaita view of Jiva seems to correspond well with the Christian concept of the soul. Dvaita Vedanta speaks of five basic differences (*Bhedas*) – between God and the world, between God and soul, between the world and soul, between soul and soul, and between different constituents of the world. May it be noted that

only these five *bhedas* are recognised, and not any *bheda* between God and God say between Vishnu and Shiva. Thus the unity of Godhead is firmly recognised in all the schools of thought in Hinduism, though conceptualized and worshipped in different forms. But that is another matter.

It was perhaps because of the difficulty in comprehending the Advaita view, not being amenable to what can be called as common sense, and certainly not perceptible through the sense organs, its philosophers had to go to great lengths to explain and defend their *darshana* (school of philosophy). Two stories used for this purpose may be narrated here.

The first of these emphasises the importance of self-awareness. A group of ten men, wanted to cross a river on foot, which they carefully did. Since the flow of the stream was rather rapid, one of them decided to count all to see if anyone was left out. He counted up to nine and cried out – 'Oh! Someone is missing!'. By turn, each of them similarly counted and reached the same conclusion that really someone was missing. They became agitated and started crying loudly. A passer-by came and asked what the matter was. They told him. He understood the problem immediately. He lined them up and said he would give a slap on the bottom of each, and then each one should keep the count loudly. Surely enough, the last man shouted 'Ten!' The passerby then told them that the problem was that they forgot to count their own selves!

The second story, which was a favourite of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, goes a step further and emphasises the importance of identifying the true nature of our Self. A shepherd went to a forest with his sheep, and found a lioness dead after delivery, and a lion cub alive near her. He took the cub home and brought it up along with his sheep, giving it milk. The cub went out to graze like other sheep, thought of itself as a sheep, and even started eating leaves of plants. One day, a lion came there hunting, and all the sheep and the lion cub started running away. The lion was wonderstruck at seeing the lion cub among sheep and behaving like a sheep. It caught hold of the frightened cub, assured it no harm, and took it to a nearby pond to show its own reflection in the water. The lion told the cub
– 'you are a lion, not a sheep; realise who you really are'. Ramakrishna says that lion performed the role of a Guru, in making the lion cub aware of its own true self.

The Upanishads have gone to great lengths probing into the true nature of the Self. More than mere thinking or intellection, they embody the essence of truth experienced through deep meditations of the wise Rshis and their disciples. Rshis were not interested in polemics; they were only dedicated to the pursuit of truth. But the Upanishads do not reflect the thought and experience of any single seer. Since many seers were involved, and the Upanishads themselves were many (supposed to be 108 in number), they do not present a logically unified, coherent single view of the Truth. They are, therefore, amenable to various interpretations, as reflected in the different schools of philosophy. The three great Acharyas – Shankara, Ramanjua, and Madhva – developed their separate views, all claiming support from the Upanishads, the Brahmasutras (an aphoristic summary of the teaching of Upanishads said to be by Veda Vyasa or Badarayana) and the Bhagavadgita (the Gita). On the criterion of support from these philosophical works, one cannot therefore conclude which of the Acharyas was correct. It is left to the personal preference and aptitude of different *sadhakas* (seekers of God Realisation) and the stage of their spiritual pursuit, to see which of the approaches or viewpoints is most suitable and has the highest appeal to them.

There is, however, a fair degree of consensus among Indian philosophers that the Self is not Ego identified with the body, but is the spirit different from body, mind and even buddhi (intellect). My body is not the same now as it was when I was an infant; it grew into a child, a youth, an adult and then into a 'senior citizen'. The body has changed much but I have observed it all along as a different entity. Similarly I am not the same as my mind and its states. The favourite method of separating the self as consciousness (Chit), is to analyse the three common *avasthas* (states of mind) – *Jagṛta* (awake), *swapna* (dreaming) and *sushupti* (deep sleep). The Self experiences all the three states, is conscious of them and yet is distinct from them. When I wake up after a dreamless deep sleep, I say, 'Oh, I had a good sleep'. Though I may not be conscious of it during sleep, I was a *sakshi* (witness) to the fact that I slept well. Who is this *I*? 'I' is the consciousness with which everything is seen, heard, experienced and enjoyed. 'I' is the sakshi.[14]

The Self is analysed lucidly by Shankara in his *Tattva-Bodhah*, a translation of which with an equally lucid commentary by Swami Tejomayananda (2001) is available. An interesting part of this concerns the theory of *Panchakoshas* (Five Sheaths or layers), which are said to envelop the self (ibid: 52-66). The 'outer most' sheath if it can be so called (because, the Self penetrates or permeates all the sheaths) is the *Annamaya-kosha* or the 'Food Sheath', which consist of the body, or rather the gross body (*Sthula Sharira*). As we move inward, we come up with more subtle sheaths. The next to Annamaya- kosha, is the *Pranamaya-kosha* (the Life-Sheath) which animates the body and its sense organs. The body functions as an organism because of *Prana* (which literally means breath, and actually implies the life-force). Next comes the *Manomaya-kosha* (the mental sheath) or the mind. Mind is the seat of emotions like anger, jealousy, love and compassion and functions closely with and through the prior two sheaths. It is through the mind that the Self perceives the objects of the sense organs. If the mind is not on the sense organs, there is no perception even if, say, the object is before the open eyes. It is the Self (consciousness) which puts the mind and the senses on the objects in order to attentively see, hear etc. Real perception and its interpretation takes place through the next sheath, – the *Vijnanamaya- kosha*, the sheath of intellect and knowledge. Logical analysis is possible and knowledge is acquired because of this sheath. This sheath is also the seat of moral values and moral judgements. It is through this sheath that the right is distinguished from the wrong, the beautiful from the ugly, and the real from the unreal. Then comes the subtlest of all the sheaths – *Anandamaya-kosha*, the sheath of happiness, joy or bliss. The Self is stated to be beyond all the five *Koshas* including even the inner-most and the subtlest *Anandamaya-kosha*. It is not clear from Shankara's *Tattva-Bodha* why the Self is different from even the *Anandamaya-kosha*, because the Self is also said to be in its essence of the nature of *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. How is *Ananda* of the last *Kosha* is different from the *Ananda* of the Self? If the former is transient, derived from sense organs, then that happiness belongs to the mind, and not the Self. It is tempting to take *Anandamaya-kosha* itself as the Self, the core of the whole complex, endowed not only with *Ananda*, but also with *Sat* and *Chit*. But while the Self, irrespective of whether it is treated as Atman or Jiva, is taken to be immortal, the *Pancha-koshas* are not. They perish with the body. The *Ananda* (happiness) aspect of the last Kosha, therefore, should be taken to symbolise the inherent and undying quest for happiness in every living being, the quest to live and to enjoy.

This much of the nature of the Self can be said to be common to all the schools of philosophy in Hinduism. But Advaita goes further and makes the fantastic assertion that the Self is the Brahman itself, the Divine, the Ultimate, the Absolute. This needs some explanation. In the simplest possible terms, it only means that there is divinity in all of us, in all living beings and that God is not only transcendental but also immanent. Shankara explains in *Tattva-bodha* that it is like a woman who is searching for her golden necklace all over the house, only to find it finally on her own neck. Similarly, we search for God all over, but finally, we have to find Him in our own selves.

One way in which Shankara tries to establish the identity of the Self (Atman) with the Brahman is to explain that both have the same unique nature. The essence of both is the same, and they can't be different. The common essence of both the Atman and the Brahman is that they are immortal (*nitya*), beginningless (*anadi*), endless (*ananta*), *Sat, Chit, Ananda,* and *nirvikara* (changeless). Both shine by themselves (*Svayam Prakashamana*) and others get their light only through the Brahman at the cosmic level and through the Atman at the micro level. The Brahman is also stated by the Upanishads to be immanent, *ie*., as present in all and everywhere, not excluding the Jivas.[15] Therefore, even the body acquires sanctity. The Chhandogya Upanishad calls it the abode of the Brahman (*Brahmapuri*) (Chapter VIII .1.1). The Upanishad even explains how the term *Hrdayam* (heart) was coined: Hrdi ayam iti *hrdayam* (it is heart because He is present there) (Chapter VIII. 3.5). Shankara clarifies, however, that the identity of the Atman with the Brahman is not merely logical, but it can also be experienced through dedicated *Sadhana*.

What are the implications of this metaphysics, this theory of transcendence, for leading a meaningful life in this world, or for a theory of life? A theory which says that everything is one and only one may seem to have little significance for the diverse and manifold life in this world. Even a theory which treats an individual jiva as a drop in the ocean of the Divine, or a theory which holds that there are billions of jivas, all real, but all dependent on and controlled by the Divine, may seem to have little solace for an individual who wants to make his or her mark. And this surely was the basis of attack by Max Weber and others, who said that such a theory cannot even provide a basis for building a system of ethics or ethical code of conduct for humanity. However, this criticism is based on a very wrong understanding of the Indian philosophy, as we can see below.

3. THE SELF AND THE WORLD

This leads to the question of the relation between the Self and the world, – a question which logically follows the two questions dealt with in the preceding two sections about the relation between the Divine and the World, and the Self and the Divine. Let us be clear that in all the schools of metaphysics in Hinduism, except Advaita, the world is treated as absolutely real. Even in Advaita, as explained above, the world is a manifestation which is neither absolutely or basically real (*sat*) like the Brahman nor false (*asat*). As Shankara explains in *Atmabodha* (verse 8), the world and its diversity are like bangles and bracelets; they are made of gold, and the Brahman is the gold here (See Nikhilananda 1947: 133). The Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of the world, and the world made by his creative power (*maya*) and will (*ichchha*) cannot be false. It is not as real as the Brahman, since the world is not the ultimate reality, while the Brahman is. Since human beings through their selves operate in this world, they are part of this reality, and play their role.

The Advaita philosophy is sometimes blamed for neglecting the individual. The analogy of a drop in the ocean is misleading as a description of Advaita philosophy. The individual self is itself identified with the Brahman. Note the *Mahavakyas* from the Upanishads from which Shankara drew support: '*Soham*' (He is myself), '*Tat tvam asi*' (That art Thou), '*Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the Brahman). And so are all the individuals. It means, no one is inferior, and no one superior to others. An intuitive realization of this can be a great experience. It means that a person can feel tremendously confident. She or he need have no guilt complex of being a sinner because she or he is the Divine Self, no less. As the Vedas declare, we are the children of the Immortal ('*Amrtasya putrah*'). This is what Swami Vivekananda emphasised in his famous Chicago Address in 1893 (Vivekananda 2000: Vol.1:11). At times, we may feel like grains of sand on a vast beach, each by itself insignificant in the scheme of things. And yet, this grain of sand can hold the whole universe in its mind, conceptualise the Divine and make It its own. No other religion has given such tremendous self-confidence to individuals. What is presumed to be anti-individual, actually turns out to be a most potent tonic for them.

But this self-respect and self-confidence does not have to lead to arrogance. This is so for the simple reason that *all* are the children of the Immortal, and not just one person. It should therefore lead to equal respect for others too, no less than respect for one's own self. Humility (*vinaya*, *namrta*) is emphasised as a great virtue in Hindu ethics, which has to be cultivated as a necessary part of one's *sadhana* for self-realisation. It is when I have love and compassion for others, that my personality is enriched and my real self is realised. If not, I undermine my own personality. This is implicit in Advaita.

Advaita thus is fully capable of providing a logical and coherent basis for evolving an ethical system and guidance to individuals for leading a meaningful life even in their mundane world. Other schools of Indian philosophy too provide this basis and guidance, but I have given more attention to Advaita here because this has primarily been the favourite object of attack on Indian philosophy. Hinduism developed a theory of *Purusharthas*, with *Dharma* (moral obligation) as the integrating and commanding principle, acknowledging also the importance of earning wealth (*Artha*), of satisfying one's desires (*Kama*), of pursuing *Moksha* (liberation from rebirth), the last three being subject to Dharma. The next chapter deals with the moral philosophy of Hinduism which all schools of thought in Indian religions accept. We can see there that Hinduism did develop a robust system of ethics to help individuals lead a morally responsible life.

Hinduism did not underplay either the significance of this world or the enjoyment of the worldly pleasures, though it insisted that it be done in morally acceptable ways. The motto, following a Vedic prayer, was '*Jivema sharadah shatam*, *Nandama sharadah shatam*' (Let us live a hundred autumns; let us enjoy ourselves a hundred autumns). Nor did the Hindus ignore the significance of studying the mundane world and the natural laws governing its operation. They had practically a lead over the rest of the world in the development of health care, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy and chemistry, almost until the advent of the medieval age. Our ancestors would not have had the urge to develop the science of yoga, which is universally accepted as a valuable contribution of Hinduism, if they had believed in the doctrine of world negation and life denial as alleged by some western schools. Yoga is designed to tone up the whole body along with mind, and control several illnesses in addition to improving general health. Hindu physicians also developed a sophisticated system of medicine – Ayurveda, based both on herbs (*vanaushadhi*) and chemicals (*rasaushadhi*). Surgery was

also developed on a scientific basis. *Sushruta Samhita* refers to as many as 120 surgical instruments. The ancient text also gives instructions in pre-operative and post-operative care, including precautions against infections (Thakur 2001). To ignore the human body and its illnesses was not considered proper, because it is primarily through our body and when we are alive that we can move along the path of dharma and realise the Divine (*Shariramadyam khalu dharmasadhanam*). As to India's lead in developing other sciences of the 'mundane', Amartya Sen (2005: 28-29) has referred to Arya Bhatta's pioneering work completed as early as in 499 CE, which included '(*i*) an explanation of the lunar and solar eclipses in terms respectively of the earth's shadow on the moon and the moon's obscuring of the sun, … (*ii*) rejection of the standard view of an orbiting sun that went around the earth in favour of the diurnal motion of the earth, (*iii*) an identification of the force of gravity… and (*iv*) a proposal of the situational variability of the idea of 'up' and 'down' depending on where one is located on the globe.' Ancient Indians are credited with developing the concept of zero and decimal numerals, a breakthrough of fundamental significance, which paved the way for later advance in mathematics and sciences, and facilitated day-to-day business.

Even the economic system in India had reached a fairly sophisticated level, compared to the western economies at that time. Correspondingly, economic ideas had also become fairly sophisticated, as evidenced from several Hindu texts. Kautilaya's *Arthashastra* (4th Century BCE), *Shukra Nitisara*, and some of the *Dharma-Shastras* are sources of economic ideas that prevailed in the ancient period. Aiyangar (1934) has made use of such sources to explain ancient Indian economic thought. Ajit Dasgupta's *A History of India's Economic Thought* (1993) also deals with ancient Indian economic thought. Ancient Hindus developed a code of ethics for governance and administration, popularly referred to as *Rajadharma*. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the *Shanti-Parva* in the Mahabharata, besides several other texts, deal with this dharma. Thus practically every field of mundane world received attention for analysis.

India's economic backwardness and poverty have been attributed to the alleged world-denying nature of Indian philosophy. It should be noted however, that this backwardness developed during the colonial period and not earlier. Angus Maddison's monumental research under OECD has shown that between I and 1700 CE, India accounted for a quarter to one-third of the total World GDP, but began to decline sharply from 24.4 per cent in 1700 to 16.0 in 1820 CE, 7.5 per cent in 1913, and 4.2 per cent in 1950 (Maddison 2003: 261). The pre-British Indian economy would not have attained the diversity, complexity and the level of development it did, if most of its inhabitants had a negative attitude to creating wealth and had no interest in mundane matters. The next chapter on the moral philosophy of Hinduism briefly presents Hindu economic philosophy and shows how it has a strong ethical dimension also.

This leaves two more points of criticism. One of them relates to the law or the doctrine of karma which is alleged to deny freedom to individuals since their life is determined by their karma. The second relates to the social laws of the *varna* system (mistakenly identified with the caste system) which also is alleged to suppress the freedom of the individuals on the ground that their occupation and conduct is determined by birth. The next section deals with the law of karma, which is a distinguishing characteristic of all Indian religions, not of Hinduism alone. Chapter 5 below deals with the caste system and tries to remove some misunderstandings about it.

4. lAW Of KARMA — NOT fATAlISM

Karma means action. The Law of Karma applied to human situations is the law of action and reaction. A belief in the Law of Karma is common to all Indian religions including Buddhism and Jainism. The Law essentially belongs to the mundane world; it does not need heaven and hell for retributive justice. Justice is dispensed in this world only, through the Law of Karma. It is considered so inexorable and automatic that it does not need a belief in the presence of a ruling God to operate it. That is how it became a part of Buddhism and Jainism too. Vinoba Bhave is reported to have once wittily observed that Vishnu, though responsible for the management of the whole Universe, reclines totally relaxed on his cool bed of the giant serpent Shesha in the company of his consort Lakshmi, because he has decentralized all his administration through the Law of Karma! (as quoted in Ananthamurthy 1982).

The Law of Karma nevertheless requires a belief in soul and its transmigration, because it operates through several births or reincarnations of the soul, and the effect of karma, if it is not exhausted in this birth, extends into the next birth too. As C Rajagopalachari observes (1999: 63), 'The account is not closed by death, but carried forward from one birth to another'. Both Hinduism and Jainism share the belief in soul. Though Buddhism does not, it nevertheless believes in transmigration and reincarnation. Because Hinduism (at least the mainstream of it) believes in God, the Law of Karma has two special features in Hinduism which are not shared by the other two religions: the role of Grace of God in alleviating the effect of the Law of Karma (*karmaphala*), and the liberating role of *Karmayoga*, a valuable and unique contribution of Hinduism not only to the world of religions but also to the field of management and governance and to the principles of work ethic in general. The Law of Karma has universal application according to Hinduism (and also Jainism and Buddhism), and is not confined only to those who believe in it. Whether one believes in the law of gravitation or not, everyone is subject to it. The Law of Karma is supposed to be as inexorable in the ethical/spiritual world as the law of cause and effect, or to take a more specific example, the law of gravitation in the physical world.

In a perceptive essay, Arvind Sharma explains the Law of Karma:

> "To an Australian aborigine, the operation of the boomerang could well symbolise the operation of *Karma*. In other words, what you give is what you get; what you send out is what you receive back; the way you treat others is the way you get treated. One might protest that this is not the way the world is, where the virtuous suffer and the wicked prosper. In the face of this *immediate* fact, the doctrine of *Karma* asserts the *ultimately* just nature of the Universe. The expression 'ultimate' is important. We say, for instance, that justice prevails in the State of Quebec. Does it mean that no theft or robbery, no crime is committed in Quebec? Quite obviously crime is committed in Quebec. What it really means is that when crime is committed the criminals are apprehended and brought to book. The principle of justice implies not the absence of the violation of law but the principle of its ultimate assertion after a phase of its apparent lapse. So it is with *Karma*. *Karma* is payback." (Sharma 1996: 24).

The Law of Karma, thus, is not the same as fate or destiny determined by someone else. This is because karma is determined by one's own action, may be past actions. What is more, it is possible to determine our future destiny also by our own action in the present and move towards happiness.

The Law of Karma does not, strictly speaking, admit of fate, in the sense of caprice of God. It tells us that the present is our own creation and as for the future also, we determine it ourselves. And that is now the Law of Karma is a moral or ethical law rooted in this world. As Hiriyanna says: 'the doctrine presupposes the possibility of moral growth, and the conclusion to be drawn from it is that freedom is not merely compatible with, but actually demanded by it' (Hiriyanna 1999: 32). Thus, the Law of Karma does not curtail our freedom but urges us to use it to move towards our own moral and material good through right conduct or living according to dharma. As Sharma (1996: 30) says: 'The doctrine of Karma no more prevents us from acting freely than the law of gravitation prevents us from moving around freely'. That human beings have freedom of will is made clear in the Gita itself, which says, 'Reflecting critically over (whatever I said), you make your own decision' (XVIII.63). Free will is evident also in a popular verse from Gita: "A person should uplift oneself by own self (own effort); one should never destroy one's self; self is the (best) relative (friend) of self; and[16] self is also the (worst) enemy of self" (VI.5). Radhakrishnan observes here: "Even God acts with a peculiar delicacy in regard to[17] human beings. He woos our consent but never compels".

The question of whether human beings have freewill or not, has long bothered philosophers and religious thinkers. In his *Introduction to Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*, AC Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada says: "There is Ishvara which means the controller and there are *jivas* which are controlled. The living being is controlled in every respect, at least in his conditioned life" (Prabhupada 1985: 8). On the contrary, our preceding discussion points to free will. The two (apparently) opposite standpoints can be reconciled. If we have no freedom of will, the Law of Karma is meaningless. God cannot punish or even reward us for acts which are fully directed by Him on which we have no control at all. Puppets cannot come under the Law of Karma. But our freedom of will is not absolute, and so is our capacity to act. We are subject not only to laws of nature (or general laws of God) but also to the freedom of will of others and, therefore, to social conditioning. Freedom of will for everyone means that no given individual has absolute freedom. Our body-centric egos are like tethered animals, moving about freely within a limit set by the length of the rope. But the freedom given to us is large enough to realise our human goals. It is also within us to even enhance this freedom and stretch the limits imposed on us by either nature or society. And God is with us when we do it for morally justifiable ends. Morever, these limits are relevant only in the case of body-centric egos, according to Advaita Vedanta, but not to the real Self which is totally free.

Though we are bound by our karma, the Lord also guides us to reduce the burden of our karma (esp. Gita IV.17). The secret lies in understanding what action or deed we have to do as duty (karma as *kartavya*), how to have freedom from karma (*akarma*), and what forbidden action (*vikarma*) to avoid. The Gita teaches us that it is morally degrading not to do what is necessary to do. It is as sinful as doing a bad deed. Arjuna thought that inaction could save him from sin. But, 'No!' said the Lord. The moral responsibility for a deed - whether good or bad (and for not doing what is necessary to do) - is not that of the direct doer (or, non-doer) alone. It is shared equally by those who get the deed done, who suggest or inspire it, and also by those who directly or indirectly consent to it ('*Karta karayita chaiva prerakaschanumodakah/ sukrte dushkrte chaiva chatvari samabhaginah//*').

The traditional exponents of the Law of Karma make a distinction between *sanchita* karma (accumulated karma) and *prarabdha* karma (that part of accumulated karma which has begun to bear

fruit and has started operating like the arrow released from a bow). Taking Arvind Sharma's (1996) example of a smoker, a person smoking for the last five years has an accumulated effect on his lungs, which may produce cancer even if he stops smoking now. The arrow is already released. But, according to Hinduism at least, the effect of *prarabdha* karma can be alleviated or softened through appropriate present action, just as a person diagnosed with cancer may still reduce his pain, prolong his life, and even cure his cancer by proper treatment, even if he could not avoid cancer altogether.

According to JP Vaswani, the Law of Karma is not punitive but reformative. He says: 'The Law of karma does not wish to punish us for what we may have done in the past. The Law of karma wishes to reform us and so sends us experiences which may help us in our spiritual advancement. It puts us in an environment which may afford us opportunities for self-growth.' (2002-b: 19 & 41-42.)

This is where the role of grace of God becomes relevant which can be obtained through morally high conduct, selfless service to society, and devotion (*bhakti*). Though all are equal before the Law of Karma, there is still scope for remission of punishment but this depends on the discretion and grace of God who will judge one on the basis of *paschattapa* (repentance) and *prayaschitta* (corrective and expiatory action) undertaken by the individual to destroy sin (*papa*). Though Hindus believe in taking ritual baths in rivers to destroy their sins, it is not so much the act of taking bath as it is the determination to take corrective action and the decision never to repeat the sin and follow a morally right code of conduct, which have that effect. Ritual bath is only a symbol of such a determination. Hindu saint poets, especially in the medieval age, have made fun of persons who blindly and mechanically follow rituals to earn merit and destroy their sin.[18] Ritual baths and other such procedures prescribed in the *Shastras* can only be a symbolic and psychological help, to help the person in turning a new leaf, starting a new life. *Prayaschitta* rituals have no meaning and no effect in the absence of genuine repentance and a firm determination to follow high moral standards. Lord Krishna assures us that sincere devotion to God (or *bhakti*) can even help the wicked by purging them of evil thoughts and diverting them to the path of righteousness. He says: 'I promise, my devotee will never perish' (Gita IX.31). The concluding part of the Gita assures again that God will liberate all such persons from sin who completely surrender themselves to His Will (XVIII. 66). But such surrender is not possible in the absence of full devotion (*bhakti*), genuine repentance and the decision to honestly follow morally upright conduct. There can thus be no release or liberation for persons like Duryodhana who felt: ' *Janami dharmam, na cha me prvrttih / Janamyadharmam, na cha me nivrttih*' // ('I know what dharma is, but I have no inclination to it. I know what is against dharma, but I cannot refrain from it').[19]

The Gita shows another important way to liberation from the Law of Karma, at least from the present and future karma, if not from the *prarabdha-karma* (whose arrow is already released from the bow). This is the famous *Karmayoga*. It is intended to ensure that worldly life goes on smoothly on a dharmic path, and at the same time promises liberation from the bondage of the law of karma, giving a sense of spiritual dignity to the individual. The logic of *Karmayoga* is simple. Since desire induces attachment and attachment leads to the operation of the law of karma, the prescription is simply to snap the link between action and desire for fruits of action or attachment. It is the motive, the attitude of the mind, which binds and not the action or work itself. Gandhi called Karmayoga as *Anasakti-yoga*, the yoga of detachment or disinterestedness. But is it possible to work without taking interest in it? Such a work is bound to be shoddy, inefficient and mindless. Gandhi certainly did not mean this. The

Gita also makes it clear that work has to be performed with dedication and commitment (*yogasthah kuru karmani*), and with skill or efficiency (*Yogah karmasu koushalam*), but by renouncing attachment (*sangam tyaktva*). Obviously, the path of karmayoga needs more explanation, which is offered below in the chapter on *Sadhana*. Karma-yoga is a part of *Sadhana*, and therefore its discussion fits there.

The Gita also shows another way of liberation from the law of Karma, viz. *Jnana*, the path of knowledge of the Brahman or the ultimate Reality. The law of karma and rebirth are applicable only so long as a person with a body-centric ego is mentally immersed in the world and its attachments to objects of desire. Once this stage is transcended and identity of the self with the Brahman is realised, there is liberation from the law of karma, and there is no rebirth. If the path of knowledge is taken to mean renunciation of action, then karmayoga is announced as clearly superior between the two by the Gita (V.2). The Gita, however, also indicates that ideally the two should be combined and there need be no conflict between the two (V. 4 & 5). Experiencing divine immanence everywhere with immensely expanded consciousness, a jnani (knower) develops an attitude of compassion and empathy towards all, but so long as one is still in this relative world, one cannot avoid one's duty to the world. The Gita is very much concerned with this world itself, and is a guide on how one must live in it without being tainted by karma, and realise one's full potential. This is what inspired Aurobindo also to advocate Purna Yoga, integrating all the three paths. More about these three paths is covered in the chapter on *Sadhana*. This section is intended to serve as a bridge between theology and metaphysics of Hinduism on the one hand and moral philosophy and *Sadhana* of Hinduism on the other.

Gandhi was a firm believer in the Law of Karma. So much so that when Bihar was struck by a powerful earthquake in 1934, Gandhi declared that it was a punishment from God to caste Hindus for their practice of untouchability!! This was a very unkind observation considering that some fifteen thousand people died, three thousand square miles of land was devastated, and whole towns were laid flat in a matter of three minutes. Rabindranath Tagore, who had a considerable scientific temperament for a poet, wrote politely to Gandhi, asking why would God choose only Bihar for expressing His displeasure. He questioned how one could presume that natural catastrophes were harnessed to moral ends. Were all those who died sinners? How could God punish whole peoples? Tagore agreed, however, that God would not be pleased with the oppression of Harijans practised by caste Hindus. But Gandhi stuck to his point that God had a purpose in everything (see Payne 2005: 456).

The main point of this section is that a belief in the law of Karma and its operation has a great ethical strength and persuasive power. Had it been mere fatalism, it would not have had such power. Fatalism means that man is a puppet in the hands of an all-powerful tyrant like God, which cannot give any scope for discretion to man to do good karma and avoid bad karma. Fatalism and the Law of karma are not consistent with each other.

1. Among several such critics, a few may be mentioned: Max Weber (1930, 1958), Albert Schweitzer (1936), and KW Kapp (1963). For a reply to these criticisms, see Nadkarni (2011: 157-61).

2. The Gita's liberalism and catholicity is quite explicit. A few relevant verses are quoted here with translation:

    Ye Yatha mam prapadyante tan tathaiva bhajamyaham /

    Mama vartmanuvartante manushyah Partha sarvashah // (IV.11)

    In whatever way people try to reach me, I accept and reward them; OPartha (Arjuna), people can follow the path to me from all sides.

    Yo yo yamyam tanum bhaktah shraddhayarchitum ichchati / Tasya

    tasyachalam shraddham tameva vidadhamyaham // (VII.21)

    Whatever form devotees choose to worship with dedication and faith (*Shraddha*), I make that *Shraddha* steady.

    Sa taya Shraddhaya yuktah tasyaradhanam ihate /

    Labhate cha tatah kaman mayaiva vihitan hi tan // (VII.22)

    Infused with that *shraddha*, the devotee worships that form and gets his desires fulfilled, but it is Me alone who fulfills them.

3. Fortunately for humanity, Plato (390s - 347 BCE) has recorded most of these dialogues in his writings; see *Plato : Complete Works*, ed, by JM Cooper (1997), Indianapolis: Hackett. Some of these works like the *Republic* are available separately also. For a selection from Plato, see Cahn and Markie (eds) (1998): *Ethics - History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, New York: OUP, pp.3-115.

4. Gandhi wrote: "If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: Search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe even in God and still he may call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is relentless pursuit after truth." (*Young India* 24.4. 1924; reprinted in Gandhi, 1950: 4).

5. In a letter dated 21.3.1932 to Ashram Children, as in Gandhi (1987: 48).

6. Cf. Young India 17.9.1925, reprinted in Gandhi (1987: 37).

7. As reproduced in the *Chitrapur Sunbeam* X(2), Feb.2003, p.3.

8. As translated by Rohini Mokashi-Punekar (2002: 5). The original is

    Amhan ananda jhala amhan ananda jhala /

    Devochi dekhila dehamaji /

    Dekhane udalenpahane lapalen /

    Deven navala kelendehamaji //

9. The original, as given below, and the translation in the text taken from Bose (1999: 187):

    Yah pushpinischa prasavascha dharmanadhi dane vyavaniradharayah /

    Yaschasama ajano vidyuto diva ururuva abhitah sasyukthyah //

10. The part of the concerned verse is: '*Sa kavih kavyah pururupam dyouriva pushyati*'. It means: 'He, the poet, cherishes manifold forms by His poetic power, even as heaven' (Rgveda VIII. 4.5; original and tr. from Bose (1999: 190).

11. For a classic work on Indian aesthetics, see, Hiriyanna (2000-a), a collection of essays published earlier from 1919 to 1951 in different places; also, Edwin Gerow 'Indian Aesthetics: A Philosophical Survey' in Deutsch and Bontekoe (eds) (1997: 304-23).

12. The original and tr. from Bose (1999: 185). Bose here has a whole chapter on the 'Path of Splendour' where he cites as many as 77 verses from the Vedas alone in adoration of God through nature.

13. As Dan Brown has observed, it is a gross misconception to equate paganism with devil worship. Pagans, literally, were countryfolks who clung to nature worship. In Latin, *pagannus* means country dwellers (Brown 2003:60). But 'pagans' were not all simple country folk. They had many educated people and luminaries among them like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagorus and Epictetus (Armstrong 1999: 110).

14. There is an insightful explanation offered by the teacher to his pupils in *Aitareya Upanishad* (3.1):

    Koyam atma iti vayam upasmahe, katarah sa atma,

    Yena va pasyati, yena va shrunoti, yena va Gandham

    ajighrti, yena va vacham vyakaroti,

    Yena va svadu chashvadu cha vijanati

    It means 'Who is he whom we worship as the Self? Which one is the Self? He by whom one sees, or by whom one hears, or by whom one smells odours, or by whom one articulates speech, or by whom one discriminates the sweet and the unsweet'. (Tr. Radhakrishnan 1994: 523).There is a similar passage also in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (III.7.23) (ibid: 229-230).

15. For example, *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II.6) declares that 'He, having the world, entered it Himself' (*Tat Srstva tad-eva anupravishthat*); the *Chhandogya* Upanishad (vi.3.2) says that thus He entered the Jivas too as Atman (*anena jivenatmananupravishya* (both quoted in Chinmayananda 1981 reprinted 1994: 38 in the footnotes).

16. In the context of free will, Radhakrishnan (1998: 33) observes: 'When once God has granted us free will, does not stand aside leaving us to make or unmake ourselves. Whenever, by the abuse of freedom, unrighteousness increases and the world gets stuck in a rut, He creates Himself to lift the world from out of its rut and set it on new tracks.' Out of his love for us, he reincarnates Himself again and again as Gita promises us (The pertinent verse in the Gita is in IV.7).

17. Ibid., p.48. Radhakrishnan makes some further observations: 'It is our past karma that determines our ancestry, heredity and environment. But when we look from the standpoint of this life, we can say that we were not consulted about our nationality, race, parentage or social status. But subject to these limitations, we have freedom of choice. Life is like a game of bridge. We did not invent the game or design the cards. We did not frame the rules and we cannot control the dealing. The cards are dealt out to us, whether they be good or bad. To that extent, determinism rules. But we can play the game well or play it badly. A skillful player may have a poor hand and yet win the game. A bad player may have a good hand and yet make a mess of it. Our life is a mixture of necessity and freedom, chance and choice' Ibid, p.49.

18. In a devotional song in Kannada, Purandaradasa, considered as the father of Karnatak (Carnatic) classical music, says that the Lord can never like a person who merely bathes like a crow in water but cannot rid his mind of poisonous thoughts and jealousy. Cf. Song No.272 (beginning with '*Oppanayya Hari mechchanayya*') in Parthasarathy 2000a (I):136. Many other saint poets of Bhakti Movements have also made fun of meaningless rituals intended to wash away sins.

19. The original verse and the translation as in Daya Krishna (1996: 124 and 156). The source for the Sanskrit verse is the *Mahabharata*.

3

Moral Philosophy of Hinduism

'*A person who follows the path of dharma does not feel helpless.*'

— MK Gandhi (*Harijan-bandhu* 5 Nov 1933; CWMG 56:183)

1. MEETING SOME CRITICISMS

Before presenting the main theme of this chapter, let us meet some criticisms made against Hinduism, particularly about its capacity for evolving ethics or a moral philosophy. Though these criticisms may be based on a wrong understanding which ought to be cleared, we also have to remember that criticisms have a constructive role. They have helped in removing some of the morally repugnant excrescences like the practices of Sati and untouchability, and in rediscovering our root values which have universal acceptance. Criticism of the law of karma, for example, has helped us to rediscover that karma is not fate or fatalism, and is actually based on recognition of free will, and individual moral responsibility, as seen in the preceding chapter.

The charge that Indian religions, inclusive of Hinduism, are other-worldly, world-and-life negating, and hence cannot provide any basis for ethics, let alone economic development, has been dealt with in the preceding chapter. It was pointed out that even the Advaita school, which is just one of the many in India and which has been the main source for creating this misunderstanding, has duly emphasized our responsibilities to the world, and there was no question of any school of philosophy in any Indian religion, including Hinduism, ignoring the importance of ethical living, as will be seen from the remaining sections this chapter.

As a rejoinder to this, critics reply that Hinduism believes in moral relativism, following from its concept of the world being only relatively real, and that its ethics is for convenience, which therefore is not taken seriously. Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, in his Convocation Address at the University of Calcutta in 1905, called Hindus compulsive liars, having no sense of truth (Chatterjee 2005: 75). He was no scholar, but as Viceroy should have known better. Other Western scholars like Weber 1976; 1967), Schweitzer (1960) and Kapp (1963) were not as damaging, but shared the view

that Hindu ethics is relative. This criticism about relativity of ethics is more serious, and reply to it will take us beyond this section. We will have more to say on this in the rest of the chapter. At this point, we may note that all the religious thinkers and philosophers in India, including Shankara, accepted ethics as absolutely essential, not only in day-to-day activities of life, but also for *Sadhana*. There was no concession either in the former or latter. The following-verse from Niti-Shataka (Verse 81) Bhartrhari, devoted to spelling out a code of conduct for people, would hardly indicate moral relativism.

> *Nindantu niti nipunah yadi va stuvantu*
>
> *Lakshmi samavishatu gatchchatu va yathestham /*
>
> *Adyeva va maranamastu yugantare va Nyayatpathah*
>
> *pravichalanti padam na dhirah*!!

<div align="right">(Bhartrhari's Nitishataka, verse 81)</div>

(May scholars on ethics censure or praise; may the goddess of wealth come or go as per her wish; may death strike now or much later; the (morally) courageous do not deviate from the path of what is just even by a step.)

It may look strange that Bhartrhari, himself a scholar on ethics, should indicate some indifference to the opinion of scholars on ethics (in the first line of the verse). This may be because he knows the weakness of scholars, - they always get into disputations and debates and their opinions may differ. The morally courageous, suggests Bhartrhari, should rather rely on own conscience honestly and do what seems right. Honesty was always commended and hypocrisy condemned. One of the Subhashitas (a good saying) goes like this:

> *Yatha chittam tatha vachah, yatha vachastatha kriyah / Chitte*
>
> *vachi kriyayam cha sadhunam ekarupata //*

<div align="right">(original as quoted in Herur 2001: 75)</div>

(As in mind so in speech, as in speech so in deeds; good persons are the same in mind, speech and action.)

Conscientiousness leads to consistency and integrity. A person with moral integrity does not break down under the burden of difficulties. This is illustrated by the popular Hindu mythological story of Raja Harischandra, who did not mind giving up his kingdom, even leaving his wife and son and accepting the position of a watchman at a crematorium, all because he had to keep his promise and stick to truth. It may look like an improbable and extreme case even for illustrative purposes, but the popularity of the story which became a theme for several plays and films, shows the earnestness of Hinduism for absolute respect for moral principles. Gandhi writes in his autobiography that this story greatly influenced him. *Charucharya* (verse 13) declares, taking the example of Harischandra, that one should never transgress the limits of dharma even during a difficult phase of life ('*na tyajet dharma-maryadam api klesha-dasham shritah*', quoted in Herur (2001: 244). The *Mahabharata* (*Udyoga Parva* 40.12) also says the same thing: 'one should not abandon dharma under the influence of sexual desire, fear or

greed. Dharma is eternal, our pains and pleasures are only passing.' These quotations show clearly that ethics in Hinduism is not expediency, - accepted when convenient and rejected when not. Yet, there are ethical dilemmas when values themselves conflict, – a topic taken up later in this chapter.

Critics then reply: be it so, but the ethics you have in Hinduism is an assortment of 'do's and don'ts, and it does not constitute a moral philosophy. Even the six *Darshanas* gave scant attention to developing a theory of ethics, trying to theoretically or discursively differentiate the good from the bad, and the right from the wrong. The reason for alleging failure on the part of Hinduism in developing a moral philosophy is due to the fact that the method adopted by Hinduism and other Indian religions is not the same as the one adopted by the Western philosophy. As Matilal observed (See Ganeri 2002:42), the didactic and the narrative were fused together, so that the moral lesson is well received and remembered by the people. Hinduism used a wide variety of texts to impart moral lessons to people and to stimulate thinking about how to lead an ethical or dharmic life, - the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* (esp. the *Gita and Shantiparva*), the *Puranas*, story books like the *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha*, and the *Smrtis*. They also taught how to face ethical dilemmas, providing a lot of illustrations. The intended audience were not intellectuals alone, but essentially people at large. About the alleged neglect of ethics in the six *Darshanas*, Hindery observes:

> "… applied Hindu morality was so capably administered by law codes (*Dharamashastras*), epics, and other popular classics and oral traditions that philosophical systems could simply bypass the ethical task entirely. … The Indian philosophers need not have feared either de-emphasis or downright detraction of moral law and order, because morals were already adequately secured in the *Shastras*, rituals, dramas and hearts of people."

> (Hindery 1978:188)

There is, however, an interesting difference between the way the West and India, especially Hinduism, look at evil. The evil is not looked upon in Hinduism as incorrigible, because its source is not something like Satan or Devil who is irreconcilably opposed to God and goodness, but in *Avidya*. *Avidya* is ignorance, which gives rise to evil thoughts and action, and is amenable to removal through *vidya*. Vidya is right knowledge. This does not mean that there can be a compromise between good and evil. It only means that evil can be subject to correction or even removal, through imparting knowledge. There is thus hope even for an evil person to become good. That is how any concept of permanent damnation is not consistent with Vedanta or Hindu philosophy.

The Hindu ethical thought, though scattered in a variety of texts, did not fail to address theoretical issues like what is truth and what is not, what is *dharma* and what is not. This should become clear in the next two sections of this chapter. The fourth section deals with Hinduism's unique contribution to ethical theory, in the form of developing ethical grading. The fifth section here is concerned with virtue ethics, emphasised strongly by the *Sants* of the medieval age. The sixth section is addressed to human goals in Hinduism (*Purusharthas*) and Human values to be observed in the treatment of others. An attempt is also made here to present an outline of what could constitute an ethical economy based

on dharma. This leads to the eighth section on environmental ethics in Hinduism, which has universal relevance. We will also have to ultimately face the question of why, if ethics was indeed given so much attention, the Hindu society permitted such heinous practices like Sati, discrimination against women especially widows, and untouchability and other excesses of the hierarchical caste system. This leads us to the final section of the chapter on ethics in practice. The development of Hindu ethics through different stages in a roughly chronological order has been discussed by me elsewhere (Nadkarni 2011:218-39).

2. TRUTH AND NON-VIOIeNce

Gandhi considered truth and non-violence as the fundamental values of Hinduism. In saying this, he was extremely insightful. The foundation of Indian ethics, not Hindu ethics alone, can be said to be in the Vedas, and the Vedas were the first in the world to probe into what the *Rgveda* called *rtam*. Initially, rtam was seen in the cosmic order, by which both the physical and the social worlds were sustained. When a sceptic asked who has seen the god Indra, he was asked to see him in the working of the world itself, and in the beauty and order resulting from the working of the moral law – *rtam*. *Rtam* was also understood as righteousness and quickly developed into the concept of satyam or truth, with strong ethical implications. Sometimes, both the words were used simultaneously, as in the following *rk* from the *Rgveda* (X.190.1) and often interchangeably.

> Rtam cha satyam cha abhiddhat / Tapasah adhi ajayata//

> (Righteousness and Truth upsurged, kindled from Self-discipline.)

> (Tr. By Hattangdi 2002 : 127)

The *Rgveda* uses the word *Satyam* many times. For example:

Satya-savam Savitaram (V. 82.7) (God is the source of Truth. Ibid: 133).

Satyam vadan satya-karman (X.113.4) (Speak truthfully, and act truthfully. *Ibid*: 134)

Satyena uttabhita bhumih (X. 85.1) (The Earth is upheld by Truth. *Ibid*: 135).

Satyah Satyasya dadrshe purastat (VIII. 57.2) (On facing the truth, one's true nature reveals itself. Ibid 136).

Satyam it tat na tvavan anyah asti (Vl.30.4)(That is verily the Truth; there is nothing else like that. Ibid: 134)

The last aphorism above could be said to provide the Rgvedic support to Gandhi's assertion that Truth is God, and that Truth alone exists, nothing else; falsehood cannot survive. He explained that Satyam is derived from the word *sat* (which exists), which means *asat* (unreal) cannot exist. This is exactly what the Gita (II.16) says, 'Nasato vidyate bhavo nabhavo vidyate satah' ('The unreal never is. The Real never is not'. Tr.by Swami Swarupananda 1982: 37).

The importance of satyam in Hinduism made Gandhi to define Hinduism as relentless pursuit of truth. Pursuit of truth requires freedom of thought which Hinduism granted to its followers abundantly in a way which few other religions could match. The variety of concepts of God and His relationship

with the world and the Self, and the different schools of philosophy discussed in the preceding chapter make this clear. Max Weber, an otherwise trenchant critic of Hinduism, observed: "The freedom of thought in ancient India was so considerable as to find no parallel in the West before the most recent age" (quoted by Srinivas and Shah, 1968: 364).

Based on his deep understanding, Gandhi also thought that Truth was neither a mere metaphorical nor a mere epistemological concept, but was the very foundation of ethics. 'Truth is a sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles' (Gandhi 1927: xi). Making statements corresponding to thoughts as they exist or to events as they actually take place are surely a fundamental aspect of Truth, but the meaning of truth went beyond this for Gandhi and included moral truth as well. Its moral aspects cover non-violence, honesty, simplicity and straightforwardness, self-control, righteousness, equity and justice. Gandhi explained, therefore, that it is by following these values, not only individuals but also the society and even the world at large gain happiness. He said: 'The key to happiness lies in the worship of Truth, which is the giver of all things' (CWMG 79:426). Without truth, life would not be worth living. Life depends on mutual trust in a society, and in the absence of truthfulness, trust is lost, and life would be a continuously meaningless and even violent struggle.

The principle of nonviolence flows from the moral and consequential dimension of truth, namely from the definition that truth is what is conducive to the welfare and unity of life of all beings. The Mahabharata gives the above definition clearly: *Yad bhutahitam atyantam etat satyam matam mama* (*Shanti Parva* 329.13). Gandhi, therefore, asserted that Truth and Non-violence (*Ahimsa*) are two faces of the same coin. Hindu scriptures often mention the two together, like an eternal couple. For example, the Mahabharata declares that ahimsa is the highest form of truth ('*Ahimsa paramam satyam*' in *Anushasana Parva* 115. 23), and that *ahimsa*, which is also the highest dharma, is based on or established in truth ('*Ahimsa paramo dharmah sa cha satye pratishthitah'* in *Vana Parva* 207.74, quoted in Badrinath 2007: 116)). The principle of non-violence is so important in all Indian religions that the maxim, '*Ahimsa paramo dharmah*' (Ahimsa is the highest dharma) is common to all.[1] Non- violence does not mean mere avoidance of hurting others, which of course is an important principle. Patanjali's *Yogasutra* (2.35) says that enmity, hatred and anger should also go away. According to *Vishnu Purana* (1.18.32), violence can be caused in three ways – *Karmana manasa vacha* (by action, mind and speech) and all these are heinous. The concept of non-violence is also used as a positive word with connotations of compassion and love for others, doing good to others, and helping others, which is consistent with the welfare definition of *satyam*.

Hindu ethics is often considered as deontological (duty-oriented), for example, by Amartya Sen in his critique of the Gita (Sen 2009: 208-21). The same *Mahabharata*, of which the Gita is a part, indicates here a consequential approach to ethics as quoted above. The Gita itself does not advocate ignoring the consequences. It condemns action taken without regard to consequences as *tamasika*, that is, morally of the lowest kind (XVIII.25). The truth is, Hindu ethics integrates approaches. The right duty is itself based on expected consequences or welfare benefits. The approach to truth and goodness is holistic, rather than merely analytical or compartmental.[2] Consequences of one's actions on others, whether they will hurt, involving violating others rights, cannot thus be excluded from one's notion of what constitutes Satyam. However, action guided only by consequences, especially personal

consequences, disregarding one's moral duty and the good of the society at large, could mean sliding down into a relativist and opportunistic ethic of the end justifying means, which Gandhi deplored. To illustrate, let us say, a powerful minister's son was found by the police to have caused an accident by driving under the influence of alcohol, resulting in a fatality. Should the police pursue the case and do its duty, or, suppress it in collusion with the minister fearing the consequences of pursuing the case on the career of the young lad whom the minister adores? Clearly duty should prevail over personal consequences and considerations, which is what the Gita teaches. Moreover, outcomes may not always be under one's control; they are determined by several variables, all of which cannot be predicted. When consequences are uncertain, a sense of duty can be a more reliable guide, and that is where dharma enters (discussed in more detail in the next section). In spite of his emphasis on *ahimsa*, Gandhi stuck to the Hindu tradition of prioritising duty over rights, if and where conflicts arose between duty and rights. Ultimately, even rights cannot be operative unless translated into corresponding duties. But *dharma* or duty-centred ethic should itself be based on satya and *ahimsa*; otherwise it will not be *dharmic* (sanctioned by dharma or ethics).

A question arises whether *Satya* and *Ahimsa* are absolute values to be followed whatever be the circumstance. In theory, 'Yes!', as illustrated by the story of Raja Harischandra and the teaching of *Niti-Shataka* quoted in the preceding section ('*Nindantu…*'). However, following them as absolute values in practice is extremely difficult, if tried to be applied strictly in all circumstances. This is particularly so in the case of Ahimsa, because the texts recognise the fact that life depends on life (*jivo jivasya jivanam*). Even plants have life. A follower of *Ahimsa* as an absolute principle should then live only on fallen leaves and fruits, and on greens which have died by themselves. This has not been the principle followed in practice in any case. Accepting this fact of life does not have to make ethics relativist. If ethical principles are so suffocatingly strict and therefore hardly followed by anyone, they cannot serve as a dependable guide for action. Some thinkers have tried to suggest a way out of this for the principle of *Ahimsa* by arguing that we can, for the sake of survival, cause hurt to plants and animals which have no awareness or consciousness of the self. But how would humans know which living things have this awareness and which do not? Greens may *perhaps* be taken as not having such awareness, but, what about fish for example, let alone higher species like goats and cows? Where do we draw a line without being arbitrary?

Gandhi had thought over this problem and said *Satya* and *Ahimsa* have to be accepted as ideals to be followed as honestly as possible. He candidly admitted: "The world is not entirely governed by logic. Life itself involves some kind of violence and we have to choose the path of least violence" (*Harijan*, 28.9.1934, p.259). He was practical enough to admit a distinction between absolute and relative truth and non-violence. According to Douglas Allen, Gandhi avoided both 'unlimited relativism of values' and 'narrow intolerant absolutism' (2008: 49). Absolute values are like Euclid's line, Gandhi used to say, which has no breadth. But nobody can draw such a line. 'All the same, it is only by keeping the ideal in mind that we made progress in geometry. What is true here is true of every ideal' (Gandhi 1960: 261). The distinction between absolute and relative truth was not to defend expediency, but to emphasise honesty about the pursuit of our ideal, and also humility so that we do not become morally arrogant. No human being and no religion could lay claim to monopoly over truth. Truth emerges

not only out of dialogue and discussion, but also out of life's experiences, honesty in admitting our mistakes or wrongs, and accommodation of others' points of view. This was particularly important in conflict resolution through non-violence.

Gandhi put tremendous emphasis on the purity of means also in achieving an end, as this made it consistent with our pursuit of truth. Having a noble end was not enough to justify unfair means. The law of Karma makes unfair means yield unfair outcomes. Based on this faith in the organic unity between means and ends, he asserted that only *ahimsa* can bring about peace and justice ultimately. In insisting upon purity of means even in fighting oppression and exploitation, he was only reiterating the basic principles of Hindu ethics. That moral force can counter and win over brute force was recognised long back. A verse in the *Mahabharata* becomes relevant here;

> *Akrodhena jayet krodham, asadhum sadhuna jayet / Jayet*
>
> *kadaryam danena jayet satyena nanrtam //*

(*Udyoga Parva* 39.72, original quoted in Herur 2001: 225).

(Win over anger without anger, evil through goodness, meanness through generosity, and falsehood through truth.).

Gandhi, however, would not consider confronting violence by merely turning the other cheek. Non-violence meant seeing the wrong doer in the eye with courage and redressing the wrong without inflicting any injury on the other party (Bilimoria et al. eds. 2008: 335). Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, put such *ahimsa* into practice to end imperialism and colonialism, and even oppression within the country like the exploitation of peasants and factory labour, and proved that *satya* and *ahimsa* are not impractical ideals. However, he also admitted that there could be circumstances when it may not work, and violence might have to be used to counter greater violence and in self-defense where there is no alternative. Such cases may arise, for example, when a rapist makes a sexual assault, or when a suicide bomber is about to kill innocent people. Gandhi made it clear that meekly submitting to evil is cowardice, not *ahimsa*, and in his moral rating, he preferred *himsa* (violence) to cowardice.

Though a strict vegetarian himself and he propagated the virtues of vegetarianism, he did not insist that everybody be like him in this regard. If some people lived on eating meat all their life, and particularly if enough vegetarian food was difficult to come by in the regions where such people lived, Gandhi conceded their right to eat meat and survive. He clarified that his belief in the sacredness of sub-human life did not mean being kinder to this life in preference to human life (CWMG 84:231). All the same, he expected human beings to be kind and considerate both in principle and practice to subhuman life. He would approve meat eating if it is for survival, but not if it is for mere fancy or pleasure when good vegetarian food is available and affordable.

Gandhi deserves special attention wherever there is some discussion of truth and non-violence, and so it is in this book on Hinduism. He may not have been a scholar or expert on all Hindu scriptures. But more than any one who claims to be such or is deemed to be such an expert, Gandhi went deep into the very essence of Hindu ethics and brought it out from the morass of orthodoxy that had covered it. He gave a freshness to these two principles of truth and non-violence, – a freshness which was

authentically his own, though of course the two principles had since long been a part of the basics of Hinduism. But it was Gandhi who realised and discovered this essence, at a time when rules of caste purity and pollution were regarded in practice as Hinduism.

3. Dharma And Its Dilemmas

The concepts of *Rtam, Satyam* and *Dharma* are so deeply interrelated that they can even be used interchangeably. Yet, the emphasis of Dharma is more on actual conduct, while *Rtam* and *Satyam* are at the level of ideals or conceptualisation. When *satyam* is put to action, it becomes dharma. Thus dharma has *satyam* as its foundation. *Satyam* is seen also as a part of dharma, as in the following *shloka*:

> *Ahimsa satyam asteyam shaucham indriya-nigrahah / Danam*
> *damo daya shantih sarvesham dharma-sadhanam //*
>   (*Yajnavalkya Smriti* 1.122 as quoted in Herur 2001: 228)

(Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, cleanliness, control of the sense organs, charity, self-control, compassion and calmness are the means of dharma for all).

It is inculcating the above mentioned virtues which constitutes dharma, not merely performing rituals, or being religious. In the texts, the word dharma has hardly ever been used to indicate religion or even faith. The essence of dharma lies in ethical living, which comes both from good intentions based on compassion and knowledge of discrimination between good and bad, right and wrong, true and false. Betrand Russell put it very succinctly when he observed, "Good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge" (Russell 2009: 257). Even if dharma or morality is pursued for its own sake and not for any benefits, it never fails to shower its benefits, and these benefits are both individual and social. At a personal level, it imparts tremendous confidence in oneself, a sense of elation and freedom from guilt. Gandhi's observation quoted at the beginning of this chapter is pertinent here – a person following dharma never feels helpless. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira in the *Mahabharata* that dharma (in the sense of righteousness) is the truest and most dependable friend of human beings, protecting them not only during their life time but also after death. At the level of the society, even when most people follow dharma, if not all, the benefits are all the more.

To appreciate these benefits, imagine a society where everyone hates everyone else. In fact, a society as such would be impossible here, no family life can survive, and bringing up children will be impossible. Imagine again a society where everyone is a compulsive liar. None can trust another here, and no institutions, no business transactions would be possible. A society, a polity or an economy can run only on the basis of mutual trust. That is why, dharma is said to uphold and maintain the society. The Mahabharata succinctly brings out the significance of the role of dharma thus, and in the process defines it too:

> *Dharanat dharma ityahuh dharmo dharayate prajah / Yat*
> *syat dharana samyuktam sa dharma iti nischayah //*
>   (*Karnaparva* Ch.69, verse 58; as quoted in Herur 2001: 242).

(Dharma is so called, as it upholds (dharanat). It upholds people (society). Whatever has this (moral) quality of upholding, may be considered as dharma.)

All people do not consider the contribution of dharma in their daily lives, at the societal level or the world level. Their focus is on 'what is in it for me?' Such people tend to become free-riders. They expect everyone else to follow dharma, but are themselves tempted by the short term benefits of cheating and free-riding. There is a story of Akbar and Birbal. Akbar thought everyone is conscious of their moral responsibility and fulfils it without cheating. Birbal said, let us test it. Next day it was announced that in a tank, every citizen should pour a potful of milk in the dark of the night, praying for the king's welfare. The milk would be an offering to God with that purpose. Both Akbar and Birbal went to see the tank in the following morning, but Akbar was shocked to see that the tank had only water. Birbal explained that everyone thought that his pouring water instead of milk would surely matter little when all others pour milk. This is cheating by free-riding. Such behavior need not be confined to the time of Akbar and Birbal. On July 30, 2012, the northern part of India suffered the worst outage in more than a decade, plunging eight states including Delhi into darkness, with about 500 trains cancelled and hundreds of thousands stranded on platforms. The next day, more states were affected by grid failure, bringing the total number of states affected to 21. The problem is reported to have emerged because several states simply ignored the warnings not to overdraw power. It was a case of rank indiscipline and cheating by free-riding, - this time not on the part of individuals, but on the part of irresponsible State Electricity Boards! (See *The Hindu* 31 July and 1 August, 2012).

That is why it is said: 'It is only dharma which kills when killed, and protects when protected' (*Dharma eva hato hanti dharmo rakshati rakshitah*. Manusmrti 8.15, quoted in Herur 2001: 241). It is because of the indispensability of ethics or dharma, all religions in India, including Buddhism and Jainism, accepted the concept and authority of dharma. There can be differences in the metaphysics of religions, but there is near unanimity about what constitutes the fundamentals of dharma. It is needed for the stability and progress of both the society and the individual.

Dharma may be unsentimental, but it has to be rational and humane. Basavanna (12th century CE) asked: "Is it Dharma if it is without compassion?" (*Dayavillada dharmavavudayya*?). DV Gundappa (after seven centuries) reversed this question: "Is it compassion if it is without dharma?" (*Dharmavillada daye enthhadayya*?). Even compassion needs to be rational and unsentimental. As Gundappa explains, a mother cannot go on giving whatever her child asks, for, this can only spoil it – both in health and conduct. A wicked person bent upon harming others cannot be let off free, as compassion to him in this way means cruelty to several others who are his actual and potential victims (Gundappa 2001:70). Dharma requires love or compassion to be combined with rationality and morality.

Dharmashastras distinguish generally between *Samanya Dharma* on the one hand, and *Varna Dharma* and *Ashrama Dharma* on the other. While the first one is common (*Samanya*) to all and is basic or fundamental in importance, the latter two are specific dharmas relative to one's *Varna* (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra) and *Ashrama* (*Brahmacharya, Grhasthha, Vanaprasthha* and *Sanyasa*) respectively. It is because of the latter two specific or relative dharmas, Hindu ethics got a bad name as relativist in the hands of some Western scholars. Such critics have conveniently forgotten that there is also basic ethics common to all, which is not relative, and that such relative ethics is accepted even

in the West (for example, a soldier's ethics would be different from that of a doctor after all!). The discussion of dharma above in this section was about this *samanya* or basic ethics which none may flout.

The Varnas and Ashramas are different categories altogether, which meant that a person with an identity in terms of a *varna* is expected to observe the dharma of that *varna*, and in addition observe the discipline and duties of the *ashrama* also which he has adopted.

As will be explained in Chapter 5, *varna* is not the same as *jati* or caste as interpreted in today's parlance. It meant occupation or profession. It makes sense to evolve codes of conduct or ethics specific to different occupations, but not to *jatis* or castes based on birth. We can have, for example, a code of ethics each for lawyers, doctors and bankers. It was in that spirit that *varna-dharmas* were evolved. Brahmins who took to the priestly profession, were expected to be proficient in the Vedas and the recitation or chanting of the Vedas, to know the *Shastras*, the rituals and their significance, and to conduct them. For this purpose they were expected to lead an austere life and not accumulate wealth beyond their immediate needs. They should always be engaged in study and in teaching, and be available for guidance on both religious and ethical issues. They should never have any intellectual or moral arrogance, and conduct themselves with calmness, self-control, cleanliness, forgiveness, compassion and humility (see Gita XVIII.42). Since they were expected to lead an austere life without accumulating wealth, the society at large was expected in turn to support them especially in times of emergency.

The *Kshatriyas*, who took to soldiering and ruling people residing in their respective territories or kingdoms, were expected to be proficient in the art of warfare and handling weapons, as well in the art and ethics of governance. They were expected to cultivate virtues of valour, courage, fortitude, alertness and competence (Gita XVIII.43). *Shastras* like *Arthashastra* of Kautilya gave a lot of attention to *Rajadharma*, the duty of kings, which essentially was to look after the welfare of the people more than their own, protect them from thieves, invaders and other wicked elements, and take care not to exploit people, except taxing them legitimately and moderately without hurting them. *Rajadharma* also involved administration of justice with fairness and without discrimination, providing succour to the needy especially in hard times like famine. *Shastras* emphasised that destitutes like widows and orphans without support merited special attention and care of the kings and administrators.

The *Vaishyas* who took to agriculture, trade, crafts and such other economically paying occupations, were expected to develop the skills of their occupations and conduct their business with honesty without cheating. The *Shudras* were a residual category, consisting of persons who could not fit into any of the above professions, and had to do with serving people in those professions as helpers and assistants. While loyalty and honesty was insisted upon in the case of Shudras, it was considered as the sacred duty of other varnas to look after the Shudras with compassion and care, meeting their needs for food, clothing, and health care, and provide support to them in times of hardship and old age. Such of the children of the Shudras who wanted to take to other professions, opportunities were made available to them in the form of acquiring skills of trade and crafts and even of warfare. There were occasional instances of Shudras becoming chieftains, kings and even Rshis respected by Brahmins and kings alike. The only profession denied to them was that of officiating as a priest in conducting Vedic rituals. There was no bar on their taking up priesthood in the non-Vedic *Tantra* tradition.

Though the general advice as per the Gita was that one should stick to one's own dharma, in practice, the not rigid or inflexible, in the sense that one could change occupations especially in *apat-kala* (emergencies, hard times), apart from following one's aptitude. For example, the Manusmriti says clearly that dharma (varna-dharma) may be discarded if it were to lead to unhappiness or people's anger (Ch.4, verse 176). In hard times when a Shudra's patron found it difficult to support him, it was open to him to seek another patron. The loyalty expected of the Shudra was far from one of 'till death doth us apart'. They were not supposed to be treated as slaves. Even after varnas deteriorated in to *jatis*, social mobility was not rare. Most often the armies consisted of those born as shudras, who then became kshatriyas.

Similarly there are *Ashrama-dharmas* specific to the four Ashramas mentioned above. The first of them, *Brahmacharya*, is the stage of self-discipline and celibacy, dedicated to the study of Vedas, Upanishads and the Shastras. In the ancient days, the study used to take place in the *Gurukulas* (Teacher's home) which had the status of schools or educational institutions. Traditionally restricted to boys, there is no reason why girls were barred from this initial phase learning the scriptures. The women who participated in discussions in the Upanishads (like Gargi and Maitreyi) are an evidence that in the ancient phase, girls too took to the study of the Vedas and matters of philosophy and religion. The Brahmacharya phase started with a ritual called the *Upanayana* (leading the child to studentship). Those who underwent this ritual were called *dvijas*, the twice-born. 'Dvija' is not the same as 'Brahmin' as a *jati* (caste). Any person who undergoes this ritual, irrespective of caste, is a *dvija*, though unfortunately when the *varna* system deteriorated into the caste system, *upanayana* became a mere ritual without the earlier significance and was confined to those born in the upper castes other than the *shudras*. Whosoever undergoes *upanayana* is expected to do '*sandhya-vandana*', reciting selected portions of Vedas twice a day along with a *japa* of Gayatri mantra and meditation, and also do the studies with commitment and devotion. The Gayatri mantra, which is in the *Rgveda* (III.62.10), is a prayer to the Sun God, taken as standing for the supreme. It may be translated as: 'Om! I meditate upon the glorious and adorable Savitr who pervades the whole universe. May He stimulate our intellect (so that we can realise Him)! The Mantra is believed to be a very powerful stimulant to the intellectual process, and helping concentration and a sense of resolve and purpose. The *sandhya- vandana* including Gayatri *japa* are supposed to be continued throughout one's life time, though one begins it during this first stage of life.

Grhasthashrama or the stage of householder is the next one and is the most important in one's life. That is when a man begins to make his livelihood, establishes a family, brings up children, gets them educated, looks after the parents, attends to guests, and helps others in need. The Grhini, the householder's wife, is no less important, because the physical burden of the family falls upon her. To formally recognize her importance, the texts insist that she sit beside her husband, participating in all religious rituals including *homas*, *yajnas* and *pujas*. Since the householder and his wife live in a society, they incur various debts in one form or another. It is during the householder's stage that all the 'debts' (moral obligations) or Rnas are redeemed. There are at least eight of them, which may, therefore, be called as *Ashta-rnas*. They are: *Deva-rna* (debt to God), *Pitr-rna* (debt to parents), *Guru-rna* (debt to teacher or Guru), *Dampatya-rna* (debt to one's spouse), *Atithya-rna* (debt of hospitality), *Loka-rna* (debt to people or society), *Mahi-rna* (debt to the Earth) and *Atma-rna* (debt to the Self).

The *Ashta-ṛnas* (eight debts) can be redeemed as follows (*i*) *Deva-ṛna* through constantly remembering God, devotion, surrendering the fruits of one's action to Him, and trying to understand His qualities and inculcating them into one's own life (like truth, goodness, joy, love as discussed in the preceding chapter); (*ii*) *Pitr-ṛna* through taking care of one's parents in their old age and illness and taking care of one's own children as a pleasant responsibility; (*iii*) *Guru-ṛna* by taking up one's own students and teaching them and extending the frontiers of knowledge and skills; (*iv*) *Dampatya-ṛna* through developing love, mutual trust understanding and confidence, loyalty and willingness to help;

(*v*) *Atithya-ṛna* by heartily extending hospitality to guests just as one may have or would like to have enjoyed from others; (*vi*) *Loka-ṛna* is redeemed by following the Gita's advice to treat other people in the same way as one would have liked others to treat one's own self; or, by treating the pleasures and pains everywhere by the same standard as one would apply to oneself (Gita VI. 32); or in other words, simply by being sensitive and considerate to others' rights and helping them whenever possible; (*vii*) *Mahi-ṛna* by being considerate to the Earth, the Nature, minimizing exploitation, wastage and pollution or, by being honestly environment-friendly; and (*viii*) *Atma-ṛna* by following the advice of the Gita (in VI. 5) – uplift yourself through your own self and never destroy yourself (by negative thoughts), making the self as own friend and not an enemy. *Atma-ṛna* is also redeemed by protecting one's own rights and dignity, not allowing oneself to be depressed or discouraged by anyone or any event.

The Tamil text, *Kural* by Tiruvalluvar, declares that "if a man goes through the householder's life along the way of dharma, nothing is left for him to attain by becoming a recluse or staying in the forest" (tr. by Rajagopalchari 1999). That is, it is enough for a householder to fulfill his moral duties. Yet, the Hindu texts do provide for two more Ashramas – the *Vanaprasthha* and *Sanyasa*. The householder and his wife can take to *Vanaprasthha* in their old age, retiring to the forest, or to a place away from the hustle and bustle of mundane life, shunning all worldly pleasures and temptations and spending the rest of their life amidst nature in contemplation and *sadhana*. This does not amount to *sanyasa*, as the householder does not renounce his family especially his wife. His children and other relatives can visit his cottage in the forest, but the householder is expected to lead a very austere life. This stage is not mandatory, and is very much by voluntary choice.

The next *Ashrama* is not necessarily final chronologically, and does not have to come only after the householder and forester's stage. It can come before, that is, after the first stage of *Brahmacharya*. The *Sanyasi*, one who adopts *sanyasa*, renounces his family and also his varṇa. There can be no *jati* and *varṇa* among *sanyasis*; *sanyasa* is beyond such categories. A *sanyasi*, however, does not renounce the human society. In fact, the whole world becomes the family of a *sanyasi*, he is not supposed to have an emotional attachment to the immediate family or to the *jati* to which he earlier belonged, nor to anyone or anything specific; nor is he expected to hate any one. He is not supposed to raise his hand against anyone under any circumstances. *Sanyasi* is supposed to observe strict control on his mind and lead a celibate life; he is expected to conquer what the texts refer to as the six enemies of spiritual progress (shad-vairis) – *Kama* (sex, sexual desire), *krodha* (anger), *mada* (arrogance), *matsara* (jealousy), *moha* (obsessive attachment to persons or things), and *lobha* (greed, avarice). In fact, all human beings are supposed to conquer these enemies which block spiritual advancement, but *sanyasis* particularly so. *Sanyasa* is not just a stage in life, it is also an institution with an important role to play. *Sanyasis* are

the most suited as spiritual guides. A priest is a professional and not necessarily trained to be a spiritual under a Guru, developing his personality in such a way as to inculcate all the moral and spiritual values, with a compassionate and kindly disposition to all humankind and even nature. *Sanyasa* does not seem to have been a very prominent institution during the Vedic and even the Upanishadic phase, but may have became so after Buddhism and Jainism became popular. Both these religions allowed many including women to dedicate themselves as monks to the spiritual path. Though Hinduism also assimilated this institution for the same purpose, sanyasis were far fewer and *sanyasinis* (women) even more so in Hinduism. This was because Hinduism believed, and still believes, the spiritual realisation and even providing spiritual guidance is quite possible for Grhasthas and Grhinis too. According to Manu, they do not even violate celibacy if sex is enjoyed hygienically within matrimony (Sri M 2011: 71). They do not necessarily have to become monks.

In spite of many texts and their teaching, there can arise problems of judging what constitutes righteousness or dharma in the context of a particular decision making or an action. The Gandhian approach to this could be said to offer three criteria as useful for this purpose. They are the motive, the means adopted and the consequences. Both the motive and means have to be pure in a righteous act. For example, a teacher may beat his student for indiscipline or lack of concentration, or worse still, for failure in solving a sum correctly. Even if the motive may be good, the means used here are violent and may turn out to be counter-productive. Consequences of an act, both intended and realised, constitute the third criterion. The outcome should be good and beneficial for all. But even after taking into account the three criteria, a moral judgment may not always be an easy task.

Texts may not always provide guidance in every situation though they provide golden rules of universal significance, such as, 'do not do to others what hurts your own self'[3], or the verse from the Gita quoted above (VI.32). Even then, texts are many and at times conflict with each other. The *Manusmrti* itself says, however, in spite of itself being a Smrti, that if there is a conflict between Shruti texts (Vedas and Upanishads) and Smrtis, what is said in the Shrutis should prevail. But even the Shruti literature is vast, and there could be conflicts between what is said in the Vedas and what the Upanishads say. The Gita, which is believed to be the essence of the Upanishdas, differs in several ways from the Vedic perspectives. It is a significant fact, therefore, that Hinduism does not treat scriptural support as the only and exclusive ultimate authority. Yudhishthira, in the Mahabharata, makes a crucially important observation:

'The scriptures are many and are divided. The Dharma-shastras are many and different. Nobody is called a sage until and unless he holds a different view. The truth of dharma is concealed in a dark cave. Therefore, the way to dharma is the one that is taken by *mahajanas* (great persons or a great number of persons)'. (Tr. by Matilal in Ganeri ed. 2002: 41)

Teachings of the texts are important no doubt, but the way great persons known for moral integrity act can also be a very good guide. Ultimately, it is the *swayam-prajna* (own conscience and moral wisdom) that serves as the deciding factor. It is wisely said, what can the *Shastras* do to him who has no wisdom of his own? (*Yasya nasti swayamprajna shastram tasya karoti kim*?). Krshna therefore advises Arjuna in the Gita- 'Critically ponder over what all I have told you, and then exercise your discretion' (XVIII. 63). And when we are confronted with choice, Gandhi's advice was to check if we have a hidden selfish motive, or whether we are honestly acting in the interest of people at large.

Moral dilemmas nevertheless defy an easy solution. Examples of these dilemmas occur in the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, and also in the Puranas, which have received considerable attention. Instances like the killing of Vali and Shambuka in the Ramayana, and the killing of Bhishma, Drona, Karna and Duryodhana in the Mahabharata war have raised a big moral controversy, which were even taken to have reflected on the seriousness of ethics in Hinduism.[5] But the problem is not confined to India and Hinduism. The Hindu epics have been frank enough to illustrate ethical dilemmas which one may have to face even in life. The wars fought by the West have seen much bigger infringement of moral codes.[6] This, however, cannot justify the expedience of our epic heroes, nor can their expedience justify it for others. It should be noted that neither the Ramayana absolves Rama of sin, nor does the Mahabharata does it to Krshna. The two poet-Rshis speak through the victims and condemn the immorality and injustice in such acts clearly. The epics also sing the praise of virtuous acts, like Rama's respecting the promise made by his father and renouncing the kingdom in favour of his step-brother, Bharata, and Bharata's act of renunciation in turn and deciding to rule only on behalf of Rama till he returns. The epics provide examples of both types of acts. Karma is shown to have pursued both Rama and Krshna, in spite of their being called as avatars. The sin of the killing of Vali from behind unseen by him could be redeemed only during the next avatar of Rama as Krshna. Krshna was killed similarly unseen by a hunter who mistook him for an animal and shot an arrow. Grieving Gandhari who lost all her sons, the Kauravas, curses Krshna for his role that his ethnic group, the Vrshnis, would also perish and it comes through. Thus we have to be cautious even in following the example of the Avatars, since even they can slip while in human incarnation.

Nevertheless, the dilemmas remain to tickle our brains. How do you tackle a clever, strong and an unscrupulous evil-doer, to ensure justice in the world? Is it morally permissible to pay him back with the same coin? How does morality work in a situation of conflict between an oppressive and arrogant but a strong party on one side, and a weaker party deprived of its rights by the strong on the other? Whatever the answer may be, the adoration for Rama and Krshna has only increased over the centuries, not excluding the contemporary times. They are seen as avatars who can give us the strength and wisdom to tide over difficulties created by all evils in life.

4. Ethical Grading – Theory Of Gunas

The Gita goes to great lengths in discussing what is most ethical, what is less so, and what is least ethical or plainly unethical. In the process, it provides two ways of ethical grading. The grading is not so much about persons, as about characteristics or features of conduct and even things like diet in terms of how far they are conducive to ethical behaviour. In Chapter 16, a simple two-way distinction is made between the divine (*daivi*) and demonical (*asuri*) qualities, and it is suggested that human beings should try to cultivate divine qualities or virtues and give up demonical behavior. No human being is regarded as absolutely divine, or as absolutely demonical, but each can have a mix of these. The path of spiritual and moral evolution consists in gradually giving up demonical traits and acquiring divine traits. For example, fearlessness, purity of heart, generosity, self-control, wisdom, non-violence, compassion towards all living beings, gentleness, humility, cleanliness, fortitude or moral integrity, and forgiveness are taken as *daivi* qualities (XVI. 1-3). Ostentation, arrogance, self-conceit, harshness,

rashness, ignorance, lust, greediness, hypocrisy, holding evil desires, quick-temper and the like are treated as qualities lead one to progress and liberation, whereas _asuri_ traits lead to degradation and bondage.

The Gita, however, gives much more attention to another way of ethical grading, ie, through classifying qualities and things in terms of three _gunas_ or natures found in human beings. Much of the last two chapters of the Gita (17th and 18th) are devoted to this purpose. The concept of the three g_una_s or _Tri-gunas_ is found also in the _Sankhya_ school of philosophy[7] which is one of the most ancient among the six Darshanas, though texts on the contribution of this school came to be written subsequently. Sage Kapila of a very ancient origin is said to be the founder of this school. The concept of _Tri-gunas_ was used by the school, more as subtle physical realities or substances, an 'imbalance' in which was said to have led to the creation of _prakrti_ (Nature, natural condition or state). The three _gunas_ taken by the Gita as indicating psychological nature, are: _Sattva_ or _Satvik_ (good, gentle, virtuous, truthful, wise, kind, benevolent, – ethically at a high level); _Rajas_ or _Rajasik_ (emotional, passionate, active, dynamic, energetic, outgoing, – placed ethically at the middle level); and _Tamasik_ (or of the quality of _tamas_ – darkness, indolent, dull, passive, apathetic, ignorant, and placed ethically at a low level). It was Gita's contribution to use the concept for ethical grading. Lord Krshna may have felt that a human being can neither be totally divine, nor totally devilish; and even if placed in between they should know where they stand in terms of their motives, behaviour and actions. The Gita sees these qualities not only in persons but also in things like devotion to God, charity, food, action, approach to knowledge and so on. Though _Satvik_ nature is the most preferred and _Tamasik_ is the least preferred, the Gita indicates that no one person is purely of one type. A human being is a combination of all the three. In the same person, one nature may dominate at one time, and another nature may dominate at another time. But it helps if a person is aware of his nature in each context, particularly to control passion and sloth, and strives to use it to maximise his or her material as well as spiritual wellbeing. Significantly, the _guna_ analysis is not applied to _varnas_, because each individual is a combination of different _gunas_ from time to time. The analysis of _gunas_ is one of the most fascinating parts of the Gita. A classification of these things, based on chapters 17 and 18 of the Gita is presented below in the form of a table for easy grasp and convenience. The remarks made in the table below about each of the _gunas_ respectively, are based on my interpretation and understanding of the original verses, rather than on their literal translation.

Table: _Trigunas_ – _Satvik_ (Truthful, Sage-like), _Rajasik_ (Emotional), and _Tamasik_ (Dismal)

	Satvik	Rajasik	Tamasik
Individuals' _Prakrti_ (nature)	Kind, compassionate, generous, friendly, soft spoken, calm and composed, wise	Emotional, energetic, active, easily provoked to anger, harsh and critical, passionate	Dull, sleepy, lazy, ignorant, passive
Bhakti (Devotion to God)	With a pure heart, for the pure joy of loving God and feeling one with Him	Expecting some material reward	Without proper _shraddha_, half-hearted or reward expected in the form of harming enemy
Shraddha (Commitment and faith)	Essentially in the Divine	Essentially in acquiring wealth and power	Belief in evil spirits or witchcraft to acquire power to harm others; irrational, superstitious

Karma (work)	Done with detachment for the good of all	Done with narrow selfish motive, for the good of only one self	Malicious, ignorant of consequences, harmful to one self and others, done reluctantly
Karta (agent, doer)	Endued with Dhrti (fortitude), enthusiasm and humility, but without attachment, dispassionate but committed, equanimity in success and failure	Passionately attached to fruits of outcome; affected by elation or dejection with outcome, tendency to be aggressive	Indifferent, uncommitted, unskilled, dishonest, ignorant of consequences, malicious, lazy, very slow
Jnana (knowledge)[8]	Sees the Unity behind diversity, synthesizes, based on holistic perception	Focuses on diversity or multiplicity, based on analysis	Wrong knowledge that mistakes a part for the whole, indifferent to cause and reasoning, obstinate
Buddhi (intellect, discrimination, understanding, perception)	Knows what is to be done/not to be done, what is good and bad, the distinction between Pravrtti and Nivrtti, and what leads to liberation/bondage	Confused, quick to judge	Pervert in attitude, taking right as wrong and wrong as right ('Fair is foul, and foul is fair…' as in the Macbeth)
Yajna and other rituals	Done with faith, devotion and understanding of the significance, without desiring anything for oneself but for the good of humanity and world peace	Done for the benefit of oneself and family only and for power or ostentation	Done improperly and without faith, or for harming others
Dana (gift, charity, donation)	Given without expecting anything in return, not even gratitude; given to the needy or deserving	Expecting something in return including power or fame, given reluctantly	Given to undeserving or at wrong place and time, given with contempt to the receiver, or for manipulating or harming the receiver
Tapas (penance, austerity)	Performed with faith for the good of others	Performed to acquire yogic powers, fame and honour, or worldly things for oneself	Performed with self-torture, and/or for harming others
Dhrti (fortitude)	High level of moral courage and resoluteness, self-confident, in full control of the mind	Using resoluteness only for a selfish purpose and ready to compromise for it	Wavering, not resolute, given to grief, diffidence, depression and fear
Sukham (Happiness)	Based on clear understanding and clean/clear conscience; long term	Sensual, short-term	Based on delusion or perversion
Ahara (Food)	Contributes to health, hygienic, adds to life and nourishment, feel-good type	Acidic, hot, pungent; producing discomfort	Stale, tasteless, unclean, makes one sleepy and indolent; harmful to health

Note: Based on the interpretation of Chapters 17 and 18 of the Gita; for more detailed discussion, it is advisable to go to these chapters themselves.

The Gita does not intend to make this classification rigid and mechanical. It is possible for a person to be *satvik* in one respect, *rajasik* in another, and *tamasik* in yet another. The purpose of the Gita is to provide guidance both in day-to-day living and for sadhana. For example, the advice in respect of

Karma, Karta, Jnana, Buddhi, Dana, Dhṛti, Sukham and *Ahara* can all be a source of guidance mainly for day-to-day conduct or living, while the advice in respect of *Bhakti, Shraddha, Yajna*, and *Tapas*, can be a guide mainly for *sadhana*. In fact, however, dharma in the sense of ethics cannot be separated from *sadhana*. One cannot be truly religious without being ethical. DV Gundappa (2001) an eminent philosopher writer and poet in Kannada has called the Gita as *Jivana-dharma-yoga* (Yoga of Ethical Living) and he gave the same title to his book on the Gita.

The classification or ethical grading in terms of the three Gunas in the Gita can be seen also as a method which can be applied with due discrimination to other things not mentioned in the Gita. It can for example be applied to an economy, politics or even society.[9] The whole purpose of the Gita is to make human beings and their institutions more virtuous, not just religious.

5. HUMAN goals In HINDUISM – *Purusharthas*

The doctrine of *Purusharthas* was developed to reconcile worldly pursuits with spiritual goals in a framework of Dharma. This was done mainly through the epics, especially the *Mahabharata*, and the *Dharmashastras*. *Purushartha* is a combination of two words, 'Purusha' (man, heroic) and 'Artha' (goal or purpose), which together means simply human goals or heroic goals of human beings. Though 'purusha' means man, *purushathas* apply both to men and women, as with the English word 'man'. These goals are said to be four – *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (acquisition of wealth and power), *kama* (sensual pleasures), and *moksha* (liberation from suffering in the form of cycle of births and deaths). When we use the word *purusharthas*, they refer to the group of these four goals.[10]

The concept of *dharma* has already been discussed in detail in the third section above. It is necessary to emphasise here, however, that dharma is not just one of the four human goals, but also an overarching framework in terms of which alone other goals, particularly artha and kama have to be pursued, and not independently of dharma. Even moksha is attained only after living the life of dharma first. The Mahabharata makes it clear: 'He who wishes to achieve *kama* and *artha* must concentrate on dharma, for kama and artha are never separate from dharma (V. 124.37). It warns: He who wishes to achieve kama and artha by means which are not really means (*anupaya ie*., means other than dharma) perishes' (V.124.36).[11] KJ Shah observed, 'even '*moksha* will not be *moksha* without the content of dharma'. Shah feels that the four 'constitute a single goal, though in the lives of individuals, the elements may get varying emphasis for various reasons'. He stresses the interactive and mutually complementary nature of purusharthas rather than any hierarchy among them. Shah's view of purusharthas appears to represent the Hindu tradition more closely than the conflict or hierarchy view. Shah sums up the position neatly: '*artha* alone is greed, *kama* alone is lust, *dharma* alone is mechanical ritual, and *moksha* alone is escapism' (Shah 1982: 59).

Hinduism, from its very beginning, recognized moksha as the ultimate goal and emphasised spiritual upliftment, but it made it very clear that there was no need to ignore one's duties and responsibilities in the mundane world. Even in the pursuit of spiritual progress or in *sadhana*, Hinduism recognised both types of paths – one of *Pravṛtti* and the other of *Nivṛtti*. The former was the path taken by *Grhasthas* (householders) and the latter by Sanyasis. *Pravṛtti* is the path of engagement with the world, while (*Nivṛtti*) was the path of withdrawal. *Pravṛtti* needs both *artha* and *kama*, while *Nivṛtti* does not and

actually renounces them. But neither the Grhastha nor the Sanyasi can renounce their respective moral responsibilities or dharma in the world.

Hinduism not only accepted *artha* as worthy of pursuit, but even formulated a philosophy about it some 4000 years ago in the *Rgveda:*

> *Parichin marto dravinam mamanyad*
> *Rtasya patha namasa vivaset /*
> *Uta svena kratuna samvadeta*
> *Shreyamsam daksham manasa jagrbhyat //*
>
> (*Rgveda* 10.31.2)

> Let a man (or woman) ponder well on wealth,
> earn it through the path of moral law and with humility
> consulting one's own conscience, and (then)
> heartily gain upright prosperity.

Wealth does not come on its own. One has to consciously ponder (*parichin*) over how it has to be earned through the path of moral law or truth (*rtasya patha*) and not by dishonest means. It has to be earned with humility (*namasa*), since success depends on the grace of God and one owes it to the society at large for making it possible. Ethical dilemmas are bound to arise, which have to be resolved through consulting one's own conscience (*kratuna*) or Inner Voice (as Gandhi called lit). Once these qualifications are respected, one can heartily (*manasa*) earn wealth and gain upright (*daksham*) prosperity (*shreyamsam*). '*Daksham*' can also be interpreted as 'efficiently'.

There is a lot of ethical economics here, combining ethics with economics. Gandhi said, 'I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics' (*Young India* October 3, 1921). He made it clear that if in any context or any issue, economics conflicted with ethics, it is such economics which had to be given up, and not ethics. One does not have to become an ascetic, but one should earn and enjoy what is earned ethically. This means that it involves no violence, or hurting or depriving others. It should *create* wealth, and *add* to the welfare of one self and others too, without making anyone else worse off. Gandhi developed his idea of Trusteeship to reconcile an individual need to excel and achieve with the societal need to take care of the weak. A wealthy man should have a control on his wants and treat his excess of wealth over needs of necessary consumption and investment, as a trust to take care of the weak.

That there need be no conflict between *artha* and *dharma* is clear in Hinduism. *Artha* is viewed as an instrument of dharma also, just as artha is to be gained through dharma. Dharma is recognised as very difficult to attain in the midst of poverty, though it does not certainly mean that the poor are considered as morally deprived or incapable of dharma. What is pertinent here is that poverty is not glorified, nor earning wealth underrated. On the contrary, the *Mahabharata* says that dharma flows out of wealth, like a river springs forth from a mountain (*Dhanaddhi dharmah sravati shailadapi nadi yatha*) (*Shanti Parva* 8. 23). Prosperity enables charity, which is its justification. Pursuit of wealth

finds its purpose when wealth finds its way into charity and promotes the welfare of others. The Gita has clearly warned that one who cooks only for himself eats sin (III. 13).

The goal of *Artha* in the sense of power also has to be pursued ethically, with due awareness of moral responsibilities of holding on to power. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* says clearly:

Prajasukhe sukham rajnah prajanam cha hite hitam /

Natmapriyam hitam rajnah prajanam tu priyam hitam //

(*Arthashastra* 1.19.34)

"In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treat as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects". (Tr. by Rangarajan 1992: 10).

How much pertinent is this for today's democracy, since kings are replaced now by political 'leaders' elected by people themselves to rule them! Rulers are warned in the *Ramayana* that if any of them indulges in anti-people activities brutally, he will be killed in the same way as a wicked cobra that has entered a house is killed.[12]

Coming to *kama* (sensual desires), the attitude has been neither to renounce them nor to obsessively indulge in them, but seek a moderate golden mean in a morally acceptable way. The principle is not to violate the dignity of others in any way, including one's own wife. As for sex, the ethical code is to confine it within matrimony. Though mainstream Hinduism has regarded any obsession with sex as something to be controlled by will power, the Tantra school has tried to explore the spiritual significance of sex and to see sex as a way of even experiencing the Brahman in its *Ananda* aspect. However, this means legitimate and consensual sex, because a feeling of guilt in illegitimate sex will come in the way of full realisation of Ananda. This can be true of even sex within matrimony, if it is forced on the wife. Such a problem cannot arise in the case of a couple in deep love with each other. Sex with love and mutual respect is considered satvik, whereas sex without love but not forced as rajasik, and forced sex as *tamasik* and heinous.

Moksha is the last of the four *purusharthas*, which is the ultimate goal. Every human being is considered as eligible to have this goal, irrespective of *Varnas* and *Ashramas*. Shudras and Grhasthas were also considered eligible to seek *Moksha*, and not Brahmins or Sanyasis alone. *Moksha*, however, is not the same as going to *Svarga* (heaven). *Svarga* is considered as a temporary reward for *Punya* or meritorious activities such as charity; enjoyment in heaven is supposed to last till the accumulation of punya is used up and exhausted, after which the *Jiva* enters this world to have a rebirth. But *Moksha* is permanent; it is a release from all bondage and cycles of births and deaths, and is in the nature of ever- lasting bliss. Corresponding to *svarga, naraka* (hell) also is not permanent; the punishment in hell lasts only so long as the accumulation of sin is redeemed, after which the Jiva takes rebirth in this world. There is no permanent damnation in Hinduism, at least as per ancient scriptures. So there is no opposite or negative of the *Moksha* concept. It is not clear however how the concept of heaven and hell emerged, since according to the Law of Karma, karma is redeemed either in this life itself or through *punarjanma* (rebirth). A few philosophers like the 12th Century spiritual leader, Basavanna,

make it clear that there is no heaven or hell separate from this world, and that one can experience both in this very world. It is up to us entirely as to which one we choose; morally acceptable conduct is heaven and the opposite is hell, according to him. Moksha is seen as the final union with the Supreme, as a reward for not only our good conduct, but also for selfless devotion, and for unselfish and helpful work. In Advaita philosophy, *moksha* is Self-Realisation, ie, realisation that the self is the Brahman. It can happen when one is living, in which such a person is called as *Jivan-mukta* (liberated while living). What *sadhana* is needed for *moksha* will be discussed in the next chapter.

6. SOcIAl CONceRN In HINDUISM

It is necessary to stress social concerns of a religion, not only because social problems are too immense to be tackled by the state alone but also because consciousness of the social and humanist core of a religion could check any parochial tendencies and intolerance. Morality has no meaning without compassion and social concern – concern for social problems like poverty, hunger, deprivation, social discrimination and injustice including injustice to women, exploitation, illness and illiteracy. A religion would have no meaning and its ethics would be a farce if it does not acknowledge the dignity of all human beings and also a sense of personal responsibility towards them and their welfare. But how far does Hinduism have this social concern? This is probed here through three criteria: (*a*) as reflected in the scriptural texts, *shastras* and other tracts on the ethics of Hinduism, (*b*) as reflected in day-to-day behaviour, and (*c*) as reflected in the development of institutions for social concern and service. While (*a*) will be dealt with in this section itself, (*b*) and (*c*) would be covered in the section on 'Ethics in Practice', which also includes a discussion on gender issues.

Our discussion so far in the preceding chapters shows that there is nothing in the basic nature of Hinduism that shows lack of social concern. On the contrary, it is very positive about it. Social concern can have two ethical values or principles backing it – compassion for the less fortunate and equality and right to dignity of all beings, at least of all human beings. Taking up the first, the law of karma certainly does not mean that we can afford to be indifferent to the suffering of the less fortunate on the assumption that it is their karma. On the contrary, if I see a person in pain and do nothing to alleviate it, even if I can do something about it, then I would be incurring the bad karma (or *papa*) of losing an opportunity of helping and for dereliction of duty. It is my moral duty to help and leave the result to the person's karma. Hindu scriptures are clear that our good deeds do count as *punya* and bad deeds, including failure to do good even if one can, count as *papa*, for the law of karma.

The very concept of immanence of God implies dignity of all human beings, not merely of their abstract selves or souls, but even for their bodies. The human body is considered as the abode of God, as reflected in the verse – *Deho devalayah proktah dehi devo Niranjanah* (the body is a temple and its dweller is no less than God who is free from all blemish). The Gita advocates equality and equal treatment of all on the ground that the same Self is present in all beings (VI.29). The Rgveda (10.13.1) says all that all human beings are the children of the Immortal (*amrtasya putrah*) It means that all have a right not only to life, but also to dignity and dignified treatment. It does not mean serving only one's own self on this basis, as it would amount to hypocrisy and selfishness. It also means that serving others especially the needy is serving God, since He is *Sarva-antaryami* (who dwells within

us all). God is not only Antaryami, He is also considered as *Patita-pavan* (redeemer of the fallen) and

L... ...... (...... ....ek). He seems to prefer acting through humans.

Freedom is valued in a wider sense and is prayed for not merely for one's own self but also for the whole group or community, as reflected in a verse from *Rgveda*.

The prayer is:

> *Uru nastanve tana/ Uru kshayaya naskrdhi/ Uru no yandhi jivase //*

<div align="right">(<u>Rgveda</u> VIII. 68.12)</div>

('Give freedom in our bodies, give freedom in our dwellings, give freedom in our life', Original and Tr. from Bose 1999: 226).

Uru means freedom, freedom from deprivation and constraints to move in life. Prayer for freedom is found again in the tenth *Mandala* of <u>Rgve</u>da (128.5). There is an echo of such a prayer again in the *Bhagavata*. It is the freedom from sorrow and suffering – *dukkha*, in others, which is rated as higher than even *moksha*, – liberation from rebirth for oneself. The verse is:

> *Naham kamaye rajyam na svargam na cha apunarbhavam / Praninam*
>
> *dukkha-taptanamkamaye dukkha- nashanam //*

(I desire no kingdom, no heaven, not even freedom from rebirth (*apunarbhavam*, *ie*., moksha) for myself. I desire only that beings afflicted by sorrow be relieved of it.)

The same sentiment comes out strongly in a *subhashita* (a good saying in float):

> *Taditah piditahye syuhu tan mama iti abhyudirayet/ Sa*
>
> *sadhu iti mantavyah tatra drshtavya Ishvarah //*

(The one who declares (or treats) those who are oppressed and harassed as his own (and helps them), he is to be regarded as the real saint; it is here (in him) that God is to be seen.)

Compassion and help to others in need is a highly cherished value in Hinduism right from the Vedic phase. *Dana* (gift, charity) was recognised as the most potent way of earning *punya*. The call to help others and not be selfish comes out clearly and loudly from the following verse in the *Rgveda* (x. 117.6):

> *Mogham annam vindate aprachetah satyam bravimi vadha itsa tasya /*
>
> *Naryamanam pushyati yo sakhayam kevalagho bhavati kevaladi //*

(The person who has no concern (for others) earns his food in vain. I tell you the truth – it is as good as his (moral) death. He, who feeds neither the good and the learned nor a friend, and eats all by himself, only sins all by himself.)

We are familiar with the proverb, 'A friend in need is friend indeed'. We have a similar saying in the *Rgveda* (X.117.4):

'*Na sakha yo na dadati sakhye sa cha bhuve sachamanaya pitvah*'

(A person is no friend if he does not help, but one who helps is a real friend.)

Padma-Purana declares, "Those who always feed the crippled, the blind, children, the old, the ill, and those helpless and pinched by penury, will enjoy bliss in heaven; there is no end to the *punya* accumulated by constructing wells and tanks, where aquatic animals and those moving on land drink water when they desire, for life is centred on water".[13] The Gita not only values generosity and charity, but also adds that it has to be without any contempt towards the beneficiary. A gift, given with contempt to recipients, is '*tamasik*' according to the Gita. It is much lower in moral status than the selfless gift given with humility which is called '*Satvik*'. The poor are to be regarded as *Daridra-narayana*, those among whom God is present, who should be served with respect and love.

The concept of Karma-Yoga as action without selfish attachment and for *loka-sangraha* (maintenance and nourishment of this world) or plainly *loka-hita* (welfare of people) forms a basic teaching of the Gita. The Gita transformed the earlier concept of *yajna* as ritualistic offering of food in sacrificial fire or animal sacrifice, into sharing with others what one has. The philosophy is that we have received from God everything that sustains us, and we repay our debt to God through *yajna*, by sharing with others what we have with us – be it food, wealth, knowledge, or simply labour or work. The word *shram-dan* (gift in the form of work/labour) may have been recently coined, but its basic principle is to be found in the Gita.

The Gita also preached equality and declared that *varna* is not based on *jati* or birth, but one's own aptitude or calling (*guna* and *karma*) (IV-13). The Gita also declared that those who are engaged in yoga see their own self among all beings everywhere, treating them as equals (*sarvatra samadarshanah* (VI. 29). Krshna endorses this further by saying that 'one who sees God in all, and all in God, is never lost to Me, nor am I lost to him (VI.30). A belief in the presence of God in all the beings implies equal dignity of all the beings, and their equal right to dignified treatment.

The Gita's emphasis on *bhakti* (devotion) for *sadhana*, laid the basis for further democratisation of Hinduism during the medieval age, – the phase dominated by Bhakti movements in Hinduism. Though the origins of *bhakti* can be traced to the *Rgveda* itself, the Gita formally recognised it as a valid path of God realisation, along with *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Karma* (selfless work). The significance of bhakti was that it could be practised by all, including the lowest of the low, meekest of the meek, literate or illiterate, high caste or low caste, the healthy or the ill. At one stroke, *bhakti* took the poor and the deprived within its scope, and was instrumental in broad-basing Hinduism. In bhakti, there were no distinctions of caste, gender, wealth and education. Bhakti gave human dignity to all. Devotion to God strengthened it; it included humility also. One of the most inspiring verses in the Gita from the point of boosting one's self-confidence and emphasising the freedom of will is:

Uddharet atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet /

Atmaiva hyatmano bandhuh atmaiva riputmanah // (VI.5)

(A man should uplift himself by his own will, and never allow oneself to be corrupted. Self is a friend of one's self, but it can also be an enemy).

Like the Gita, the *Kural* by Thiruvalluvar, laid emphasis on compassion to all, helping those in need, being truthful and hospitable and so on. It explicitly deplored caste distinctions. The *Kural* is in Tamil, and is known as the Tamil *Veda*. Its whole emphasis is on ethical living, rather than on metaphysics. It showed much more social awareness and ethical concern about inequality in society in the form of caste distinctions than the Sanskrit texts did. It was no surprise that the Bhakti Movements started first in Tamil Nadu, and covered the whole of India by the middle of the second millennium. They democratised the Hindu society as never before, and encouraged even the lowest of the low to protest against social evils including the oppression of women and the hegemony of upper caste. As we shall be discussing in the following chapters (especially Ch.5), even the Bhakti movements could not end the caste system, since the economic and social differences between the castes could not be eradicated.

Social concern received a renewed emphasis during the modern age. Right from Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) to Mata Amritanandamayi (1953-), leaders of Hinduism have put social reform and social service as upper most among their priorities. Reflecting this mood, Swami Vivekananda (1863- 1902) asserted, "It is an insult to starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics".[14] As Jones observed, "The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, with its system of hospitals and dispensaries, and its extensive relief projects, added to Hinduism a dogma of social service and a successful programme based on that dogma" (Jones 1989: 216). The values of modern age since Renaissance in Europe – Humanism, equality, equal regard for women and women's emancipation, uplift of the hitherto deprived, equality before law, secular education, liberty and human rights – received unanimous acceptance and support of reformers and leaders of modern Hinduism. Interestingly, this meant no rejection of Hinduism but only rediscovery of its human values.

7. ENVIRONMENTAl ETHICS IN HINDUISM

A lack of ethical sensitivity and concern seems to be a major reason for our massive failures on the environmental front reflected in significant levels of pollution of air, water and soil; deforestation; depletion of natural resources and their increasing scarcity particularly of water and energy resources; increased risks of climate change; loss of bio-diversity, and desertification. The basic nature of ethical concern can be seen as transcending narrow short term self-interest at the centre, rising continuously on to caring for others in wider and wider circles. The least ethical is the most self-centred person. The person at a higher ethical level transcends this narrow interest and extends his perspective to cover his family, community, country, humanity, and then on to a wider circle covering the whole eco-system with its animate and inanimate constituents. This is the teaching of the Gita (VI.29).[15]

There is a strong streak of environmentalism in Hinduism from the beginning, as reflected in the veneration and deification of nature in the Rgveda. This has continued and is reflected even in some of the day-to-day prayers. Hindu children were taught to recite a prayer on getting up in the morning, which sought forgiveness from Mother Earth for stepping on her:

Samudra vasane pṛthvi parvata stanamandale / Vishnupatni

namastubhyam pạdasparsham kshamasva mẹ//

(quoted in Pandurangi 1999: 61).

(O Earth, clothed in oceans, with mountains for your breasts, Consort of God, I bow to you, forgive me for stepping on you).

The concept of Gaia is not new to Hinduism, which treats the Earth as *Bhumạta* (Mother-Earth). The *Atharva-vẹda* has a whole prayer in praise of the Earth, called the Prthivi Sụkta. Verse 11 in the Sukta is as follows in translation: "Oh Mother Earth! Sacred are thy hills, snowy mountains and deep forests. Be kind to us and bestow upon us happiness. May you be fertile, arable and nourisher of all! May you continue supporting people of all races and nations! May you protect us from your anger (*ie*., natural disasters)! And may no one exploit and subjugate your children". (Tr. By Dwivedi 2000:10).

There is no notion in Hinduism about God creating this wonderful world solely for the enjoyment of man. On the contrary, it is believed that all, including animals and plants are his creation. Human beings have no exclusive right to lord over nature. Animals and even plants also have a God-given right to live. God is immanent in this world or nature, making it sacred. *Yajurvẹda*, which is even older than the *Atharva-vẹda*, commands explicitly, *Pṛthivim mạ himsihi, antarisksham mạ himsihi, mạpo mạ aushadhih mạ himsihi*'. (Do not injure the Earth, do not inure the space, do not injure water and the plants). (*Yajurvẹda*, V.42,43; and XIII.18).

Indian religions respected animals and their right to live, and violence on them was looked down upon. Jainism and Buddhism tried to stop the practice of animal sacrifice of the Vẹdic period. The Gita also changed the concept of *Yajna*, making animal sacrifice unnecessary. The Buddha called for compassion to all living beings and nature. Human beings may be more powerful than animals, but the Buddha argues in *Sutta Nipata* that 'we have a responsibility to animals precisely because of the asymmetry between us, not because of the symmetry that takes us to the need for co-operation. The Buddha goes on to illustrate the point by an analogy with the responsibility of the mother towards her child' (Sen 2009: 205). Power gives us responsibility to protect, not to exploit. This is also Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship extended to Nature. The benign attitude to non-human life and nature in general is evident in Indian culture in many ways. According to the doctrine of rebirth, to which Hinduism as well as Jainism and Buddhism subscribe, a human being could have been an animal in the past birth and could become an animal in the next birth. This brings human and non-human beings much closer in Indian religions, and should induce an attitude of empathy and respect to non-human life forms.

There certainly was an economic basis also for veneration of certain animals at least, which acquired a religious colour. The veneration for cow and bull/ox, for example, was based on their tremendous economic significance in daily diet, in agriculture, and in transport. Even the veneration of snakes, particularly by farmers, may be due to their role in rodent control and consequent protection of crops. The dangerous beauty of the cobra with raised hood also created an awe, which may have led to its worship.

A basic feature of Indian, especially Hindu culture, is its love of diversity, which is manifest in all fields—literature, culture, religion, art, architecture, languages, literature, and racial composition of people.[16] The love of diversity follows basically from conceptualising God in manifold forms of his manifestation including nature. Commitment to biodiversity comes naturally to Indian culture particularly the Hindus. The worshipping devotee is ideally supposed to offer twenty one varieties of flowers and leaves. This induced households to grow varieties of flowering plants and herbs in their garden plots. It is also this love of diversity which made Indian farmers preserve many varieties of cereals, pulses and vegetables. This is a rich heritage, not only to draw upon, but also to conserve.

Self-control or restraint on wants is highly regarded in all Indian religions, without which one cannot qualify for *sadhana*; it is actually a basic or primary requisite of *sadhana*. Wants have to be restricted to what is essential and legitimate; spiritual progress cannot go with consumerism. The first verse of the *Ishopanishad*, which was Gandhi's favourite, is pertinent here:

> *Ishavasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat /*
>
> *Tena tyaktena bhunjithah ma grdhah kasyachit dhanam //*

(All this is the abode of the Supreme Lord. Everything belongs to him. Enjoy what is left for you as your legitimate share and do not covet what is not yours).

It teaches leading a simple life by avoiding greed and pomp. By emphasising the value of austerity and curtailing consumption, Indian religions could be said to have strongly supported sustainable development. We can seek enjoyment in life in several ways other than wasteful consumption, by enhancing our capabilities, as Amartya Sen advocated, through increased leisure, devoting more time to art, literature, eco-friendly sports, music and dance. This is possible because God has granted us freedom of will, which we have to exercise in a responsible way.

If we exercise restraint on the use of natural resources including fossil fuel, it follows that we have to prefer labour-intensive rather than energy-intensive methods of production. This indeed was Gandhi's economic approach. He did not mind the use of machinery to reduce drudgery and strain, but not when it caused unemployment. His primary concern was to create full employment and to avoid a situation where some are over-occupied and some idle. But this approach was also eco-friendly, minimising the use of non-renewable energy. Gandhi also picked up another value of Indian culture, preference for durability, which reduces entropy or wastage. 'Use once and throw-away' habit is not consistent with Indian tradition and culture, but unfortunately business and economic growth thrive on this habit. Gandhi also made villages as centres of our economy as in the past, emphasising self- reliance and decentralisation. Producing mainly for the local market rather than for distant markets or the world market unduly increased the demand for transport, and with it the demand for nonrenewable energy sources. Apart from depletion, it also meant increased air pollution, leading to climate change. Environmental ethics should thus lead us to have a serious re-look at the style and nature of the present economic growth, and see how it can be made more eco-friendly, sustainable and humane.

In brief, the basic features of traditional Indian culture, particularly those of Hinduism, which support the cause of environment may be listed as follows (Nadkarni 2011: 118):

1. Reverence for nature - principle of nonviolence extended beyond human beings, without excluding them;

2. Respect for diversity;

3. Self-control on desire for more;

4. Free will and acceptance of human responsibility;

5. Gandhian preference for labour-intensive production, not energy-intensive production;

6. Durability as a value – not 'use once and throw away' habit;

7. Self-reliance, decentralisation, emphasis on village or local economy, without isolating from the world economy.

8. eTHIcS IN PRAcTIce

There is generally a gap between preaching principles and practicing them all over the world. Gandhi, however, rued that the gap was painfully bigger among Indians, even if their principles were loftier. It is not ethics in principles and ideals, but ethics in practice which can take a nation along the path of progress even in mundane matters like economic, social and political development, let alone spiritual progress. A nation lagging behind in this will be simply treated with contempt by the international community of nations. The ethical level of the Hindu society particularly since the colonial days has been abysmally low, which may well have been a major factor behind the success of foreign powers in establishing their way. Social reformers including Mahatma Gandhi and Dr BR Ambedkar contributed immensely to reform our society and put it on an egalitarian and democratic basis. However, their battle is yet to succeed. The moral integrity of most of our political class (so called 'leaders') is so low that they have lost all credibility and they rule by default. But this is a reflection also on the people who elect them. Out of exasperation, Vir Sanghvi, the editor of the Hindustan Times, wrote: 'If a serial killer stood for elections to the US Senate he would lose. If a sex crazed rapist tried to make it to the House of Commons, he would lose his deposit. In most successful democracies voters are discerning enough to not vote for crooks, dacoits and murderers. Our problem is this: we vote for them, time and time again'.[17] Even a decade after Sanghvi wrote this, the situation has not changed, and persons with criminal background are believed to be in state legislatures and even Parliament, as per repeated newspaper reports. The Law has not yet been amended to effectively bar the entry of politicians from contesting elections to public bodies. It is not appreciated that India can never dream of being a regional, economic or political power with this kind of a background of massive poverty, intolerable inequality and heinous levels of corruption and pilferage. In spite of centuries of effort, we have not been able to do away with the evils of caste oppression or exploitation of women.

Paradoxically, there is no dearth of religiosity in contemporary India, particularly among the Hindus. Varma quotes some interesting statistics: "… according to the latest survey by the Census of India, there are 2.4 million places of worship in the country, as against 1.5 million schools and half that number of hospitals" (Varma 2004: 96). Much of the religiosity that we witness today especially in the urban public space is pompous, ostentations, noisy and even hostile to environment – as in polluting water bodies with chemicals released from the Ganesha and Durga idols immersed in them.

Its purpose is cheap entertainment and sometimes exhibition of communal and economic power, and not spiritual progress. Such religiosity is not elevating, either morally or spiritually. It goes hardly a step towards Self-realisation or God-realisation.

We cannot, however, paint all Indians, or all Hindus, with the same broad brush in dark colour. Most of the Indians, including Hindus, who are settled abroad, have shown exemplary civic sense and have enriched the political, economic, social and academic life of their host countries with honour and distinction. Hindu temples abroad are models of cleanliness, quietude and solemnity, free from any vulgarity and garishness. Within India also, we cannot use the same broad brush for all. It is not as if it is a totally hopeless and dismal situation. It is not also as if ethics in practice in the historical past was either more glorious or more dismal than now. One of the major achievements of the contemporary Hindu society is the significant rise in the awareness of injustice and inequality, and widespread protest against social evils, particularly among what were called the lower castes. As a result, the Hindu society has become much more broad-based than ever before, though we have much to achieve yet in this regard.

We may first have glimpses of ethics in practice in the distant past. The lofty principles of scriptures were tried to be implemented through 'do's and don'ts in the *Shastras*. They had the status of law books. Despite commitment to the caste system and hierarchy, the *Shastras* were not totally devoid of social concern and a sense of justice and fairness. Actually they were supposed to ensure them. The *Arthashastra* warned the king to guard against officers exploiting or harassing people, and asked him to confiscate their property and even banish those who illegally take money and property of people (1.111- 2). *Arthashastra* envisaged a pre-modern welfare state where public services and infrastructure were to be provided by the king, and the rights of women, consumers, borrowers, wage earners and even prisoners were tried to be safeguarded. While business and industry were encouraged, earning wealth had to be subject to *dharma* and unfair dealings were banned.

Shastras, including the *Arthashastra*, tried on the whole to safeguard the interests of women. The wife had an absolute right to maintenance to be provided by the husband. "The husband could not proceed on a journey without making proper provision for her maintenance and household expenditure. If he married a second wife, the first wife had to be properly provided for" (Altekar 1999: 215). The 12th Century jurist, Vijnaneshvara, maintained that if a husband abandoned a virtuous wife or willfully misappropriated her property, she could move to a court of law to get her grievances redressed (*ibid* 215-6). A person casting aspersions on a woman was to be fined heavily. *Arthashastra* grants wife's right even to refuse sexual intercourse with her husband if she has already borne him sons or wants to lead a pious life (3.3.45). The wife had also the right to abandon her husband if his character was bad, or if he was away from her for a long time, or threatened her life, or was impotent (3.2.48). Women were allowed to remarry under certain conditions, including continued absence of the husband particularly during the fertile periods, or neglect of her and children's maintenance (3.4.24-25).

The wife had no property right in immovable property, partly because property rights, particularly of land, were not clearly defined even in general. To compensate for this, the institution of *Stri-dhana*

(woman's wealth) was evolved, which gave absolute right to women on movable property like gold. The scope of *Stri-dhana* was widened subsequently and strengthened, not shrunk. It included gifts from woman's father at the time of marriage, gifts from husband and relatives, and her own earnings. The widowed women too enjoyed the right to *Stri-dhana*, through it was considered as the sacred duty of the family to take care of them irrespective of whether they had any *Stri-dhana* or not.

Re-marriage of widowed women was permitted, even encouraged during the Vedic period. There was no practice of Sati during the Vedic and Upanishadic era. In the *Ramayana*, none of the three wives of king Dasharatha became a sati, but the *Mahabharata* does mention such cases. According to Altekar, the practice became more prevalent later when invasions from the North-East became frequent and the risk of humilation and dishonour increased. But the practice of Sati remained voluntary, and confined to certain parts of India. It was almost unknown in the south. Altekar observes, however, that the practice degenerated in areas where it was prevalent, since women were subtly encouraged to commit *sati* with the motive of cornering their *Stri-dhana*.

Despite constraints imposed on women, the society still respected them. An eloquent example of this is reflected in the time-honoured practice whereby the father of a *sanyasi* is expected to bow down before his ascetic son, but the mother is not; instead the ascetic son is expected to bow down to her! Respect for the dignity of women and concern about avoiding any sexual offence or misbehaviour was built in to certain customs. For example, a woman tied *rakhi* to the wrist of a man if they liked each other and *rakhi* is a symbol of brotherhood. Mutual attraction and liking is thereby transformed into sibling relations between the two, and the man is duty bound to protect her and desist from offending her in any way. Mixing between men and women then takes place with ease and without guilt. In the Indian custom, 'To every woman, every man, except her husband, is either father, brother or son according to age. And to every man, all women, except his wife, are his mother, sisters or daughters'.[18]

However, there were provisions in the Shastras which were not consistent with the concept of human rights and equality particularly in the case of the treatment of untouchables and *shudras*. There was no equality of law between castes. But thanks to social reforms and social protests particularly since the time of Raja Ramamohan Roy, the importance of the *shastras* as law books declined drastically. The British established the equality of all before the law as a basic principle of governance. Not only was *sati* banned, but also many other reform measures found their way into legislation. After Independence, Indians including Hindus willingly preferred to go in for a modern legislation in the form of the secular Hindu Law and a new Constitution of India, instead of adhering to the Shastras. Hinduism did not come in the way. Untouchability and any discrimination based on caste were made illegal and women's status improved. Women were given the right to immovable property along with the right to inherit, right to divorce and alimony, and the right to franchise. Taking dowry now is a criminal offence, and the law has come to the protection of women against domestic violence. The so-called Hindu Law has hardly anything to do with the *shastras*, and owes inspiration entirely to modern values of justice, fairness and human right to dignity.

What has been discussed above is with regard to the provisions in the law books. What about the actual practice particularly in the distant past? Travel accounts of those who visited India in the past may give some glimpses into the actual situation. There were several travellers, but I have taken up

three of them. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who came to India during the Seventh Century CE visited almost every part of India except the extreme south. He was particularly appreciative of the qualities of honesty, love of learning and courage on the part of people in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins, and has noted with admiration the quality of the country's people as a whole in respect of generosity and charitable disposition, reflected in the distribution of food and medicine to the needy (as cited in Majumdar ed. Volume III 1997: 575). A1-Biruni's (Alberuni) account of Hindus around 1030 CE generally confirms the above observations, though he was also more critical (Sachau ed 1996). He was impressed by their piety and alms giving seen across all castes (*ibid* Vol.II: 136-7). He notes that incomes were generally divided into four portions, the first for common expenses, the second for 'liberal works of a noble mind', the third for alms, and the fourth kept as a reserve not exceeding what is kept for common expenses for three years (*ibid* Vol.II 149-150). The liberal works of a noble mind may be for construction of tanks and ponds and other public works. Alberuni was particularly impressed by temple ponds and the beauty of their construction (ibid Vol.II: 144).

The chronicle of Abbe JA Dubois (1770-1848) regarding social conditions in India from 1792 to 1823 when he was here, is much less complimentary (Dubois 1992). Coming from France and imbued with modern humanist values of Renaissance in Europe, Dubois was simply shocked by the lack of ethics in day-to-day behaviour, wile and narrow mindedness particularly among Brahmins. There was hardly anything that impressed him as good and praiseworthy. The stupidity and inhumanity of caste rigidity, oppression of women and the practice of *Suttee* (*Sati*) in Bengal left him horrified, but not speechless, as he has given detailed accounts of the dismal conditions of the Hindu society of the time. He saw hardly any evidence of social concern.

Fortunately for the Hindu society, its modern leaders like Raja Ramamohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda were also equally horrified at what they saw in their own society and strove hard to reform it. Swami Vivekananda, when he visited Kerala, called the Hindu society there a 'mad-house of casteism'. He found there not only 'untouchability' but also 'unseeability'! The untouchables were not allowed to be in the eye-range of the upper castes. Their very sight was considered polluting. Though common masses and heads of traditional Mathas were found wanting in social concern particularly about caste matters, many Hindu leaders had it in ample measure. The story of social reform movements is well recorded and known widely. Panikkar has insightfully remarked, "India's independence and emergence into the modern world would hardly have been possible without slow but radical adjustments that had taken place within the fold of Hinduism for a period of over 100 years" (1953:319). We will be discussing more of this in Chapter 9.

It is pertinent to note here however, that even in the dark and dismal phase of oppression of the lower castes during the British period, the values of charity and helping the poor particularly in times of crises were not absent on the part of private individuals and institutions. The rich landlords and merchants may definitely have been exploiting the poor tenants and agricultural labour, but there was also evidence of charity on their part. For example, they took upon the task of feeding the hungry through free kitchens during famines, which is recorded in the Famine Reports. People subscribed generously to Famine Relief Funds raised by the British government in affected districts.[19] Such charity, inadequate as it was compared to the severity of the crisis, could not alleviate the suffering

of the people enough. Nevertheless, there was evidence of people rising to the occasion to help the needy even during normal times. *Chatrams* and *Dharmashalas* were started by private philanthropists, meant for free boarding and lodging for travellers and the poor. Even the poor contributed. Almost single handed, Sant Gadagebaba (1876-1956), coming from a humble social background, fought social evils like dowry, drinking, casteism and illiteracy among the poor, moving from village to village in Maharashtra. He also started several *dharmashalas* particularly for the deprived castes, where they could stay temporarily during travel.

In urban areas, students coming from villages and studying in towns were assigned houses where they could have a meal once a week by turn, each student thus having two meals a day round the week from different houses. This system was called 'varanna' in Karnataka with the students and hosts generally belonging to the same caste[20]. The system helped the spread of education particularly during the first half of the 20th century. Initially it was started among Brahmins; but other castes soon followed by opening free or concessional hostels for students of respective castes. In quite a few cases, such hostels were thrown open to students of other castes also. This in turn stimulated proper educational institutions to start hostels for rural students. By early 20th century itself several rural areas began to have their own schools, started not only by the government but also by private institutions such as Hindu *Mathas* and Christian Missionaries. Though the *varanna* system was mostly confined to boys, some of the hostels that were started later, facilitated the entry of girls also into college education in towns. However, on the whole, facilities for education were much less favouable for girls than boys, many schools in rural areas not even having toilets for girls.

As the process of economic development got a push after independence, it gave a push in turn to private philanthropy. Philanthropy was no longer confined to the top wealthy, and became more broad-based. While earlier, people donated mainly to temples, the new middle classes gave more and more for social causes. Social concern shown by Hindus did not take long to be transformed into institutional efforts. Right from the 19th century, reform movements as well as social work got organised under the banner of Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and many others. The trend has not abated and gained momentum as more institutions like the ISKCON, the Brahmakumaris, and the Art of Living are also in the field and have been doing wonderful work. Apart from social service, these organisations and their workers strive to raise the moral and spiritual level of people, dissuading them from drugs, alcoholism and smoking, and making them derive greater happiness and joy by simply being better human beings at peace with others and also their own selves. Traditional *Mathas* and temples started paying more and more attention to social service such that practically every *Matha* is now engaged in social service. The famous temple of Tirupati has been in the field of social service right since the 16th century by developing irrigation tanks in drought-prone regions (Rao 2004:81).The temple has, in the modern age, branched out in the field of education (from primary to university) and in health care. The modern age Gurus like Shri Satya Sai Baba, Mata Amritanandamayi and Sri Sri Ravishankar have been known for their social work in several countries of the world in almost all the continents. Their organisations are catering to the spiritual as well as the mundane needs of Hindus and non-Hindus alike, and spreading the message of peace and love. New caste associations of the so-called hither-to unorganised 'lower castes' have sprung up to take care of the social, economic and spiritual needs of their fellow caste brethren.

The discussion above should not lead us to conclude that the Hindu society, even if it encouraged charity, did not give scope for empowering the weak and the poor through encouraging them also to protest. On the contrary, there has been abundant evidence of protest movements against injustice. The Bhakti movements were not purely spiritual, but involved a lot of protest and can be said to have empowered the lower castes by raising their status. Gandhi who declared himself a Hindu is an unparalleled example of an attempt to empower the deprived and the depressed, though of course he did not do it under the banner of Hinduism. He declared that resistance to evil and injustice was a part of the moral responsibility of all; otherwise, it amounted to acquiescing with evil. There are other notable examples from the modern phase of Hinduism apart from Gandhiji's, - that of Swami Vidyananda during 1919 and 1920, and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati during the 1930s and 1940s. Both of them mobilized peasants against their landlords. The two Swamis made the peasants seek nothing less than a complete abolition of Zamindari, and demand minimum wages for agricultural workers. Though adversarial, their movements were nevertheless non-violent at least from the side of peasants, notwithstanding the fact that the landlords used violence to repress the peasants. The movements were not led under the banner of Hinduism, but were nevertheless inspired by the values of Hinduism, especially the values as in the Gita. Both the Swamis were steeped in the traditional discourse and also sensitive to social issues (Agrawal 2006). Swami Sahajananda asserted that "there is no contradiction between the moral stance (dharma) of the Gita and that of Marxists", in his *Gita- hrday*, a Marxist reading of the Gita published in 1948 in Hindi (referred in ibid:29). The Swami was foremost in starting the Bihar Province Kisan sabha and later All-India Kisan Sabha in 1936 along with NG Ranga. He saw no contradiction between his being a monk and also a peasant leader to secure justice for the poor peasantry. When landlords asked him how he, as a *sanyasi*, could get involved in such temporal issues as peasant problems, he quoted a Sanskrit verse to the effect that it is the selfish that seek their own individual liberation to the neglect of others, but that he could not do so and had to identify himself with the lives and interests of the poor (Das 1982:84). For him the essence of religion was helping the poor to lead a life of dignity and liberate themselves from poverty.

There have been a lot of new initiatives on the environment front also to address abysmal indifference to environmental issues. There are thousands of NGOs engaged in environmental activism to protest against instances of unsustainable development projects including displacement of settled people, and also to take up conservation works, promotion of organic farming, collection of urban solid waste and its processing, and so on. Bindeshwar Pathak almost single handedly launched a nation-wide movement for sanitation and operation of a chain of public toilets both in urban and rural areas, which received a good response. For a person born in a Brahmin family, it meant breaking caste barriers in a truly revolutionary way[21].

In spite of all such efforts, problems still remain. Atrocities on Dalits, dowry related deaths of women, poverty, increasing inequality, illiteracy (which, however, has come down significantly now), and lack of civic sense particularly in urban areas continue to be major challenges. Access of the poor to quality education and quality health care, food security for all, malnutrition of children, and high levels of infant and maternal mortality rates, need urgent attention. The Hindu religious leaders cannot pretend any longer that this is all *maya*, not deserving their serious attention.
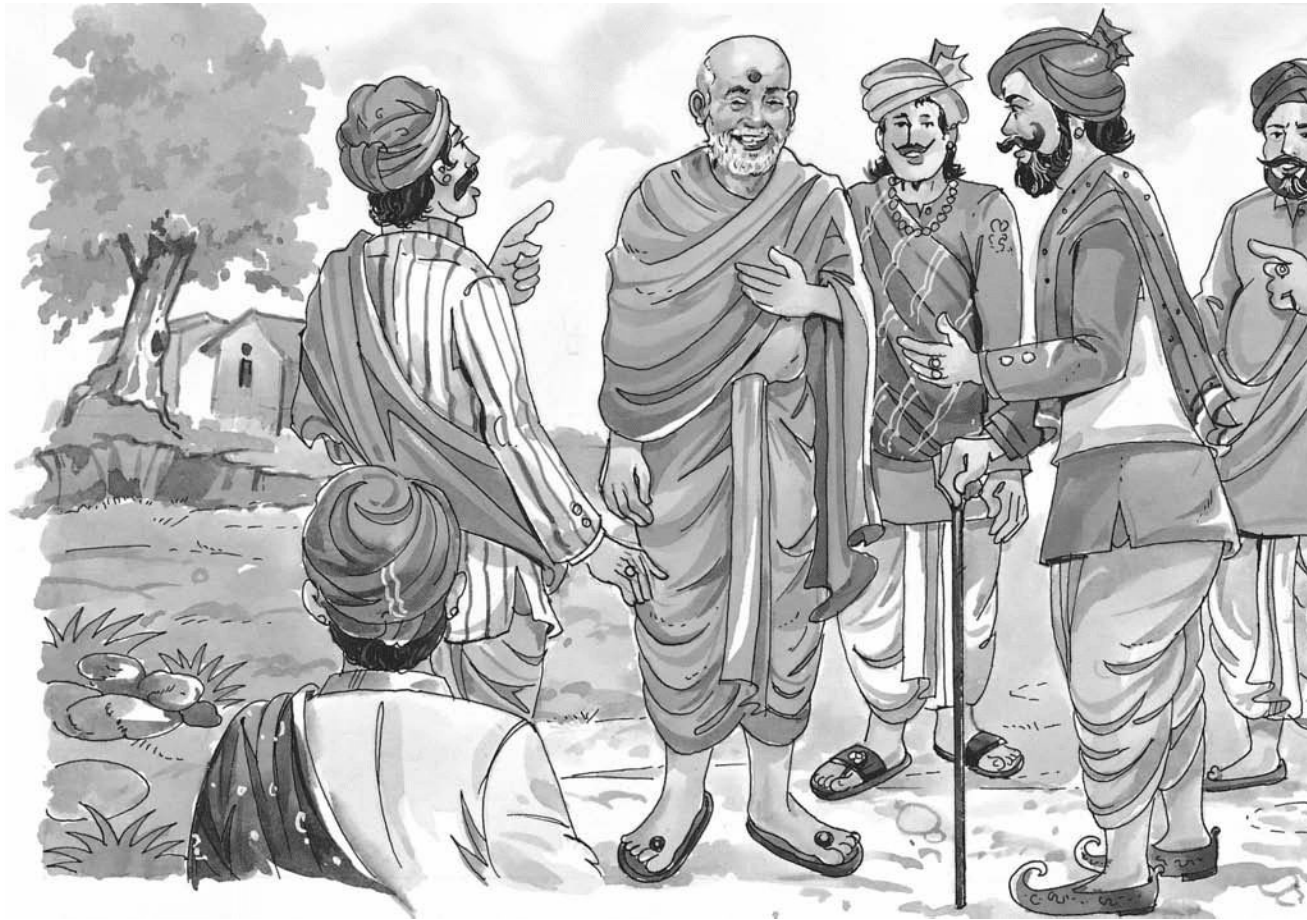
To a question posed by Zamindars as to why Swami Sahajananab Saraswati, a Sanyasi, got involved in such temporal issues as fighting for peasant's cause, he replied quoting a verse to say that it is the selfish who seek only their own liberation but he could not do so.

Notes To Chapter 3

1. The teaching, '*Ahimsa paramo dharmah*' occurs in several places of Mahabharata, especially in the *Anushasana Parva*. Some of the verses where it occurs are quoted by Badrinath (2007: 115-6) along with their translation into English. An example:

   Ahimsa paramo dharmah tathahimsa paro damah /

   Ahimsa paramam danam ahimsa paramam tapah //

   (*Anushasana Parva* 116.28)

   "*Ahimsa* is the highest dharma; *ahimsa* is the highest form of self-control; *ahimsa* is the highest offering; *ahimsa* is the highest austerity'. (Badrinath 2007: 115).

2. Regarding what constitutes a holistic approach see Chapter 7 in Nadkarni (2011: 169-95).

3. The original is '*Atmanah pratikulani paresham na samacharet*' from *Panchatantra, Kakolukiya* – 102, quoted in Herur 2001: 259. There is a very similar saying in the *Tirukkural* (the Kural) of Thiruvalluvar, 'Do not do to others what you know has hurt yourself' (tr. by Sundaram 1990: 50).

4. See for example, Ganeri 2002, Matilal (1989), and Das (2009).

5. For a discussion and ethical explanation of these incidents, see (Nadkarni 2011: 229-32).

6. Gurucharan Das draws a parallel between the World War II and the Mahabharata War. The World War II was regarded as a 'just war' by the Allies. 'A world dominated by a victorious Nazi Germany would have been even more intolerable than the one ruled by Duryodhana. In that war the victorious Allies did some nasty things. In the five months of the World War II in the Pacific theatre, American 'fire bombing' raids killed more than 90,000 Japanese civilians – and this happened before they dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the European theatre, the British killed more civilians with their bombings of German cities than were killed by Germany's blitz on Britain. The Pandavas' acts seem like indiscretions by comparison.' (Das 2009: 203-4).

7. We will have more to say about this school of philosophy later in Ch.6.

8. See 'Holistic Approach to knowledge (Ch.7) in Nadkarni (2011: 169-95).

9. A *satvik* economy can be said to be the one which is organised and functions ethically, with no poverty, no conspicuous inequality, with safety-nets to all especially the weak to meet emergencies, and adequate social security for all. It provides for equitable access to education, health care and all amenities and infrastructure. It allows only moderate inflation, and only sustainable use of natural resources and without pollution and wastage. It ensures employment for all. Even its private business is focussed not on maximisation of profits or shareholder wealth alone, but also takes into account the interests of all stakeholders. A *rajasik* economy is focussed mainly on maximization of growth rate with less attention to other concerns mentioned above. A *tamasik* economy has neither social justice nor economic growth but is full of corruption and illegalities in running both the public and private sectors, with very ineffective or little intervention to improve matters. Probably the Indian economy would come in between rajasik and tamasik with features of both. I will be happy if readers convey to me their ideas about how they would characterise the economy, politics and society in terms of the three gunas (e-mail ID given in the preface above).

10. 'Artha' is thus used here with two different meanings in two different contexts. It has also a third meaning – it is 'meaning' (for example, *Shabda-artha-kosha*, a dictionary), but the third meaning is not relevant here.

11. As translated and quoted by Malamoud (1982:42) in Madan (ed) (1982), p.42.

12. The original verse is from the *Ramayana, Aranyakanda* 29.4:

    Karma loka-viruddham tu kurvanam kshanadachara /

    Tikshnam sarvajano hanti sarpam dushtamivagatam // (quoted

    in Henur 2001: 208)

13. As quoted (in English) by Kane 1990, Vol.V, Part II, pp.934-5.

14. In his address at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, September 20, 1893 (Vivekananda 2000: Vol.I- 20).

15. This section significantly draws from Chapter 4 on 'Ethics, Environment and Culture' in Nadkarni 2011: 100-24). Readers may see this chapter for more details. But this section here is neither a reproduction nor a summary of the chapter and includes a few additional points too.

16. This love for diversity in practice is celebrated by BP Singh in the form of a whole book for it (Singh 2011).

17. Vir Sanghvi: 'The Politicians We Deserve', Sunday Hindustan Times, July 21, 2002. Quoted in Varma (2004: 53-54).

18. As told by Raihana Tyabji to Fred J. Blum in Thakkar and Mehta (2011: 240). Though she said this with reference to mixing of men and women in the Freedom struggle led by Gandhi, the practice was not an innovation of Gandhi. It has been there much before. In the ashrams of Gandhi or even outside, men and women freely interacted with each other, and there was not a single incidence of sexual assault or misbehaviour. Raihana attributes this to the yogic power of Gandhi, who could induce morally upright conduct even among his followers, apart from observing it himself.

19. See for example, the Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Board of Revenue (Revenue Sett., Land Records and Agriculture), No.503, November 3, 1900 for Kurnool district; paras 14(c) and (f), page 15. Prof. D. Rajasekhar of ISEC drew my attention to it.

20. Thanks are due to GK Karanth for drawing my attention to this system.

21. For a story of how he did this and achieved monumental success, see Bansal (2011: 1-31). Bansal in her book also presents several other stories of success of social entrepreneurs who made significant difference to the lives of people.

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4

Sadhana in Hinduism

> "*Salvation and knowledge of the ultimate truth were open to all [in Indian religions] to the member of every caste, high or low. This salvation or enlightenment could not be a group affair, it was highly individualistic. In the search for this salvation also there were no inflexible dogmas and all doors were supposed to lead to it*."

> — Jawaharlal Nehru (1994: 252)

1. SADHANA AND ITS PURPOSE

The literal meaning of *sadhana* is achieving, or striving to achieve. Achieving anything requires dedication and commitment, which are also implied by the term. The one who is on this path of achieving is called *sadhaka* or the seeker. Often the travel is more meaningful than the destination, and so it is with sadhana. What is sought to be achieved is secondary to the adventure of achieving. The very task of spiritual sadhana, when sincerely practised, purifies and ennobles us, imparts more confidence in us, strengthens our moral fibre, gives us peace of mind, and lifts us above the ordinary, gross and mundane. And that is an achievement by itself. Take the prayer below.

Ma gatchha tvam itahstathato Girisha bho mayyeva vasam kuru Swaminnadikirata
mamakamanahkantara simantare /
Vartante bahusho mrga madajusho matsaryamohadayah Tan
hatva mrgaya vinodaruchita labham cha samprasyasi //

(*Shivananda-Lahari* by Shri Shankaracharya, as quoted in Herur 2001: 356) (My
Lord, the Lord of Mountains, the Primeval Hunter!
Do not go here and there, but reside in me!
Within the wilderness of my mind, there are many animals – Arrogance,
jealousy, infatuation and the like!
Have the pleasure of a hunt by hunting them down!)

The spiritual seeker fervently appeals to Lord Shiva to reside in him and hunt down the wild animals in his mind. Controlling one's mind, and getting it rid of narrow selfishness, lust, hatred, arrogance, and jealousy are an indispensable part of *sadhana*, and if it is done there is little left to achieve further.

What is the ultimate goal of *sadhana*? One does not undertake a journey unless one has a destination in mind. It is the destination which inspires you and makes you to undertake the necessary trouble and toil. It is the destination which makes you choose the path. What then is the destination of *sadhana*? The answer to this question is not unanimous, even if we grant that the destination is spiritual and not just material or mundane.

Most of us may not have high spiritual ambitions. We are so embroiled in our day-to-day life's struggles we are satisfied if we return home in one piece at the end of day after going through maddening traffic jams in our (especially Indian) metropolitan cities. We invoke the Grace of God to merely keep us alive, active and healthy, give us success in keeping our respective families in good comfort and bestow on us peace of mind in a world which disturbs it every moment. With so much uncertainty facing us – the extent of which seems to increase with every generation, we feel that faith in God can give us much solace. It does not mean that this faith is enough to solve our problems and that self- effort is not necessary. But we believe in invoking God's Grace even to make our efforts effective and successful and to give us the necessary good wisdom (*Sadbuddhi*) to make ourselves successful and happy. The Gita assures that even a little of piety and leading a virtuous life can protect us from great fear and stress (II.40).

Quite a few, however, would set the bar higher and apart from success here in this world, would also prefer to reserve a nice room in heaven after death, as their spiritual destination. They believe that there is a heaven and a hell somewhere outside this world. The god of justice, Yama, through his officers, is supposed to maintain an account of each person, and after death, according to the *punya* (merit earned through good deeds) and *papa* (sin earned through bad deeds), sends the *jiva* (or soul) of each to heaven or hell respectively for finite terms till their *punya* or *papa* are exhausted or redeemed. The message, therefore, is to do good deeds and avoid bad deeds. Such a belief is certainly constructive in so far as it induces people to be moral and to act in a way that benefits the society. Whether there is a Yama or not, whether there is a heaven or not, an act of *punya* is something which is socially beneficial, and an act of *papa* is socially harmful. Any *sadhana* requires the performance of good deeds and avoidance of bad deals, irrespective of belief in heaven and hell. *Sadhana* thus, apart from individual benefits, has also beneficial side effects on the society at large. Vedantins, observe
– without questioning the reality of heaven and hell – that even as pleasures and pains of this world are temporary, the pleasures and pains of heaven and hell are also temporary. There can neither be a permanent luxury apartment in heaven nor any permanent damnation in a cellar of hell. The abode there is temporary, and the *jivas* come back to this world, take another birth, and then the cycle repeats. They point out to a more meaningful destination which is even higher than a stay in the heaven, - *moksha* or a release from rebirth (to be discussed further below). There are also spiritual savants like Basavanna who assert that there is no separate heaven or hell apart from this world, and that both are experienced in this very world according to one's moral conduct.

The law of karma requires no heaven or hell for its operation. One reaps according to what one sows in this very world. If the `harvesting' is not completed in the present birth, the *jiva* takes another birth to complete it. Each *jiva* is bound by this law. The true destination for *sadhana* then is one of seeking liberation from the operation of this law, which is called *Moksha* or *Mukti*. Once this state is attained, then there is no rebirth, and one is freed from the cycle of births and deaths, and there is then no question of the fatigue of respective experience of sorrows, anxieties and tensions of this world. It is said to be a state of blissful peace from which there is no return, having once attained it. It is Union with the Brahman, the absolute, no less. Compared to the joy of experiencing this union, all mundane pleasures are said to be mere trifles. Implicit in accepting this as the ultimate destination, is an attitude which looks down upon life in this world as full of sorrow and tension, and the urge is to escape from it. *Moksha*, in such a conceptulisation, comes only after death. However, if life in this world is such an undesirable thing and is best to be avoided, why in the first instance did God create it?

Vedanta says, however, that death is not *moksha*, also *moksha* does not require death. If we read the Gita carefully, it speaks almost throughout of such a state being attained in this very life. The emphasis of Hinduism is on Self-Realisation as the ultimate destination of *sadhana*, which is identical with *moksha*-while-living, also called *Jivan-Mukti*. And the interesting thing about this is that the destination and the path to it become one and the same. As observed in the beginning of this section, the very travel spiritually ennobles us and lifts us above the ordinary as the divine spirit stimulates and enlightens our consciousness. Though there are said to be cases of sudden enlightenment or Self- Realisation, it seems to me to be a gradual process, speeding up at times, slowing down at others, but on the whole progressing to perfection. Self-Realisation may or may not come on its own. But to receive it when it comes we have to keep our doors and windows open, as has been observed by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri M and others. "If the window is open the breeze will certainly come; there is no doubt about it." (Sri M 2011: 95). They also caution us that though we have to keep our mind pure and prepared for it, we should start on the path right now. "If you wait to become morally perfect before you begin your spiritual practices, that day will never come. Start today and, as the divine bliss enters your heart, you will get purified inside and outside. You will get the strength and inspiration to mould your life as you wish" (ibid: 111). Each step taken counts and contributes to progress. As the Gita assures, '*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat*' (even a little of dharma protects us from great fear or anxiety. Ch.II.40).

When the destination of spiritual journey is *moksha*-while-living, then *moksha* acquires a much wider meaning than a mere release from the cycle of births and deaths. It means freedom from not only the *Shad-vairis* (the six enemies - anger, greed etc) but also from fear, anxieties, tensions and sorrows of the world which come through deep attachment. But this freedom does not come from renunciation of action, because as the Gita say that such a renunciation while living is not possible (III.5) It need not even involve renunciation of family ties and obligations to make a living. One can also try to realise the full potential of one's personality in this world. As Vedantins say, a *sadhaka* can be *in* the world but not *of* the world. What it means is that one can play one's role in the world like an actor in a drama, but at the same time should keep the consciousness alive in the mind about what one really is, and not completely identify with the character of the play. If this basic detachment

is not there and if there is a complete identification with the character, it can lead to disasters. For example, in a murder scene, the actor may really kill someone! Vedantins say that if one acts one's role as an actor, one can detach oneself from the temptations, tensions and sorrows of the world and face life more calmly and effectively. Such an attitude can even help you avoid health problems caused by stress, while at the same time progressing towards Self-Realisation. Sri M quotes a teaching by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in which he compared a yogi to a housemaid. "The housemaid treats the house she works in as if it were her own. She keeps everything clean and in order. She refers to the children of the household as her own, calling them 'My Radha', 'My Babu' and so on. But in her heart of heart, she knows that nothing [in the household] belongs to her" (as quoted in Sri M, 2011: 101). The housemaid is in the household, but not of the household.

A question may arise here whether one can be genuine, if one is only an actor. For example, between a husband and wife, should love be only a matter of acting? If so, does it not amount to hypocrisy? Does it not mean that the couple would then miss the pleasure of genuine love, its intensity, passion, companionship, and spontaneous sacrifices for each other? How can there be deep love if there is no attachment? When I eat a delicious ice-cream, is it unspiritual to enjoy it, or should I only act as if I enjoy it? Is life worth living, if it consists only of acting and being deliberately aware all the while that one is only acting? These are certainly genuine questions. Life consists of trade-offs and choices. Many may choose to love life with all its tensions and sorrows, because they rate the pleasures of life higher than its sorrows. Such people may not bother about *moksha* either while-living or after-death in the sense of a release from rebirth. They may actually prefer to be reborn to have a chance of going through the pleasures of life once again. On the other hand, there may be others who would rate life's sorrows and tensions as outweighing its little temporary pleasures, particularly if obsession with such pleasures is an obstacle in the spiritual journey. It is a question of choice. *Moksha* is not a mandatory goal for all, but only for those who seek it. Moreover, one may not be born with this goal. One can seek it after undergoing the pleasures and sorrows of a life of *Grhastha* or *Grhini* and becoming more mature in the process for a spiritual journey.

Nevertheless, *sadhana* does not mean absolutely eschewing all enjoyments and pleasures of life. What it insists upon is avoiding obsessions and cravings, being in full control of one self, not straying away from the moral path, but being in equipoise without losing balance of mind. The Gita is clear here. Yoga is not for those who either overeat or starve; nor for those who sleep all the while or those who hardly sleep. Moderation and balance are the key to yoga. (VI.16). Loving one's wife with intensity is okay, but pandering to her wishes to the point of ill-treating or neglecting one's parents is not. Similarly, respecting and loving one's parents is okay, but not to the point of ill-treating one's own wife in order to please one's parent. An ideal husband in this context exercises love, wisdom and moral influence in such a way that he can make both his parents and his wife love each other. It is the failure to do so which has resulted in several cases of suicides of young married women in India. Greedy parents use their spineless sons to squeeze daughters-in-law and their families to bring in more and more wealth. There is happiness to none in such families. The example of a son caught between his mother and wife illustrates how one can get bogged down in conflicting and entangled relationships in life, unless one can keep one's head above them with a certain degree of detachment and poise. Such a person

can tame conflicting relationships into harmonious and enjoyable ones. Let alone spiritual pursuit, the principle of detachment and balance brings its benefits even in worldly pursuits. *Sadhana* aims merely at making happiness more meaningful, truly satisfying and lasting. Its aim is not to deprive one of happiness. A successful *sadhaka* is joyful, open, compassionate, social, obliging and free of complexes. *Sadhana* does not prevent one from enjoying the ice-cream, provided overindulgence in it is avoided and there is no craving for it. The relevant point here is who the master is. Is the *sadhaka* the master over the ice-cream? Or, is ice-cream the master over the *sadhaka*?

Swami Chinmayanada used to say that happiness is a quotient, *ie.*, a ratio of desires satisfied over the total desires felt (quoted in Patchen 2003:154-5). In the majority of cases, the quotient is less than one. As desires are satisfied, more desires emerge, and hence there is no break-even. According to Swamiji, *Sadhana* simply requires that we increase happiness by restraining the desires felt and the quotient increases thereby (subject of course to basic needs being satisfied). In the case of an accomplished *sadhaka*, the quotient can be one or even more than one, since here the wants are more than satisfied, and contentment is reached easily. Whatever comes is gracefully enjoyed as a blessing. Such an attitude is beneficial not only to the individual, but also to the world since the pressure on the use of environment is thereby reduced. It is the pursuit of satisfying unlimited wants that lies at the root of depletion of natural resources and even global warming. What is good for spiritual pursuit seem thus to be beneficial even in worldly pursuits for sustainable happiness and welfare for all.

Ultimately, for a genuine *sadhaka*, nothing else counts except getting or realising the Divine. Seeking the Divine to get something out of It, particularly material gains, is not the purpose of ideal *sadhana*. As a medieval saint-poet put it – I seek not wealth, nor knowledge, nor powers, but only Krshna. Sri Aurobindo has expressed it in a modern way:

> "The object of the yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great yogi or a superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for moksha though liberation comes by it and all else may come, but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object."
>
> (Aurobindo 2010: 10) (parentheses as in the original)

2. Self-Realisation Through Jnanamarga And Rajayoga

Sadhana can be pursued in different ways, depending on one's concept of the ultimate goal. Though all goals of *sadhana* lead to meaningful and lasting happiness, they may be perceived differently and hence pursued differently, or even in combination, as may be preferred by the *sadhaka*. When self-realisation is perceived as the ultimate goal of *sadhana*, the paths followed are *Jnana-marga* and *Rajayoga*, which go together. When the goal is one of personal fulfillment through union with the personal God, then *Bhakti-marga* (*-yoga*) – the path of love and worship is followed. If, on the other hand, the goal is one of personal fulfillment though unselfish service to humanity or to God Himself through such

work, the path chosen then is *Karma-marga*. The emphasis of *Jnana marga* (-*yoga*) is using *Buddhi*, the capacity to discriminate between the real and unreal, momentary and everlasting. The emphasis of *karma-yoga* is on using the will power, the capacity to detach oneself from desiring the fruits of action, while the emphasis of *bhakti-yoga* is on using the capacity to love and to feel. When all the Yogas are followed in an integral and holistic manner, the whole personality and the mind of the person is involved in the pursuit of the Divine. The pursuit itself purifies the instruments making them fit for use in *sadhana*. These goals as well as their instruments may be seemingly different and distinct but are consistent with and gel with each other. They may not even be perceived as alternatives, since they are not exclusive to each other. An advanced *sadhaka* sees the unity behind these goals and instruments respectively and can follow all these paths simultaneously in an integrated and harmonious way. When done so, they may have a synergetic effect, since they mutually help each other. A sadhaka does not have to make neat distinctions between Jnana, Bhakti and Karma following only one exclusively. For example, strictly according to Shankara's advaita philosophy, *jnana-marga* may appear to be the only logical way. But Shankara himself composed many hymns of fervent Bhakti addressed to personal gods, including the one quoted at the outset of this chapter. He did not see any contradiction between the two. He felt on the contrary that Bhakti is the surest stepping stone to *Jnana*. Similarly, Bhakti is a necessary ingredient of Karma-yoga too, because any work done without dedication is meaningless for this yoga. The Adhyatma-Ramayana (VI. 7.66) says explicitly: *Bhakti-hinena yat kinchit krtam sarvam asat-samam* (any work done without bhakti is as good as not done). Similarly, Bhakti without Jnana would be raw emotion without sanctity, and Bhakti without Karma (even when capable of work) would be pure idleness and a burden on society.

A brief and simple statement about Self-Realisation is that it is a process by which one discovers God and the ultimate truth within one's own self. Jnana-marga or Jnana-yoga appears as the logical choice for this purpose, since it leads to the knowledge of the Self. Raja-yoga (literally, the king of Yogas) is a path complementary to it which includes a set of spiritual practices leading to Self- realisation. Since meditation (*Dhyan*) is an important spiritual practice used for the purpose, Raja-yoga is sometimes referred to as Dhyana-yoga also. Control of the wavering mind through meditation is crucial to Rajayoga, which is mentioned right at the outset in Patanjali's *Yogasutras* (*Yogah chittavrtti nirodhah*; Sutra 2). Since self-realisation is not a matter of mere book knowledge or learning, but also of experiencing and feeling it, even Jnana-marga needs to fulfill some moral requirements and a mental disposition for receiving the realisation, which may be strengthened by spiritual practices of Rajayoga. There is thus a lot of overlap and commonality between Jnanayoga and Rajayoga, which is why they are taken together in this section.

The Gita teaches us repeatedly that God is within us and in every one of us (III.40, 42; VI. 30, 31; XV. 11, 15; XVIII.61). It is from this teaching that the belief about our body being a temple of God took root (*Deho devalayah proktah dehi devo Niranjanah*; ie, the body is a temple of God and its dweller is the blemish-free God Himself). Where there is a temple, there is worship and worship means Bhakti, which provides a meeting point between Jnana and Bhakti. This idea of the body being a temple finds a beautiful expression in one of the the *vachanas* (sayings) of Basavanna (12th Century AD) in Kannada: