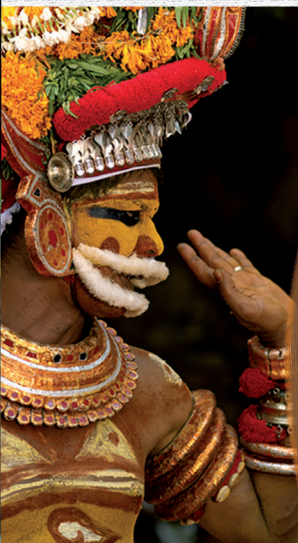
FERNANDO A. GARCIA

HUMANISM IN INDIA

NOTES FOR A STUDY OF HISTORY



Architect Fernando A. Garcia (1950, Mar del Plata, Argentina) is a scholar and a social activist inspired by Silo's work. Silo (Mario Luis Rodríguez Cobos) is the founder of worldwide *Humanist Movement* -a novel and influential current of thought and social action based on *New Humanism* (or *Universalist Humanism*). Garcia has been devoted to his vocation since he took Silo as his spiritual guide back in 1970. This has taken him mostly to Asia, Europe and Latin America, where he travelled, resided and developed a wide range of activities.

As a member of the World Assembly of the *Humanist Movement*, he contributed to set up and provide orientation to working teams, organizations, publications, campaigns, mass media action and many other activities in many countries. This spanned the fields of social work, culture, ecology, human rights, and, generally speaking, voluntary work for a change of society and individuals.

He is vice-president of *Associazione per l'Appoggio Umanista* O.N.L.U.S., Roma (*Humanist Support Association*), and, in India, he has been a cofounder of the *Foundation for Humanization* (Mumbai), and *Humanscape* magazine. This work on India is the fruit of his personal experience with that millenary culture and its people, matured through many years of work in urban and rural areas.

Besides his participation in conferences, lectures and seminars, he is the author of many diverse articles and essays. The present book introduces one of those works, sponsored by the *World Centre of Humanist Studies* (Moscow).

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Fernando Alberto García

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FOREWORD TO THIS EDITION

I welcome this original, even extraordinary, interpretation of Indian civilization, society, and culture from the point of view of the Humanist Movement. Fernando A. Garcia, the author, does a remarkable job of highlighting humanist elements in Indian history, elements such as placement of the human being as the central value and concern; affirmation of the equality of human beings; recognition of personal and cultural diversity; developing knowledge beyond conventional or imposed ideas; upholding freedom of thought; and repudiating violence. It is not that he sets himself up as a self-appointed one-man judge to see how India scored on such benchmarks; rather, he tries to highlight the presence of such humanist ideas and ideals during the different periods of India's history.

What makes Garcia's intervention noteworthy is that he steers clear from negative, stereotypical accounts of India so common to Western scholars; such accounts, as has been persuasively shown, distort Indian realities owing to their own prejudices. On the other hand, he also avoids the excessively defensive or idealized ways of narrating India that are also common both in India and abroad. In short, he neither demonizes nor idolizes the object of his study. Instead, what we find is a well-researched, balanced, and informative report on the progress of humanism in India through the ages.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to both lay and scholarly readers as a good introduction to a subject that needs more research—what the native sources and drivers of humanism were in our part of the world. Humanism, as is obvious, is not the sole preserve of any one culture or community, but is part of a world-wide species impulse that has sought, from the beginnings of time, the realization of the highest potential of our humanity. Garcia's book shows that this impulse was alive and active in India, contributing not only to this country's growth, but also to human development everywhere.

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PREFACE TO THE 1997 EDITION

About the author

Fernando Garcia was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina, on 12th of July 1950. He started learning to appreciate Indian civilisation at an early age, when at 13, he came across a Spanish edition of the Bhagavãd-Gîtã and the works of Swami Vivekananda, under whose inspiration he then became an aspiring karma-yogi and a short-lived vegetarian. After graduating as an architect, he travelled to Sri Lanka to follow from close the diffusion of the Humanist Movement founded by Silo, the Latin American thinker and writer. Subsequently, he shifted to India where he resided for some years. In those years, he also travelled to China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, etc.

Presently, he works as a freelance translator and writer in Rome, Italy, still maintaining regular contacts with India. He welcomes contacts through the Foundation for Humanization, 62 Hatkesh Society, Flat No. 5, Viram, N. S. Road No. 8, Juhu Scheme, Vile Parle West, Mumbai 400049, INDIA, or directly by email at : fernando120750@gmail.com

A FOREWORD FROM THE WORLD CENTRE OF HUMANIST STUDIES

The World Centre of Humanist Studies takes pleasure in introducing another contribution from Fernando Alberto Garcia. Among other works, Garcia is the author of the essay "Human Rights and the West," published by our Centre within the 1996 Annual "Humanist Perspectives."

The presentation of this book will be part of our *First International Symposium on Ethics in Knowledge*, to be held during November 2008 at the National University of Cuyo and at Punta de Vacas Park – Mendoza, Argentina.

We believe that our times are not marked by a clash of civilizations, but by their integration into one universal human nation with all their cultural diversity. Therefore, standing by our pledge to build bridges of understanding and communication among cultures and peoples, we aspire at making this book the first of similar ones. That is, to produce a series focusing on different countries and cultures in Asia and all over the world.

We thank the author and we wish for many contributions to come from him.

Hugo Novotny
Moscow, 2008

PREFACE TO 2008 EDITION

The 2008 edition was an an essay made available to the general reader for the first time. The 1997 edition was published as a monograph meant to be circulated among supporters of the Humanist Movement, mainly in India but in other countries as well. This work was originally written with the purpose of helping humanists to acknowledge and value humanist roots in their own cultures, in confusing times when such roots may deceivingly appear to be definitely superseded by antihumanist values and practices. Such realization has contributed to inspire humanizing actions in all fields, and will hopefully continue doing so.

That edition aimed at making that inspiration reach a larger public. In this regard, I remain especially grateful to the *World Centre of Humanist Studies* (W.C.H.S.) for the encouragement and support received. Actually, this book was meant to be presented at the *First International Symposium on Ethics in Knowledge* organised by the Centre, held at Punta de Vacas Park (Mendoza, Argentina) from 12th to 15th November of 2008.

Fernando A. Garcia
Buenos Aires, 2008

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the main sources of inspiration and support for writing my book: Silo, the Humanist Movement and the Indian people.

In particular, I am grateful for the continuous and manifold support given by the *Foundation for Humanization* (Mumbai, India).[1]

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Foreword

This is my first book, and it did not come early in my life. Actually, I never thought of writing before. It is because I felt there was an important vacuum to be filled that I decided to take the pen. There are, indeed, plenty of abler writers to take up this task, but they were not coming forward. Thus, notwithstanding its ambitious title, I decided that mine could be an introduction to better works that others will hopefully produce.

Future editions of this book may include the feedback and contributions from other writers who may come forward. I advance a proposal to Indian scholars who may be enthused by this book. If they can add elaboration to this book, in further editions they will be duly acknowledged. Thus, this book may be revised and grow in course of time as a joint production -like most great Indian works.

Indian civilisation is in all likelihood the oldest on earth[2]. It comprised or extended its influence to present-day countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Siam, etc.

"The spread of Hindu religion and culture to south-east Asia began about the middle of the first millennium B.C. India had, from very early days, developed extensive

[2] This point will be dealt with below.

mercantile contacts with Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Burma, Malaya, Thailand, and other countries of the region. Partly through these trading contacts, partly through political conquests, but also through emigration of Indian colonists, Hindu culture spread to this area of the world."[3]

In most of the book, I will refer to India equating it, at least, with the Indian subcontinent, and, broadly speaking, with the civilisation that spread much beyond the subcontinent. In ancient times, Indian influence reached in various ways the Mediterranean in the West, the Pacific in the East[4], Tibet, Mongolia and China in the North, and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in the South. No less than one sixth of today's world population is a direct inheritor of Indian civilisation.

However, such tremendous wealth of human experience has not been always sufficiently or properly researched and diffused. Still, plenty of stereotypes and misconceptions abound in the Western imaginary regarding things Indian.[5] This wealth needs be tapped

3 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 86.

4 Some research seems to give support to the idea that Indian civilisation reached the Western shores of Pre-Columbian America through the Pacific Ocean from the first to the twelfth century C.E. Mayan, Aztec, Incan, and North American Indian civilizations show striking influences.

5 For an instance, the numbers 1, 2, 3, were invented by Hindus in India (see How Did We Find Out About Numbers, by Isaac Asimov) and the place-value system of representing any number using 10 (das - the decimal system) symbols 1, 2, ... , 9, and 0 were developed in India. Since Europeans learned about the number system from Arab traders, the numerals are wrongly called Arab or Arab-Hindu numerals. "The ancient

in these times of so-called globalisation, in which the richness and diversity of peoples risks being trampled over by a crass attempt of uniformisation.

Everybody is now aware that we are at a crossroad of humanity. These are times of crisis, and no field escapes from it. People from different walks of life denounce it and offer would-be solutions. This is unprecedented since, for the first time in human history, there is a global civilisation in the making. However, risks are neither few nor small. This turning point that some of us see as a unique chance to humanise the world, others see it as a self-seeking, profit-making opportunity. The outcome depends on human intentionality, guided by the models that will prevail in course of time. Humanism, properly understood, is one such model that can provide a positive direction into the future. Humanism is in the background of every civilisation. Actually, it sums up the best of every people. It only needs to be brought to the foreground.

Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Babylonians all evolved number systems, although none had a zero, which was introduced from India by way of Arab mathematicians in about the 6th century AD and allowed a place-value system to be devised on which the decimal system is based. Other number systems have since evolved and have found applications. For example, numbers to base two (binary numbers), using only 0 and 1, are commonly used in digital computers to represent the two-state 'on' or 'off' pulses of electricity." (The Hutchinson Encyclopedia (1995 edition), Helicon Publishing, Oxford, 1994, under number, history, page 764). "The little circle which is known nowadays as zero was called 'void' (śūnya) in Sanskrit. This was originally an Indian invention which was introduced into the West by the Arabs about 1150 A.D." (*A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 409).

A Western-centred, naive vision will have us believe that humanism is exclusively a European development and, basically, an anti-religious onslaught. The present work intends to show that both notions are utterly wrong. In addition, Indian readers will realise that I did not try to see Indian civilisation according to this concept of humanism, nor through Western prejudices. Although the humanist attitude has found expression in all civilisations, here we will focus on humanist expressions in Indian civilisation. Along with growing globalization, there has been a growing interest in comparative studies. However, it is not along the obsolete lines of declaring one culture to be the norm and judging other by its standards, but rather in terms of a comparative analysis of many cultures, though the humanist attitude has found expression in all civilisations.

On the other hand, I guess some scholars may disapprove my lack of "scientific objectivity," but detachment, but I will not apologise for this. I must make it clear from the very beginning that I do not pretend to be “neutral” in my approach. Even before Einstein, Quantum Physics, or Phenomenology, we started giving up the naiveté and the arrogance of being “neutral observers” describing reality "as it is." Everybody has, whether explicit or not, a particular and unavoidable standpoint from which things are seen in a particular way. However, this is not an invitation to wild relativism, but an antidote against absolutism under the pretence of "objectivity." Of course, we can (and ought to) avoid gross misrepresentations of facts,

distortions, and errors while reasoning, etc. In present times, those who confuse the collapse of obsolete ideologies with the definitive end of all ideologies will have as believe that their views are devoid of ideological content. This is not my case. I adhere to a current of thought, represented by the worldwide *Humanist Movement*, which is called *New Humanism* or *Universalist Humanism*. This is not the place to elaborate on this novel thought. However, I will briefly deal with it while explaining the conceptual framework I will use while looking for the humanist thread in Indian civilisation. I will also mention it among the latest humanist trends in India, and will give some bibliographical reference.

This is the first book written on Indian civilisation from the standpoint of the above-mentioned *New or Universalist Humanism*. I know that M. N. Roy's manifesto, first published in 1947, was called "New Humanism."[6] Besides the affinities or differences one may find in both, the *New Humanism* I am referring to is not Roy's. So, the term 'new' to define a brand of Humanism is being used again more than half a century after M.N. Roy used it. Moreover, the Radical Humanist Party of India and the worldwide Humanist Movement I belong to are two different organisations.

I am fully aware of the fact that writing on history is like walking on a minefield, in the sense that its interpretation is open to hot controversies. Actually, most

6 *New Humanism, A Manifesto*, Fourth Reprint, M. N. Roy, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1981.

of the Indian subjects are still debated, and most of the historical events and characters can show both positive and negative aspects, depending on how one looks at them. Thus, while exercising my right to opine, I may be unwittingly touching some raw nerves. However, in no case whatsoever I meant to attack anyone. Rather, my intention is to point out what, according to me, are positive features of the Indian civilisation, while hopefully contributing to build bridges. Because "For us, Humanism has the captivating merit of being not only history, but also a project for a future world and an instrument for present action."[7]

Finally, I do apologise for my shortcomings both as an amateur historian and as writer -I cannot boast any formal education as those fields. I just count on a well-defined humanist viewpoint, and a strong love for India. Actually, this book is but a small tribute of gratitude to the invaluable gifts of vital experience and human warmth I received from India. Therefore, perhaps some readers -especially Indian- may feel that, due to my limitations, I am making a disservice to the subjects I covered. However, I felt it was better to write something that can later be improved, than not writing anything at all. In any case, may even the criticisms entice some to improve on this work!

Bombay, September 21, 1997.

7 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*.

Outline of this book

The present work has humble pretensions. It is meant to be just a compilation of some pointers to subjects that the author or, hopefully, better-equipped writers will develop in future. The subjects I refer to are the humanist traits that are present in the background of every culture. Sometimes those traits lie dormant, seemingly inexistent or just mentioned at the time of paying lip service to them in high-sounding speeches. At other times, those traits resurface and bloom, incarnating in high-profile characters or in thousands of low-profile men and women. Those are the traits that, in every civilisation, should be identified and stressed in this crucial turning point of humanity.

I do not adhere to the view that India is "a wounded civilisation,"[8] but rather a most vital and lively one. Neither do I intend this book as a half-flattering "The wonder that was India." Undeniably a wonder India was; but I equally believe she still is, and will forever be.

I may have rather titled this book "My India," sharing with Corbett[9] my love for her, and in the sense that here I exercise my personal way of looking at her.

Among others, this book responds to an urge for compiling a collection of notes taken along many years of reading and daily interaction with Indian people.

8 Reference to *India: A Wounded Civilisation*, by V.S. Naipaul, Penguin Books, Aylesbury, Bucks, 1979.

9 *My India* by Jim Corbett, (Oxford University Press) UK/INDIA 1952.

Therefore, those notes and observations -like brush strokes- have been taking the shape of a pattern that I will illustrate with bibliographical references and historical facts. Actually, I will heavily rely on quotations so that issues are conveyed and argued in the same words used by Indian authors. However, I will not abound in many historical details besides those closely related to the points I want to convey. Therefore, I apologise with readers unacquainted with Indian history. Surely, they can find many interesting books to go deeper into some subjects.

As usually happens with some approaches by which the writer wishes to convey a particular look at history, relevant aspects should be brought to the forefront and spotlighted, while others should be fleetingly mentioned or plainly ignored. Given the constraints of book length, the present study will make no exception to this.

While surveying historical events, I will not adhere to deterministic views or theories about historical events or developments. I do not think that human history can be thoroughly explained by, or that human beings are puppets in the hands of, economic forces, availability of material resources, challenges to which they are presumably compelled to respond, pre-established cyclic periods of rise and fall, biological clockwork mechanisms, etc. Neither am I a devotee of "the end of ideologies" or "the clash of civilizations."

I rather tend to see that those aspects reflect the points of view that some historians used to look at a reality that is far more complex than their simplistic cause-effect accounts. If at all, I rather feel more inclined to share certain Advaitic or Buddhist views that see every single event indissolubly linked to so many concomitant

conditions, that single cause-effect explanations lose any meaning. It is rather a structural view by which a single viewpoint is a compromise. This compromise should, however, be made explicit.

"From the above it can be seen that historiography has become a sort of covert moralism, justified as scientifically rigorous, that begins by considering historical phenomena as seen from "outside," obscuring the fact of the historian's "look" and therefore the distortions it introduces.

"This will not be our approach. Our interest is an interpretation or philosophy of history that goes beyond the orderly narrative or simple "chronicle" (as Bernardo Croce ironically calls it). Moreover, it is not a matter of concern if such a philosophy is based on a sociology, a theology, or even a psychology, provided it is at least minimally conscious of the intellectual construction that accompanies the doing of historiography."[10]

Besides, most -if not all- historical accounts give little or no importance to the very agent of history, i.e. human consciousness. Its intentional, evolutive, and structural character makes it is neither a passive mirror of external circumstances nor a reactive substance that can be manipulated at will. Human beings will always surprise us. In other terms:

"This sort of exegesis is not incidental but unavoidable. There is no way to understand how temporality occurs in events, that is, how they gain temporality in a conception of history, other than by including the intrinsic

10 *Silo, Complete Works vol. 1. Contributions to Thought. Historiological Discussions*, Introduction. Latitude Press, USA.

temporality of those who produce these events. Thus, it is useful to agree: *Either history is an occurring that reduces the human being to an epiphenomenon, in which case we can speak only of natural history (unjustified because among other things it omits human construction), or it is human history (among other things capable of explaining construction of all sorts).*
For my part, I hold to this second position. "[11]

Therefore, using one of the possible many points of view to look at cultures and civilisations, I will precisely try to hint at how human consciousness went on opening its way in Indian civilisation and accumulating progress towards humanisation. This process started since remote times and is still going on. It proceeded through trials and errors, moving forward and backward, through slow accumulations and sudden leaps, but with a clear direction towards overcoming pain and suffering, towards humanising life. If it is argued that historic description and interpretation are relative to the point of view used, then I will choose one that stresses what is positive, that helps life by giving faith and keeping hope alive -I choose to see the growing humanist streak in Indian civilisation.
In order to track the humanist attitude in Indian civilisation, we will focus on precise historical periods, "since such attitude seems to retreat and advance in a pulsating way along history, until many a times it disappears completely in the times of no-return that

11 *Silo, Complete Works vol. 1. Contributions to Thought. Historiological Discussions*, Chapter 3: History and Temporality. 3.1 Temporality and Process. Latitude Press, USA.

precede the collapse of a civilisation."[12]

On the other hand, and as much as possible, this book will not deal with abstruse philosophical matters. That is, it will barely brush philosophical humanism or discuss, for example, the humanist traits present in the classical six schools of thought of India. Rather, it will focus on widespread social expression of humanist traits that I will define below.

Similarly, most of the time I will overlook important areas of social and cultural endeavour, but which may be irrelevant for this particular study. India's immense wealth in terms of literature, music, poetry, theatre, cinema, folklore, handicrafts, language, architecture, sculpture, science, technology, etc. will barely be tapped. I will rather tend to concentrate in specific social developments marked, or heralded, by changes in the fields of religion, ethics, politics, and social organisation.

Throughout the book, although a reference is made to outstanding personalities because they represent a period, I understand that historical processes are the joint product of entire peoples. That is, I do not see history is not made by in terms of special classes or individuals who, as active agents, give a new shape to a previously unsuspecting, formless and passive society. There should be minds prepared to value the import of the message given. Though they may play the role of interpreters or catalysts of their times, they cannot be seen as the sole agents. There would not be outstanding personalities without outstanding peoples and their times. Heroes, seers, and leaders are not

12 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 251.

aliens landing from outer space, just in any circumstances. Kings may be more or less good or bad as rulers, but they hold power over the rest as long as popular belief keeps on bestowing them with that power. M.K.Gandhi -granted his personal qualities- rose to become *Mahatma* in the land of non-violence (*Ãhimsa),* at the time of growing popular rebellion against colonialist imperial oppression.

All personalities, organisations and currents covered, are controversial. The criterion followed here was to describe what I deem was their contribution to the humanist cause, leaving aside other aspects that may be relevant from other points of view, and that are amply covered in other works. In line with this, only those that were deemed their positive aspects were mentioned. Though I am aware of criticisms made against them, I thought it better to build bridges rather than widening divides.

Throughout the centuries, humanists in India have addressed various issues according to their times and circumstances. The same applies to the approach and means they used. While reviewing them here, I am not implying that all those issues, approach and means should be reproposed in present times. The humanist struggle is also historic, and should be updated to cope with the present situation. Some issues may now be inexistent, older approaches may be counterproductive, and previously successful ways may now prove to be ineffective.

To point out humanist achievements of Indian Civilisation does not imply downgrading other civilisations, but highlighting its contribution to the cause of a universal human nation. For "Present-day Humanism unmasks and condemns chauvinism as an antihuman ideology and

practice that places the nation and the race above the human being, pitting human beings against each other, and praising violence as a methodology for solving conflicts."[13]

In this book, we will not come across permanent defeats or successes in the cause of humanisation. We will see contributions that yielded as much as they could, just as we cannot demand from a step to take us further or higher than the next step of the staircase.

> "Therefore, the problem now is to first find some appropriate words and concepts which will express and explain the 'uniqueness' of this distinctive cultural tradition and a 'way of life' that suggest a basic unity. This unity is reflected at various levels and aspects even while it exhibits normal social and cultural change through the passage of time, that is, Indian civilization represents a spatial and temporal continuum in which its carriers come and leave it while it continues on itself, because there are 'certain persistent themes' that dominate the life of the people in this civilization and, thereby, result in a continuum of this distinctiveness of the Indian tradition."[14]

Finally, what is the type of humanism we are interested in pointing out in this book? "We are interested in a humanism that should contribute to the improvement of life, that faces discrimination, fanaticism, exploitation and violence. In a world that is fast becoming global and that shows the symptoms of a clash between cultures, ethnic groups and

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13 *Dictionary of New Humanism*, World Centre of Humanist Studies, Latitude Press, USA, 1987, under "Chauvinism."

14 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 58-9.

regions, there should be a universal, plural and converging humanism. In a world wherein countries, institutions and human relations get destructured, there should be a humanism capable of impelling the recomposition of social forces. In a world wherein the meaning and direction of life have been lost, there should be a humanism apt for creating a new atmosphere of reflection; a reflection in which neither the personal be any longer uncompromisingly opposed to the social nor the social opposed to the personal. We are interested in a creative humanism, not a repetitive humanism; a new humanism that takes into account the paradoxes of the times while aspiring at solving them."[15]

In India's culture, we will see that apparently opposed, clashing factions, contributed equally to the common cause of humanisation, each one from its own angle. Moreover, although hard to digest by narrow outlooks, the fact is that I did not come across any single current or faction that has not been influenced by its relation – whether positive or negative- with others. This lends further credence to the fact that identities -be they individuals, peoples or cultures- are never configured in isolation, but through social intercourse.

Thus, the humanist traits that I describe in this book configure a design that, like those beautiful Indian fabrics, cannot be made but with multicoloured threads. In this diversity, any individual thread twists and turns, passes over and below others, disappears and reappears; forming along with others that unique pattern we love as *Bhārat* (India).

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15 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 239-240.

PART 1

HUMANISM

Chapter 1: Humanism as an attitude

Before reviewing humanist expressions in Indian civilisation, it is necessary to clarify and define what is meant by "humanism." Though impatient readers may skip this part and go straight into things Indian, they will be missing the stand chosen to select and describe them, failing to recognise humanism in those expressions shaped by time and circumstances. Humanism has been defined in many ways, and still its definition is under debate. Given the scope and length of this book, here we cannot review all of them. It would either be impossible or require another book. In any case, we have to define what we are talking about, being aware that whatever definition we take will not satisfy all the humanist varieties. "On the other hand, I think that the proliferation of 'humanisms' in the last few years is wholly legitimate, always provided that they present themselves as particular cases, without an absolutist pretension over humanism in general."[16] Hopefully, all humanist branches will understand that we are serving the overall cause of Humanism. Therefore, I will briefly introduce the definition I personally adhere to. I will choose the definitions that, in my view, cover better the humanist tradition in India. For this purpose, I will borrow from the *Dictionary of New Humanism*[17].

16 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 253.

17 Under "Humanist Attitude," in *Silo: Collected Works, Volume II, Psychology Notes, Notes, Dictionary of New Humanism*.

"The humanist attitude existed long before words such as "humanism," "humanist," and others like them had been coined. The following positions are common to humanists of all cultures:
1) placement of the human being as the central value and concern;
2) affirmation of the equality of all human beings;
3) recognition of personal and cultural diversity;
4) a tendency to develop knowledge beyond conventional wisdom or that imposed as absolute truth;
5) affirmation of the freedom of ideas and beliefs; and
6) repudiation of violence.

"Beyond any theoretical definition, the **humanist attitude** can be understood as a "sensibility," a way of approaching the human world in which the intentionality and freedom of others are acknowledged and in which one assumes a commitment to non-violent struggle against discrimination and violence (**humanist moment*)."
Therefore, it is clear that I do not intend to deal with humanism as a dry and abstruse philosophy - which I deny it is. Moreover humanism, strictly as a philosophic endeavour, systematic philosophy, humanism is mostly a Western affair. I am referring, for instance, to the Christian, Existentialist, and Marxist varieties of humanism.[18] However, such philosophical humanisms, besides the criticisms one may move against them, take us away from the actual facts they are supposed to address. In other words, here we are rather concerned with the practical expressions of the humanist

18 See, *Interpretations of Humanism*, Salvatore Puledda, Latitude Press, USA, 1997.

attitude and its actual influence in social life. Besides, the whole academic discussion that takes place mostly in Western circles would seems to make humanism an almost all-Western affair, and perhaps some want to export it as model that belongs to that cultural area. This misconception is further reinforced by the fact that the term "humanism" was coined in the West, thus encouraging some to claim a sort of "copyright" on a universal human trait present in all cultures. It would be as absurd as claiming that science or literature was invented by the peoples that coined those terms first. Therefore, there is no doubt for us that "humanism belongs to the roots and heritage of the whole humanity."[19] Within this context, here I will adopt the approach of a humanist current that embraces humanist expressions in all cultures

"UNIVERSALIST HUMANISM[20]

"Also called *New Humanism* (*). Characterized by an emphasis on the *humanist attitude* (*). The humanist attitude is not a philosophy but a point of view, a sensibility and a way of living in relationship with other human beings. **Universalist Humanism** maintains that in all cultures, in their most creative *moment* (*), the humanist attitude pervades the social environment. In such periods, discrimination, wars and violence in general are repudiated. Freedom of ideas and beliefs is fomented, which in turn provides incentive for research

19 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 239.

20 Under "Universalist Humanism" in *Silo: Collected Works, Volume II, Psychology Notes, Notes, Dictionary of New Humanism*.

and creativity in science, art and other social expressions. **Universalist Humanism** proposes a dialogue between cultures that is neither abstract nor institutional, but rather an agreement on fundamental points and a mutual and concrete collaboration between representatives of different cultures based on their respective and symmetrical humanist "moments" or eras (**Humanist moment*). The general ideas of **Universalist Humanism** are formulated in the "Statement of the Humanist Movement" (**Humanist Statement*)."

With this outlook, Silo says, "To establish links between civilizations through their 'humanist moments' is, understandably, a vast long range endeavour. If, at present, the ethnic and religious groups withdraw within themselves to achieve a strong identity, we have a sort of cultural or regional chauvinism in motion by which those groups risk a clash with other ethnic groups, cultures or religions. Then, if each one legitimately loves his people and its culture, he can also understand that, in them, there existed or exists that 'humanist moment' which makes his people, by definition, universal and similar to another with which it clashes. Hence, these are diversities that could not be possibly swept away by any of the parties. These are diversities that are neither an obstacle nor a defect nor backwardness, but constitute the very wealth of humanity. The problem does not lie there, but in the possible convergence of such diversities, and this is the 'humanist moment' I refer to when I talk about the points of convergence."[21]

21 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, pages 253-254.

In our review, we will also identify outstanding humanists, understanding that "humanist is everyone who struggles against discrimination and violence, proposing outlets so that the freedom of choice of the human being manifests itself."[22] From this standpoint, philosophies will be relevant for our study only if accompanied by or translated into actual, diffused social behaviours and facts. The history of humanity is riddled with good-willing philosophical ideas, excellent laws, and religious injunctions that never went beyond narrow circles or books. At other times, their application was never pursued thoroughly or was rather twisted. On the other hand, humanist attitudes -as sensibilities- are prior to their thorough formulation as philosophical systems. Moreover, they give the latter their foundation, whether acknowledged or not.

What Albert Einstein, the great scientist, described as "the most important factor in giving shape to our human existence," may also define the humanist aim with his words: "is the setting up and establishment of a goal: the goal being a community of free and happy human beings who by constant inward endeavour strive to liberate themselves from the inheritance of anti-social and destructive instincts."[23]

In order to clarify further what is meant by "humanist attitude," the following chapters will briefly elaborate on each of its characteristics.

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22 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 256.

23 Albert Einstein in *Essays in Humanism*, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950, page 108-9.

Chapter 2: Placing the human being as the central value and concern

Throughout centuries, human beings have inquired about the natural and the social worlds, and about human beings themselves. Human beings have been trying to find the meaning of their world, of their own lives, society, history and existence.

Different were those who inquired and the circumstances in which they did it, and different were the responses given. Those responses were adopted by peoples to a greater or lesser extent sometimes within and sometimes beyond the boundaries of the society and the times in which the responses arose. The responses given to the same subjects changed according to the peoples in which they arose and spread, and even the same response underwent changes according to the changing times.

In all cases, human beings were at the centre: *they* were inquiring, and *they* were adhering to, or rejecting, the results of their inquiries.

Those responses human beings gave themselves took the shape of philosophy, culture, politics, science, etc. Those were adopted by societies as garments to be worn, until they wore out or became too tight to encompass their growing understanding and needs.

Fewer were the cases in which those inquirers probed into the inquirers themselves, and became aware of their active role in making the meaning of the subjects dealt with. Conversely, the inquirer's particular grasp of the subject under examination was taken as reality

itself unquestionably. That is, it led them to believe that their grasp of the subject matched the very nature of things grasped, that it was independent of themselves, their approach to the subject, the means used, and the circumstances of their inquiry. They overlooked their active role in configuring the way reality appeared to them.

Thus, this naiveté of man's infancy entailed a submission to the subjects dealt with, or to the results of the inquiry. Inquirers overlooked themselves as subjects, the makers of meanings, the creators of the "objects" they discovered. Then, they inverted the roles; they placed those "objects" as subjects, endowing them with intentions, and placed themselves as objects with an inexistent or subordinated intention. There arose the overwhelming notions of deities, rulers, the State, human "nature," a "natural" law, the meaning of existence, nature, etc. Human beings saw themselves as "objects" yielding to the intentions of things higher or greater than them, thus dehumanising themselves.

Indeed, as different people inquired into the same subjects, and their results were taken as the very reality, this led to conflicting views on the same issues, and to more or less bloody clashes. Consequently, the "reality" or the "truth" of such beliefs fluctuated according to the number of believers or to the control exercised over the people. History is riddled with instances in which those notions born out of human beings' inquiry were used as banners to oppress people. Moreover, those visions of things often entailed the justification used by some to monopolise and impose on others in the name of those "realities" or "truths." The intentionality of some was

affirmed, just as the others' was denied and trampled upon. Then, some were attributed the humanness that was denied to others. Those who were dehumanised were looked upon as objects to be treated according to the dehumanisers' intentions.

Let us cite in brief just a few instances in which human beings downgraded themselves in the name of their own creations, which displaced human beings from their central position:

- Human beings have conceived revengeful deities that punished believers and unbelievers as well;
- social models that discriminated people and persecuted dissent;
- economic models that treated human beings as goods to be traded, or as mere producers or consumers of goods;
- visions of history and mankind that attributed supremacy to those who conceived them;
- scientific theories that reduced man to the status of a particular animal, and their best feelings and aspirations to brain chemistry or genetic heritage;
- psychological theories that saw human beings as puppets manipulated by the environment;
- ecological theories that placed man as just one more among other species -and the most evil as such;
- therapies that dealt with human beings as machines with spare parts to be replaced or disposed of;
- educational systems that treated students as passive blank tablets on which to emboss official notions;
- political theories that stressed on supremacy, conquest, war and preying;
- religions that stressed more on power and control over people, than on helping them to find God in

their own hearts and in their fellow human beings;
- philosophies that placed the State, a church, a class, a law, or plain absurdity and nihilism, above the human being. The ultimate paradox was to oppress and kill in the name of freedom -as some conceive of it.

In those cases, human beings (or human life) were not placed as the central value. Other constructs, or other values, were given more importance. Other values were placed higher than the makers of those values, i.e. human beings themselves. Therefore, instead of conceiving things in terms of being at the service of human beings' growth of happiness and freedom, they became chains that bonded their own makers.

Human beings have been suffering and dying in the name of deities, powers, ideas and models they themselves have created and chose to believe in. At all times, human beings were at the centre, choosing to believe or not to believe in them, to act or not to act on those beliefs.

Nowadays, the threat is renewed by enthroning money, profit and a particular economic system as the new deities. The so-called blind or fair forces of the "free market" are raised above the human beings, as new deities to propitiate with the sacrifice of human lives. Human life is trampled on in the rat-race of pragmatism of convenience, possession of objects, and climbing the ladder of success.

All throughout, human beings have assumed their own constructs to be realities operating by themselves, independent of their way of conceiving them. However, progressively, the fact is dawning in humankind that reality appears to be according to the observer's "look." Every particular "look" builds a "reality," a "landscape," that will result in more or less happiness, more or less

freedom for the very creators of that vision.

How absurd or naive our old beliefs may look when they are replaced by new ones! How irrational they may look when we deprive them of the suggestive power with which we endowed them! How ready we are to embrace new beliefs unquestioningly, conveniently forgetting how blindly we once adhered to the fallen beliefs! How reluctant we are to probe into our standing beliefs!

Therefore, let human beings find meanings that go in favour of life, of happiness, of freedom. In sum, let human beings make meanings that go in favour of themselves -the very makers of meanings.

If we could reflect dispassionately on all this, we would realise the wisdom of respecting plurality and diversity, of acknowledging the equality of all human beings, of developing inquiry beyond established "truths," of rejecting all forms of violence and discrimination.

Placing the human being as the central value does not mean to forego to search for, or to adhere to, new notions of man, society, history, deities, science, etc. On the contrary, New Humanism encourages free inquiry in all fields. Let us just remain aware of the fact that the results of our inquiries will always be one way of looking at things, that greater or higher ways may be lying in store for us human beings in the future.

Placing the human being as the central value means that the consequences of such inquiries should add to happiness and freedom for all, instead of becoming one more alibi for further violence and discrimination. In other terms, let our ideas and beliefs -and, above all, actions- be at the service of overcoming physical pain

and mental suffering; let them contribute not just to freedom and happiness of whoever upholds them, but to everybody's as well.

All this is condensed in the humanist motto: "*Nothing above the human being, and no human being below another*," the basis of which is the universal golden rule that advises: "*Treat others as you would have them treat you*."

Summarising: Human beings are not placed as the central value whenever their happiness and freedom is compromised for the sake of something that is placed as higher or as greater than that. Conversely, human beings are placed as the central value when everything is put at the service of their happiness and freedom, or, in other terms, at the service of overcoming pain and suffering.

Since happiness and freedom should be for all, and not for some, placing the human being as the central value also entails affirming the equality of all human beings, acknowledging both personal and cultural diversity, developing knowledge beyond that which is accepted as absolute truth, upholding the freedom of thought and belief, and repudiating all forms of violence.

All the above is condensed in the humanist motto: "*Nothing above the human being, and no human being below another*."

Chapter 3: Affirming the equality of all human beings

For at least 300 years, much of Western political debate has focused on equality, and the drive to implement various interpretations of it has been a major force of the 20th century.[24]

Whether from the point of view of science or from that of religion, discrimination against "those who are not like us" is receding in the background.

In the case of science, the theories of a "master race" have long been discredited, and not just because Nazism was militarily defeated.

In the case of religion, different creeds coincide on the equality of all human beings. They may not always abide by this in actual practice, and may discriminate on other grounds, like establishing who are closer or farther from "the truth," etc. But all human beings are seen as equals in front of their "creator," or equally share the universal pervading divinity. This applies to theistic religions, in which there is a difference between God and human beings, a gap that is called "dualism." In "non-dualistic" traditions, like Advaita (i.e. non dualistic) Vedanta, human beings can find God within themselves, in the depth of their consciousness, since the Absolute manifests as God-consciousness, and human beings are essentially that. Actually, the individual realizes his or her real identity that is the

24 *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Fontana Press, Glasgow, 1990, second edition, equality page 280.

same as God's and is universal. He is consciousness and consciousness is all that exists, as manifestation of the unmanifested. Therefore, it follows that all human beings and their apparent differentiation and individuality are illusory; essentially and ultimately, they are the same.

Some affirm that egalitarian assumptions are no more self-evidently "natural" than inegalitarian ones. However, the point is not whether the equality of all human beings is "natural" or not. Granted that things "are" according to the observer, what matters is that, given the choice to see people in terms of differences or in terms of similarities, we intentionally choose the latter. That is, we will to see what unites people, not what divides them. All the more reason for this, if nothing comes to support definitely the supposed "naturalness" of inequality. In any case, the arguments in favour of inequality always relay on secondary aspects (colour, shape, etc.), not on essential ones, i.e., not on humanness. Neither sociality, nor labour capacity or language by themselves make human beings stand as unique.

Even when discriminators point out cultural or psychological factors, they take them to be fixed, immobile, overlooking that they are different manifestations of the essential humanness. In sum, all arguments in favour of inequality stem from concepts of the human being that do not grasp the essential and, therefore, miss the equality of them all. For instance, by saying "man is a rational animal," man is placed as one more species among the animals, with a peculiarity -to be rational. Therefore, placing the emphasis in his animalness, in his physical instrument -the body- there is

room to search for humanness where it is not. From then onwards, discriminators can easily establish superiorities or inferiorities based on secondary aspects such as colour, athletic performance, immunologic defence system, metabolism, longevity, etc. On the other hand, if genetic inheritance is the core of that animalness, and it can be manipulated and perfected for all, what is the worth of discriminating others on its basis?

The same applies to "rationality," because then people can be discriminated according to a certain arbitrary standard of rationality. Is there more or less rationality - and, therefore, humanness- in cultures that privilege technological development, or philosophical speculation, or social organisation, or artistic expression, or the search for harmony with nature? Who are qualified to set the standard of rationality, and therefore humanness? Those, precisely, who favour a certain type of rationality? The subject is no less tough than the definition and measurement of genius.

While expounding his definition of human being, Silo explains,"To define the human being in terms of its sociability seems inadequate, because this does not distinguish the human being from many other species. Nor is human capacity for work a distinguishing characteristic when compared to that of more powerful animals. Not even language defines the essence of what is human, for we know of numerous animals that make use of various codes and forms of communication. Each new human being**,** in contrast, encounters a world that is modified by others, and it is in its being constituted by that world of intentions that I discover that person's capacity for accumulation and incorporation into the

temporal – that is, I discover not simply a social dimension, but each person's *historical-social dimension.*

"With these things in mind, a definition of the human being can be attempted as follows: *Human beings are historical beings, whose mode of social action transforms their own nature."* [25]

Here we are far from naive or superficial definitions. This being -not animal- is in a process of transformation of whatever its nature is. It is change, it is motion, it is transformation -there is nothing fixed or natural about it. Therefore, here there is nothing which discriminators can get hold of. In all human beings we recognise the accumulation of social history, incorporated as personal background, in front of which every human being chooses to accept it or reject it. There is transmission of social experience, there is intention, there is choice, there is a past and a future that extend beyond the individual life span. And these are characteristics that we can see in all human beings, no matter how different the social memory they carry, their intentions, and their choices may be.

The implementation of the equality of human beings clashes against the vested interests of minorities that monopolise the social resources. They argue that there is a lack of resources to support an increasing world population, when it is a fact that world economic and technological resources can provide basic needs to everybody. They argue "unequal individual endowment" because of genetic factors, when these genetic factors

25 Under "Human being in *Silo: Collected Works, Volume II, Psychology Notes, Notes, Dictionary of New Humanism*.

can now be manipulated and they are not a reason why people should be denied basic needs and rights. They argue lack of education to deny political rights, when it is in their hands to provide such education.

Defenders of inequality take "unequal individual endowment" as natural and perennial. Therefore, they propose "meritocracy,"[26] that is, the rule of those regarded as possessing merit. Here merit is equated with intelligence-plus-effort, its possessors are identified at an early age and selected for an appropriate intensive education, and there is the obsession with quantification, test-scoring, and qualification. All this has overtones of Huxley's *Brave New World* as well as Plato's *The Republic*. They overlook the role that historical accumulation of inequality -a non-natural development- plays in creating and maintaining the "unequal individual endowment." With this self-defeating cynicism and self-serving ideology, there is little room for transforming society, but it only reinforces the existing inequalities. While affirming the essential equality of all human beings, humanism also acknowledges the personal and cultural diversity with which they express themselves.

26 Meritocracy. Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, 1958. Fontana, page 521

Chapter 4: Acknowledging both personal and cultural diversity

Discriminators of all times tended to make everybody adjust to their particular views, creeds, or lifestyles. They did it using overt or covert coercion. They saw diversity as a threat against their own identity; as though somebody's difference would somehow make their own identity less right. They did not see plurality as a wealth of possibilities from which to get enriched. They saw it in terms of "if we two are different, one must be wrong -and that's you."

Totalitarisms of all shades tend to abolish diversity, and replace it with a uniform colour. In today's world, cultural and personal diversity is threatened by a so-called globalisation imposed by international finance capital.

Humanists "find inspiration in the contributions of many cultures, not only those that today occupy center stage."[27]

"Humanists seek not a uniform world but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and in creativity."[28]

"Today, minorities the world over who are the targets of xenophobia and discrimination make anguished pleas for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, leading the struggle to overcome such neo-fascism, whether overt or

27 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*

28 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*

covert. In short, to struggle for the rights of minorities is to struggle for the rights of all human beings."[29]

"Under the coercion of centralized states—today no more than the unfeeling instruments of big capital—many countries with diverse populations subject entire provinces, regions, or autonomous groups to this same kind of discrimination. This must end through the adoption of federal forms of organization, through which real political power will return to the hands of these historical and cultural entities."[30]

"For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced."[31]

"We are committed to the present, and we envision a continuing struggle toward the future. We affirm diversity, in open opposition to the regimentation that until now has been imposed based on the argument that diversity sets the elements of a system in dialectic, and that respecting all particularities gives free reign to centrifugal and disintegrating forces. Humanists believe the opposite, affirming that now, during just such times as these, the levelling and obliterating of diversity will lead rigid structures to explode. For this reason, we stress a convergent direction and a convergent intention, opposing both the idea and the practice of eliminating supposedly dialectical conditions from any given group or collectivity."[32]

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29 *Silo: Collected Works, Volume I, A Contemporary View of Humanism,* Universidad Autónoma, Madrid, April 16, 1993.

30 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*

31 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*

32 *Silo: Collected Works, Volume I, A Contemporary View of Humanism*, Universidad Autónoma, Madrid, April 16, 1993

Chapter 5: Tending towards developing knowledge beyond that accepted as absolute truth

In the best “humanist moments” that humankind has known in different cultures and civilizations, knowledge was always sought and developed beyond what was then considered as the absolute truth. Whether it was in the field of science, philosophy, arts or religion, there was a zest to expand the horizons. Considering something as the absolute truth may happen in good or in bad faith. Sometimes the limitations in vision imposed by the times make people blind to see the new, whether perceived or imagined. Classical examples are those of the beliefs on a flat Earth and the impossibility of flying aircrafts. Similarly, it happened in all fields of human endeavour. At one point in time, somebody wanted to know more or to dare go beyond. Hence, inventions, innovations, progress and revolutions made a breakthrough. And many of these happened against the scepticism of naysayers.

However, many a times wielding and imposing “absolute truths” has served the vested interests of powers-that-be. Until not long ago, "pensée unique" (French for "single thought") was very much in vogue. Restriction or persecution, cover or overt, cruel or not, of anything going against “absolute truths” was used as a means for social coercion. Usually it was meant to ensure the preservation of privileges and power, trying to resist the evolution of history.

For instance, do we not consider today with a certain degree of disbelief that a new world can be organised around solidarity and cooperation, instead of money and survival of the fittest? But this is just one example among so many that may be given. Sometimes these prejudices about leaving behind "absolute truths" are self-deceptions or self-censorship; but they often are also actively nurtured by those who have vested interests in keeping them as such.

Indian civilization offers us plenty of instances regarding the abovementioned cases. On one hand, India preserves almost all the "geological strata" regarding different historic stages of "absolute truths." On the other, India has never remained idle regarding questioning absolute truths and staging revolutions to topple them. The following chapters will offer many such cases.

Chapter 6: Upholding freedom of thought and belief

Early Christians were called “atheists" by the Romans, since they refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan idols and imperial statues. Orthodox Hindus called Buddhists (and Jains) were called “nihilists” or “unbelievers” (*nãstikas*) by orthodox Hindus.). Buddhism was placed next to materialism (*Lokãyata*), which means that it was considered the second worst teaching in the world in the eyes of Hindu orthodoxy.

"Although unrest toward prevailing customs may trigger man's searching out new ways, the blossoming of various philosophical and religious systems is also largely due to the possibility for free thought within the society concerned. In addition, freedom of thought is an indication of the respect given to each individual. In India, such recognition of each person being an individual man worthy of respect occurred very early. Freedom of both thought and expression was permitted not only to hermits and philosophers, but also to everyone else. Probably never before, and seldom since, has there been any place where such absolute liberty of thought was allowed. 'In India, religious and philosophical thought enjoyed almost absolute freedom. Anyhow, it is certain that it enjoyed freedom so large as had never been found elsewhere in the West before the most recent years[33]."[34]

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33 Max Weber, *Hinduismus und Buddhismus. Gesammelte Anfsatze zur Religionssoziologie*, Bd.

34 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 185.

Chapter 7: Repudiating violence

"All forms of violence —physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others— that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists."[35] Coherently with this, humanism understands non-violence as an active attitude that does not tolerate any form of violence, and commits to overcome it by non-violent means. "Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence."[36] Active non-violence is the only alternative for addressing conflicting issues in any civilised society, particularly when plurality goes beyond opinions or interests, and involves race, creed, language, ultimately culture. "We may add that in the contemporary world the need for non-violence has become more pressing than ever before because of its manifold applications. It appears to be an efficient method of settling colonial, racial and other social problems. It can tackle increasing structural violence of various forms."[37]

Violence admits many forms among human groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence). And there is also an internal violence tightly related to social violence.

Since *himsa* (violence) and *ãhimsa* (non-violence) are ever-present themes in Indian civilisation, they are

35 See *Statement of the Humanist Movement*, Appendix.

36 See *Statement of the Humanist Movement*, Appendix.

37 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, Preface.

dealt with in a separate note in the Appendix of this book. Now, let us have a brief review of the different forms of violence according to humanism. The examples given below are just pointers, since they usually are accompanied by complex contexts calling for careful examination.

Physical Violence

He or she who does something that causes pain and physical bodily damage exercises physical violence. That is, when he or she inflicts pain or deteriorates vital functions, or, ultimately, when death is caused.

Although this form of violence may be accompanied by other forms of violence, the following examples can be seen basically as cases of physical violence: war, terrorism, assault, aggression (physical), rioting, torture, rape, wife/husband/children physical "punishment," death by hunger, endemic illnesses, and others called "social" illnesses, suicide, pollution of natural resources, adulteration in medicines and foods etc.

Racial Violence

Whoever does something that damages others due to their ethnic origin, features, customs, etc., exerts racial violence. That is, when some harm others because the latter have, for instance, a physical appearance different from their own.

Although they may be accompanied by other forms of violence, the following examples can be seen basically as cases of racial violence: racism, slavery, discrimination, segregation, apartheid, pogroms, theories of racial superiority or racial inferiority, etc.

Some other forms of racism are not so evident, such as sending certain racial or subracial types to the battlefield as so-called 'cannon fodder', or portraying them in a grotesque way on the mass media, or applying double standards while dealing with different races, etc.

Economic Violence

Whatever harms the human being in his legitimate economic rights or economic situation exercises economic violence. That is, whatever attempts against his subsistence and living standards, whatever deprives him from legitimate earnings or property, etc.
Although, they may present themselves accompanied by other forms of violence, the following examples can be seen basically as cases of economic violence: monopolisation, exploitations, bonded labour, frauds, bribery, overpricing, unjust taxation, adulteration of consumer products, underpayment, speculation, robbery, burglary, usury, blackmail, hoarding, etc.

Religious Violence

When some do something that harms others due to the creed they profess or because they do not, they exert religious violence. That is, when the aggression is based on the difference of beliefs or religious practices, or whenever one faction harms others because the latter does not yield to their dictates, or when simply some become the targets of others because they do not adhere to any established religious creed or practice, etc.
Although this form of violence may be accompanied by other forms of violence may accompany this form of violence, the following examples can be seen basically as

cases of religious violence: religious bigotry, intolerance, obscurantism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, defamation, untouchability, inquisition, excommunication, discrimination, "holy" wars, crusades, official religion, etc.
There are many other forms of religious violence which harm the freedom, happiness and development of the human being, thus generating divisions between people, blocking positive pathways of scientific research and social progress, justifying (or not opposing) certain inhuman laws and practices, curtailing freedom by "divine" sanction through various threats, blackmails and violence.

Psychological Violence

When somebody does something that harms others psychologically, mentally, morally or emotionally he or she exercises psychological violence.
That is, when the harmony of thing, feeling and acting, coherence or internal balance of the other person, is disrupted.
Although this form of violence may be accompanied by other forms of violence, the following examples can be seen basically as cases of psychological violence: various threats promotion of terror, hate, etc. forced imposition of ideologies, etc. "brainwashing" through false or negative propaganda, promotion of false values of life through mass media, biased education, censorship of certain areas of knowledge or culture, misinformation, nihilism etc.
There is much of psychological violence while imposing ways of life, of subsistence, beliefs, customs, etc. That is, imposing one's own models on others through

blackmails, compulsions, ignorance (either promoted or existing). Much of this is hidden behind words such as education, morality, good manners, traditions, etc.

Moral Violence

Moral violence is the form of violence committed by whoever is an accomplice or abettor of any form of violence. This has several degrees, but any person who even though not directly involved promotes, acquiesces to, or does nothing to prevent or stop violence, is also responsible for violence and its consequences.

"To mind one's own business", indifference, self-enclosure, self-centredness, selfishness, lack of sensibility, lack of communication, egoism, self-righteousness, etc. are fertile grounds for moral violence.

On the other hand, solidarity, compassion, communication, interest for those next to us, voluntary action for social benefit, participation in social affairs, etc. predispose people in the opposite sense.

Internal Violence

Internal (or personal) violence means the violence that is experienced by any individual. It is a composite unpleasant experience in which the person affected by it experiences negative thoughts, emotions, physical tensions, and disturbances.

It is a state in which the person suffers all sorts of imbalances and disharmonies (i.e., mental, emotional and physical) to various degrees of gravity.

It is the opposite of coherence, peace, tranquillity, serenity, stability, calm, equanimity, harmony, balance, collectedness, coolness, etc. Moreover, it is the

absence of a growing feeling of happiness and internal freedom, of faith in oneself, in others and in the future. It is the opposite of peace, force and joy.

Internal violence has three main sources within the individual:

a) Past frustrations, resentments and negative memories that the person could not reconcile with, b) present disorientation, unclear priorities and values, lack of affirmation, behavioural difficulties, self-image or attitude, c) uncertainties and fears about the future.

Indeed, the purpose or meaning of life one has plays a crucial role in generating or dispelling internal violence. A life built around "receiving" is exposed to internal violence, and no therapy will be of any avail until life is built around "giving."

The following are cases of internal violence manifested in various ways: hatred, mistrust, prejudice, resentment, frustration, negative memories, disorientation, insecurity indecision, self-enclosure, lack of communication, fears (of losing things, of sickness, of old age, of death, etc.), cynicism pessimism, negativity, lack of faith in oneself or in others, or in the future, lack of purpose in life false purpose of life obsessions compulsions disagreement between thoughts, feelings and actions tensions contradictions etc. All the abovementioned is generically called "suffering."

Internal violence manifests mainly in two ways: a) physical disturbances and illnesses, and b) external violence, that is, aggression of others.

PART 2

CONVERGING DIVERSITY:
a distinctive feature of Indian civilisation

Background

Indian civilisation is the product of many races and many cultures out of a millennia-old interaction. It represents a combined achievement of which no single current can claim total authorship, and in which every current can feel both represented as a co-builder and a benefited party. There is hardly any major aspect of this civilisation that has not been shaped by diverse influences. This involves race, religion, philosophy, art, literature, poetry, science, technology, architecture, music, diet, etc. Nothing has remained unchanged or untouched by many varied influences. And this is one aspect that makes Indian Civilisation the wonder it is.

Racial aspects

The majority of Indian people are racially very mixed. The Negrito, the Proto-Australoids, the Mongoloids, the Mediterranean, the Alpine, Dinaric, and Armenoid, and the Nordic groups, some with many sub-types, can all be traced in today's Indian population.

"According to the most recent authoritative view, viz., that of Dr. B.S. Guha, no less than six racial elements have contributed to build up the population of India... It must be noted that considerable admixture has taken place among these six types of humanity in order to give rise to the present population of India, and none of them is now found in a pure form."[38]

38 *Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 16.

This absence of racial purity is a wealth in more than one sense. Besides the genetic advantages, this also prevents any faction to elaborate anything similar to a Nazi "master race" theory.

History

The roots of Indian civilisation stretch back in time to pre-recorded history. The earliest human activity in the Indian sub-continent can be traced back to the Early, Middle and Late Stone Ages (400,000-200,000 BCE). Implements from all three periods have been found from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar, parts of what is now Pakistan and the southern most tip of the Indian Peninsula.

However, as we go ahead, we come across one of the many thorny points. Broadly speaking there are two contending theories regarding the ancient or formative period of Indian civilization. To expound both the theories in detail and take a position for or against any of them falls outside the scope of the present book and much beyond the author's qualification. Hence, they will be described in broad strokes.

Till not long ago, the main landmark for starting the history of Indian Civilisation was the invasion of people who called themselves Aryan (presumably from Central Asia) around 1500 BCE. Since Aryans comprised so many diverse peoples, D.D. Kosambi concluded that "Aryan" meant essentially a new way of life and speech, pointing out that "the subgroup that affects India can be traced with fair certainty, in two great waves of pastoral tribesmen originating in the

Khorezm region."[39] However, the discovery of a much earlier civilisation in the Indus Valley (Harappa) by 1922-23 threw that starting point much back in time, and fuelled an ongoing hot debate.

In broad strokes, according to one theory, Aryans were foreign invaders who dominated and imposed an alien culture on pre-existing indigenous cultures (whether these were highly, equally or less developed than the invading one). The Indus Valley Civilisation represented the highest point of the indigenous culture.

According to the other theory, the so-called Aryan invasion was just an internal migration within the subcontinent (with outflows reaching the Mediterranean and beyond). The Indus Valley Civilisation represented the epicentre and the last stage of the millenary Vedic culture of Aryans.

In one case, there were racial and cultural differences, which would indebt Indian Civilisation with alien and older civilisations. In the other, there were only regional racial and cultural differences, and the roots of Indian Civilisation are to be found only within the subcontinent.

For those who would be keen on more details, a chart summarising the main points of each stance could be drafted. In all likelihood, no single historian would agree to all the characteristics listed for each stance, and there are some scholars who uphold a mixture of the two stances. Besides, there are also shades within each one. For example, while admitting that the Aryans came into the country, some assert that certain new information available tends to place it back at

39D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., revised second edition, 1994, New Delhi, page 82-83.

such an early point in history (before 3000 BCE or even 6000 BCE), that it has little bearing on what we know as the culture of India.

Both the theories claim support from different sources of evidence. That is, linguistic, astronomical, mathematical, computer-aided cryptography, ongoing archaeological research, the use of recent technologies such as satellite photography, literary analysis (Vedas, Puranas, epics, Sulba Sutras that are part of Kalpa sutras, etc.), Landsat Imagery Reports, tradition, etc. Of course, the scholars representing each theory quote from the works of other scholars.

The debate is neither an idle one nor it is confined to academic circles. In the words of Koenraad Elst, (Ph.D.):[40]

"Indian Scholars often get excited about supposed imperialist motives behind the Western scholars' acceptance of the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT). They point to the Christian missionary commitment of early sanskritists (F. Max Müller, M. Monier-Williams) and dravidologists (bishop R. Caldwell, Rev. G. U. Pope). They quote Lord Curzon as saying that history rewriting is "the furniture of Empire." Indeed, the British could justify their conquest by claiming that India had never been anything but booty for foreign invaders, and that the Indians (or at least the upper-caste Hindus who led the freedom movement) were as much foreigners as their fellow-Aryans from Britain. As Winston Churchill said in

40 Koenraad Elst, (Ph.D.), Catholic University, Leuven, Belgium, *'Political aspects of the Aryan invasion debate*,' abstract of Invited and Contributed Papers, International Conference on Revisiting Indus-Sarasvati Age & Ancient India, October, 4 - 6, 1996, Atlanta (Georgia), U.S.A.

1935: "We have as much right to be in India as anyone there, except perhaps for the Depressed Classes, who are the native stock." For this political reason, patriotic Indians tend to reject the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT).

"The political use of the AIT continues till today, especially in order to:

"1. Mobilize lower-caste people, supposedly the 'subdued natives', against the upper-caste people, supposedly the "Aryan invaders", as argued ad nauseam by the Christian-supported Banglore fortnightly Dalit Voice, even while low-caste leader Dr. Ambedkar had rejected the AIT and the notion that caste status has an ethnic origin;

"2. Mobilize Dravidian-speakers against speakers of Indo-European languages, especially in the course of the Dravidian separatist movement which was at its strongest in the 1950s, and in the sabotage of the implementation of the constitutional provision that Hindi replace English as official by 1965;

"3. Mobilize the tribals, who have been given the AIT-based name "aboriginals" (adivasi), against the non-tribals, who are to be treated on a par with the European invaders of America;

"4. Mobilize world opinion against "racist Aryans", i.e., the Hindus, since they are the "Aryan invaders who imposed the caste system as a kind of Apartheid to preserve their racial purity and dominance", never mind the fact that the association of "Aryan" with "race" is a European invention to Hindu tradition; now that "idolater" and "heathen" have lost their force as swearwords, "racist" is a brilliant new way of demonizing Hinduism.

"That the AIT has been and still is being used for political purposes, is a plain fact. However, contrary to what Indian/Hindu nationalists often allege, this does not imply that the AIT was deliberately concocted for the said purposes. Nor does it have any implication for the question whether the AIT is right or wrong; after all, someone may be right in spite of his wrong motives. If they themselves want to receive a fair hearing even after expressing their patriotic reasons for opposing the AIT, they themselves ought to address the AIT on its own merits, rather than to keep on wailing over the motives of those who have thought up the AIT and of those who now wield it as a weapon against India."

Even if the AIT had not deliberately concocted for imperialist purposes, it served them well on the ideological side. Obviously, to justify imperial domination with the argument that others did it first, is quite weak either on legal or ethical grounds. It amounts to admitting looting, but pleading innocence on the grounds that others also did it. On the other hand, addressing the AIT on its own merits is something that many Indian and foreign scholars are presently doing. However, it is a pitiful and ironic fact that, fifty years after independence, the British policy of "divide and rule" is still at work through those who use the non-AIT theory for pitting Indians against each other, i.e., fighting discrimination with discrimination. If we yield to such direction of historical revisionism, there is no end to the divisions that can be created among people. This is something that no country, and India in particular, can afford in these times. One of the main factors that enabled British ascendance was the internal divisions that allowed the invaders to consolidate their position by playing factions against each other.

Chapter 2: Pro-Indian view

Aryan invasion may or may not have taken place. But, if it did, it was no later than by 1000 BCE (before 3000 BCE or even 6000 BCE, according to some). Therefore, at a distance of not less than thirty centuries and considering all that happened in between, the alleged Aryan invasion is highly irrelevant to present-day issues -unless some choose to believe so. More relevant factors should be addressed, and other 'invasions' considered. Otherwise, the country may be played in the hands of international finance capital, while its people foolishly take sides for or against remote issues.

Moreover, any theory can be used as ideological ammunition, if such intention is there. India may be the oldest civilisation on earth, indebted to none other and mother of so many great things in all fields. If this is proven, will that pride be used to contribute even further to the constitution of a universal human nation, based on unity in cultural diversity? Or, conversely, it will be used to brandish a holier-than-thou nationalistic arrogance, to do what was always criticised in others?

Without denying the importance that the elucidation of the Aryan question has, still India has plenty to be proud of no matter which theory prevails. The remote origins of a civilisation are one thing, and a very different one is its further development in course of centuries. Besides, there is no civilisation that can claim all-round independent development. Not even proud Europeans can deny, for instance, the important Arab contribution to their culture.

Until one theory is universally acknowledged as valid by all parties, we are going to take both theories as hypotheses and stress their positive sides. Humanism always tries to reconcile positions, understanding that good is what unites people and bad is what divides them.

If we take the non-AIT theory as a working hypothesis, anyway we see in it the acknowledgement of an Aryan internal migration that came across non-Aryan or non-Vedic traditions within the subcontinent. It is further acknowledged that there was an initial differentiation that later gave place to large-scale complementation and synthesis. In this process, all parties involved were benefited.

On the other hand, if the working hypothesis is to consider Aryans as an invading race or culture, still we are going to see how the autochthonous culture strongly influenced the invading one. So much so that it rendered it quite different from what allegedly was originally and jointly configured that unique blend which is today universally recognised as Indian culture.

Whichever stance we may take, we will see that history is not made of stark contrasts, of overall winners and losers, of 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' Some historians tend to see a linearity or homogeneity in history that only exists in their intellectual schemes.

Chapter 3: The Big Merge

As we have seen above, in the second millennium BCE, a people that called themselves Aryans either invaded India or migrated within it. They were the first to use the *Rig-Veda*[41] as their sacred text, the first to speak the Sanskrit language and worshipped a particular group of deities led by Indra. Since Indian Civilisation comprises no less than six racial types with their subtypes, Aryans belonged to one of these. In any case, whether by race, language, religion or all combined, Aryans became either a new or a differentiated dynamic element within the subcontinent. They triggered a new process.

The 'end' of the vast spread-out pre-existing Indus Valley Civilisation cannot be viewed in terms of extinction and replacement by a totally new system (with some sort of interregnum in between), or by different 'racial waves' that 'parachuted' into a cultural no-man's land, etc. It was never like that in Indian history. Rather, there must have been a continuity, coexistence and interaction with emerging systems that help us understand the (otherwise inexplicable) various traits of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the other non-Aryan elements that have obviously survived into the make-up of later Indian society. But they did more

41 There is no uniform view as to the date of Vedas. The range of controversy goes from a remote unknown past to around 800 BCE. In any case, most scholars seem to place them at a date later than 2500 BCE.

than just survive; they contributed to its identity to a great extent, as we shall see below.

> "Hence, by the middle of the second millennium B.C. the entire continent up to its borders appears to have been inhabited by interrelated settlements and not isolated self-sufficient villages. Some of the later non-Harappan sites even show borrowings of the Harappan tradition."[42]
>
> "In any case, the Indian subcontinent by the end of the second millennium B.C. was inhabited by the various interacting 'cultures' which where spread all over. By the end of the first millennium B.C.E., such interlocking and overlaps of archaeological evidence are very clear and quite evident, and the subcontinent up to the borders of Mysore was inhabited, and these various kinds of socio-cultural and socio-economic relationships were well established. By the time of iron technology, attempt at the political spread and unification by various 'kingdoms' was on its way."[43]

By the beginning of the first millennium BCE, a process of interaction and mutual adjustment takes place. Different traditions start modifying, and are modified by, each other.[44]

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42 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, page 138.

43 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, page 92.

44 I disagree with S. Radhakrishnan's black and white picture, in the sense that a "refined," "accommodating," humble, "good," and "sympathetic" Vedic religion became degraded by mixing with "base," "vulgar" pre-existing religious traditions. He presents pre-Aryan peoples

"One of the important indications of the gradual unification of India is the way the Aryan and non-Aryan mythologies merge and a common mythology develops. From the point of view of Hindu philosophy, however, what is much more important is the way their different outlooks upon life influence each other, and compromises emerge -such as the philosophies of the Upanishads, the Gita, the Dhammapadam, and so on."[45]

Summarising: "The cultures of the Dravidian and the non-Dravidian peoples before the so-called Aryan invasion, the actual Sanskritized Aryan culture, the culture of the later invaders, the influences of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism (to which Hinduism gave birth) and of Islam and Christianity (which came from outside) can be traced at various stages of the evolution of Hindu thought."[46]

The above remarks may displease those who refuse to acknowledge such interactions and influences, or choose to downplay them. Already history shows that there is no great philosophy, religion, culture or civilisation that has

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as "uncivilised and half-civilised tribes" and "barbarian neighbours." (*Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, page 118). This clashes with the documented existence of highly civilised, non-warrior Indus Civilisation culture that, according to some historians, the Aryans -the real barbarians in the original etymology of the term- would have destroyed. Besides, present-day scientific views tend to be a lot more cautious as to which religious traditions are "advanced" or "backward." However, it is to be acknowledged that Radhakrishnan wrote when the Indus Civilisation culture was just being unearthed.

45 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 18.

46 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 15.

grown in isolation or that was born fully developed. Even if a single seed were acknowledged, still that seed would have required an interaction with various external factors to develop into a full-grown tree. Actually, there would be no tree without such diverse factors. It is a well-known fact that even empires that overrun peoples also incorporated many of their cultural traits in the process.

However, it should be noted that in spite of the diversity of thought regarding metaphysical and ethical matters, Indian Civilisation has shown a very low degree of violent conflict on these issues. All throughout centuries, there has been an underlying basic agreement on behaviour and its values.

Plenty has been written on the influence Aryans have exerted on the whole of Indian Civilisation, as though they had single-handedly moulded the entire subcontinent and its heterogeneity according to their culture. Therefore, we should now review some of the elements that, according to many scholars, should be ascribed to non-Aryan or non-Vedic sources. Although some may be contested, it would be quite difficult for any faction to disprove all of them and claim a pure lineage devoid of any mix.

Chapter 4: Non-Aryan contribution

Let us see how in cultural merges all parties give and take from each other, in a willing or unwilling interaction and mutual influence.

"There is a general belief that all the best elements in Hindu religion and culture are derived from the Aryans, and whatever is lowly, degrading, or superstitious in it represents the primitive non-Aryan element mixed up with it. This view is certainly wrong, and we must admit that the Aryan religion, thoughts, and beliefs have been profoundly modified by those of the Proto-Australoids and Dravidians with whom they came in contact in India. Though the extent of their influence is not yet fully known, there is no doubt that they underlie the whole texture of Hindu culture and civilization, and their contribution to it is by no means either mean or negligible. In some respects, particularly in material civilization, the Dravidian speaking peoples perhaps excelled the Aryans, and in any case they must be regarded as partners of the Aryans in building up the great structure known as Hinduism."[47]

> "This basic structure of Indian society had already been well formulated before the Aryans came to an inhabited land, and it is upon these earlier foundations of the Indian Style that the superstructure of the Indo-Aryan-speaking invaders, their religio-philosophical 'ideology' was probably built. In fact, the institutional patterns of the Harappan

47 *Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 18.

society, *which is pre-Aryan but not non-Indian*, are preserved in some form or the other even today in the smaller towns and villages."[48]

S.C. Malik argues this contention convincingly, mentioning several non-Aryan contributions to later India, some until today. This continuity is seen in intangible institutional aspects such as genealogical descent reckoning, some form of 'caste' structure, the importance given to memorisation process, a priestly function specialised as a class, etc. In other 'tangible' archaeological terms, it is seen in the potter's wheel, carts and boats; the use of water jars; the habit of throwing away the goblets of *terracotta*; house-building methods and techniques (and interrelated ritual practices and observances), like the use of stucco and the practice of building ritual bathing tanks and of the large number of bathrooms (but no lavatories); dice and other games, khol (*kajal*) for the eyes that was kept in jars with sticks in them, ivory combs, bangles and the use of garments for both men and women that needed no pinning. Certain cattle breeds and widespread features of cattle-worship show Harappan continuity. Indigenous crops like rice, wheat and cotton[49] were introduced into the Aryan economy, changing thereby their socio-cultural organisation. Also settlement patterns present in Harappan society, which are based on occupational social differentiation, of many villages and small towns, continue even today. There are other ritual items and cults of Harappan society such as the

48 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, page 140.

49 Harappan is probably the first civilisation to make cotton cloth.

mother-goddess, *liṇgas*, yonîs, 'proto-Śiva', swastikas, and other gods and deities that have become part of later 'Hinduism'. The beginnings of binary and decimal system and other measurements and weight-standards (not prevalent in Persia and Mesopotamia) that were used by the Harappans have continued into later India. "It may now be regarded as very probable, if not almost certain, that the old Indian alphabet was derived from the pictographic script current in the Sindhu Valley."[50] Besides, there is also enough evidence to presume that the nomadic-pastoralist Aryans acculturated trade and commerce practices, agricultural economy, town-planning and city-building, settlement patterns from pre-Aryan civilised communities albeit remoulded or remodelled according to their 'ideology'.

Even if the thesis is accepted that the Indus Valley Civilisation was part of Vedic culture, it seems to be clear that there were some differences or gaps with the latter Aryans of 1500 BCE. In any case, the culture of the Indus Valley Civilisation was not the only one present in the subcontinent.

> "There is enough evidence to indicate that some of the fundamental conceptions of Hinduism are derived from this culture, and it is not unlikely that the Indian script and punch-marked coins, as well as many arts and crafts in later India, are greatly indebted to the same source. On the whole it is now being gradually realized that the present civilization of India is not merely a development of the Aryan civilization, as has so long been generally held, but

50 *Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 41.

that it is a composite product resulting from the fusion of several cultures in which the contribution of the Sindhu Valley Civilization must be regarded as an important factor:"[51]

"The non-Vedic cultures must have contributed to Hinduism the ideas of renunciation and asceticism leading to *moksha*, *mukti*, or *nirvãṇa*, which were quite alien to the Aryan code of values."[52] There are indications that the Jain idea of non-violence (*ahiṃsã*) is pre-Ãryan.[53]

"It is also seen that in the 'Hindu' tradition of India the main works of Brahmanism have throughout history incorporated within them the 'lower' myths, gods, etc., which are presented in these religious treatises as unified cycles of stories within a well-formulated and sophisticated framework...

Therefore, since times immemorial the literate tradition of 'Hinduism' has adopted and readjusted many of the 'lower' gods into its own tradition, just as the peasants and tribals have adopted and taken the 'higher' gods and rituals within their own socio-economic framework.[54]"[55]

"Thus, the early Aryan society, in order to become 'civilized', had adopted a host of the indigenous

51*Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 27.

52 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 51.

53 M.L. Mehta, Jaina Philosophy, page 6.

54 Kosambi D.D., *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London, 1965, p. 62.

55 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 73-74.

social and cultural systems, institutions, etc. of the already 'Indianized' inhabitants. A part of this process of the assimilation and the adoption of the indigenous gods, etc. has been very appropriately and interestingly described by the late Prof. D.D. Kosambi."[56]

"Hence, it was, contrary to the general opinion, not the Aryanization of India but rather the Indianization of the Aryan nomadic pastoralist hordes."[57]

"Hence, it is in the light of this process that one sees, even today, in existence numerous (to the extent of 40 percent) non-Aryan deities, ceremonies and rituals in the villages of the region that was known as the heart of the *Ãryãvarta.*[58]"[59]

56 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 137.

57 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 144.

58 Marriott, Mckim, *Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization*, Village India, ed. Marriott, Chicago, 1955, pp. 209-210.

59 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 145.

Chapter 5: Non-Vedic contributions

There is a very well known mention of non-Aryan and apparently pre-Aryan elements in Vedic religious writing and poetry.

The *Atharvaveda* contains references to many definite non-Vedic influences, such as the prayers of the outcastes (*Vrãtyas*) who opposed sacrifices. Interestingly enough, from the humanist point of view, in the *nṛisũkta* (*nṛi* = man, *sũkta=hymn*) the object of adoration is not God but man.

> "As a result of the mingling of diverse races, ceremonies other than Vedic sacrifices gradually entered the life of the community and also of the *tapovanas*.[60] One of these was the offerings made to the ancestors."[61]

Ahiṃsã as expounded by Buddhism as well as Jainism. "The Hindu belief in non-violence (*ahiṃsã*), which contributed to Buddhism and Jainism, is definitely of non-Vedic origin."[62]

The worship of the mother image of spiritual power *Śakti* and the mother-goddess *Devī* is likely to come from Indus Valley Civilisation.

Let us consider *Śaiva* and *Śãkta* systems, and the ways of *Yoga* and contemplation. The *Nãtha* cult is also non-Vedic, and closely connected with the doctrines of

60 i.e., Forest schools.

61 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 50.

62 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 51.

Yoga.[63] Another cult associated with *Yoga*, the *Tantra*, was mainly a folk religion. The *Tãntrikas* also worshipped *śiva-śakti* or, more usually, *Devî*, the mother-goddess. Unlike many branches of orthodox Hinduism, women play an important part in the *Tantras*. They are also quite liberal in matters of social and caste restrictions.

> "Vedic rituals were without exception the function of males, where a wife had to be present, but only as her husband's partner. When Mahãyãna Buddhism popularized idol worship on a massive scale, new religious vistas opened, more so, because they had female deities also who had to be propitiated.
>
> Mahãyãna introduced *tantra*, which is usually understood as religious sanction for wildly permissive behaviour. Some excesses took place under the garb of *tantra*, but that was not its main purpose, nor its main basis. Without going into details, and broadly speaking, *tantra* means non-Vedic and non-Pañcharatra method of ritualistic worship."[64]

The notion that Siva seems to be a non-Aryan deity, is controversial. However, there seem to be agreement on the fact that Saivism has many non-Aryan elements.

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63 "It is also linked with the worship of Paśupati Śiva, i.e., with the worship of Śiva as the Lord of the animals. Among the Indus Valley relics, the Paśupati icon and images of Yogis have been found, which suggests that the cult may be very old indeed. Later on these cults came into close contact with Buddhism, Jainism, and popular Hinduism." *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 69. ś

64 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 136.

"*Śiva* is another god of the non-Aryans who has been accepted in the Hindu pantheon. Relatively primitive tribes like the *Śabaras* and *Kirãtas*, seem to have been his worshippers, though there are a few possible traces of his worship even in the urbanized Indus Valley Civilization."[65]

Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord in *Bhagavad-Gîtã*, is of non-Vedic non-Aryan origin.[66]

> "The mediator between God and men is the *avatãra* or the divine incarnation. The doctrine of the *avatãra* is non-Vedic and possibly non-Aryan,[67] and it seems to be an advance on the

65 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 58.

66 "The worship of Kṛishṇa (literal meaning, black) may at first have been confined to the ãbhîra tribe, who seem to have led a nomadic life between Mathurã and Dvãrakã. There are so many legendary folk-stories associated with Kṛishõa that it is highly probable that his origins are to be found in some popular deity." *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 92. Kṛishõa ṛ õ

67 "The origin of the concept of avatãra is obscure. It cannot be found in the Vedas, but it is possible that it came from the Aryan settlers in Iran. The idea of discontinuous incarnations can be found in the Bahrãm Yãsht, which forms part of the Zoroastrian corpus, where incarnations of the deity Verethragna can be seen. According to another theory, the concept originated in central Asia, as the Bharãm Yãsht shows traces of Chinese influence and mythology. In none of these beliefs, however, does the concept play as important a part as it does in post-Vedic Hindu thought, particularly that of the epics, Rãmãyana and Mahãbhãrata. Since Krishna, the incarnation of the Lord, who is supposed to reveal Himself in the Bhagavad-Gîtã, is a non-Vedic non-Aryan deity, it is not at all improbable the concept of the avatãra was present in non-Aryan Indian thought for a long time." *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 62.

dependence on the extra-human gods of the Vedic period."[68]

The cult *Kãlî*, a folk goddess, who emerges as the mother-force of the universe.[69]

Gaṇeśa or Gaṇapati (the lord of the folk), with his human body and elephant head.

The *Vaishṇava* approach through devotion or *bhakti*.

The ideas of asceticism, renunciation and continence.

Image-worship is a non-Vedic cultural contribution, as shown by the fact that the Indus Valley Civilisation (much earlier than Aryan or Greek invasions) had many images.[70]

Vegetarianism is diffused by Buddhist and Jaina religions.

> "For the non-Aryans the places for education and the interchange of ideas seem to have been the *thîrtas* (holy places, particularly places of sacred bathing). In these holy gatherings such non-Vedic cults or philosophies as *Nãtha*, *Yoga*, and *Jaina* flourished. *Melãs*, such as the *Kumbha Melã* near Allahabad, which are Hindu festivals held even today, are survivals of these traditions."[71]

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68 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 62.

69 "Images of a mother-goddess have also been found in the Indus Valley Civilization, and they may be connected with the origin of Kãlî worship." *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 59.

70 "Idol worship is non-Vedic, but very old, . . . "A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 37.

71 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 51.

"The cultural influences of the non-Aryan certainly humanized the Vedic religion."[72]

72 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 62.

PART 3

RESPONSE TO ARYANISATION

Chapter 1: 800-500 BCE - A turning point in the complementation and synthesis of cultures

We cannot easily accept the view that Aryan growing advance and influence, either peaceful or otherwise, did not meet any resistance from other groups and traditions. It is highly improbable that they were always welcomed as elder brothers of the same culture, and, therefore entitled to rule them thanks to their superiority. That resistance may have taken place in various fields, whether military and not. However, as the Aryans established themselves and advanced into pre-Aryan and post-Harappan territory, the initial violent clash of cultures led to "a mode temperate process of diffusion (would have been set to work) which 'diluted' both the cultures, and for the time being created a somewhat anomalous society. This process of acculturation implies the influx of strange words into each other's language and vocabulary; it also means the emergence of new gods and other cultural items and traits."[73] The initial differentiation of cultures gradually gave place to a complementation (or mutual adjustment and exchange) that would have ultimately arrived at a synthesis - Indian Civilisation. Had he dealt with it, Arnold Toynbee might have seen this

73 *Indian Civilization - The Formative Period*, S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in association with Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, New Delhi, 1987, pages 144-145.

process as a challenge-and-response one. The Aryan and non-Aryan, Vedic and non-Vedic, cultures and systems of thought start mixing more by the time of the *Upanishads* (800-500 BCE). This period is full of heterodox creeds and opinions, and an interesting one from a humanist point of view. The Vedic interest in gods had by then been replaced by interest in man and in human greatness. This is the period in which the main foundations of modern Hinduism are laid.

Likely, the earliest *Upanishads* were composed between the completion of the Vedic hymns and the rise of Buddhism.[74] They marked a turning point in the previous Vedic world-view, based on cosmological speculations reflecting the older mythological interpretation of the world.[75] Besides the development of philosophical speculation, approximately between the 800 and 500 BCE there was a shift, breaking away from the old sacrificial ideology and towards finding the meaning of the world and man's existence on the basis of rational or spiritual experience. S. Radhakrishnan tells regarding the Upanishads, "Their aim was not science or philosophy, but right living."[76] Hence, Buddhism and Jainism appear in a historical context that was ripe for a new approach to existential matters. [77]

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74 It is generally accepted that the oldest pre-Buddhist Upanishads are Brhadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya and Aitareya. Though dates are uncertain, most of them were composed about 800 BCE or later, but before Buddha's times.

75 A parallel development took pace in the West with the advent of the Ionian thinkers in Greece.

76 *Indian Philosophy*, S. Radhakrishnan, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, page 145.

77 "From the fifth to the third centuries B.C., an amazing array of creative minds appeared in Greece, India, China, Israel, and ancient Persia: Pythagoras, Empedocles

It is interesting to notice that Upanishadic thinkers, within the Brahmanic fold, start a humanising revolt that will later find full expression in Buddhism and Jainism. They started rebelling against the Vedic conception of the divine, and started placing the human being as the central value. They accomplished this by identifying the true identity or essence of every human being, i.e., the ãtman or self, with the Ultimate, with Brahman. The identity between the subject and the object was realised in India before Plato was born. Thus they attributed human beings the highest dignity. As far as my knowledge goes, this was an unprecedented and unique humanist development in history. Having laid this cornerstone, it took little to go ahead and assert the fundamental unity underlying human diversity, giving foundation to coherent feelings of brotherhood and solidarity, and abhorring all forms of violence and discrimination.

Tat tvam asi (That art thou) succinctly explains to believers why they should treat others as they themselves would like to be treated.[78] The universal "Golden Rule," one of the main pillars of humanism, finds

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and Plato in Greece; Gotama and Mahavira in India; Confucius and Lao-tzu in China; Second Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel in Israel; and Zarathustra in Persia, although the precise date of the latter is open to question. Jaspers has referred to this period as the 'axial age' in the history of philosophy." *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 73.

78 This idea is fully developed in the Upanishads, though it appears first in the Vedic Saṃhitãs.

here a clear precedent.[79] If the real self, or soul, of every human being is identical with that of the whole universe, it follows that all human beings are equal -there only exists One without a second (ekamevãdvitīyam). Believers are thus encouraged not only to behave accordingly in daily life, but also to become fully aware of such identity through practical means (various forms of meditation, devotion, selfless action, etc.).

This is a particular form of expressing one of the main pillars of the humanist attitude, i.e., the equality of all human beings.

> "As this kind of speculation developed, the dignity and significance of the gods were lessened. To the man who had acquired metaphysical knowledge of the unity of the self and the ultimate, the entire religious system of different gods and of the necessity of sacrificing to the gods was seen to be a stupendous fraud: 'When peoples say, 'Sacrifice to that god,' each god is but the manifestation of the self (*ãtman*), for he is all gods.[80] Here the 'self' is to be regarded as the fundamental principle underlying our existence."[81]

Moreover, Sandilya expresses in the Chandogya Upanishad: "Now, verily, a person consists of will (kratumaya)." This further asserts intentionality and, therefore, human dignity. Besides, this intentionality

79 There is also a version of the Golden Rule in the Hindu epic Mahãbhãrata (c. 300 BCE in its present form) XIII, 113, 9; XII, 260, 22; V, 39, 72.

80 *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, I, 4, 6.

81 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 82.

makes man the maker of his own destiny, since he may choose to do good or evil. This freedom, which places him above Vedic sacrificial gods, also entails accountability in this life and, according to belief, beyond physical death.

> "According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action."[82]

> "It is interesting to note, in this connection, that in the post-Vedic philosophies (the *Upanishads*, the *Baghavad-Gîtã*, the Buddhist, and the Jaina scriptures) it is men who hold the centre of interest, the gods are subsidiary. In Buddhist art and literature, the gods hold the umbrella or shower flowers on the heads of great men, and sometimes blow the conch-shell. In the epics Rãma and Kṛishna are human, although, as incarnations of the Lord, they are also divine. The gods in the epics are their servants. On the whole, we notice that in this period sacrifices yield place to human ethics, monotheism replaces polytheism, and instead of the Vedic rituals we have a growing urge towards knowledge and devotion. We can see in this period the process of amalgamation between the Vedic and the non-Vedic elements of Indian culture."[83]

82 *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV, 4, 5.

83 *Hinduism*, K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, pages 55-56.

Chapter 2: Society during the time of Buddhist and Jain rise

In order to fully understand the humanising impact of the Jain and Buddhist rise and expansion, we should review some aspects of the epoch in which they arose and with which they had to deal with. They rise at the end of a process of accumulation of changes, a true turning point in times, not just in India but in other civilisations as well.

> "The sixth century B.C. may be regarded as an important landmark in the history of Indian culture. The old Vedic religion had gradually ceased to be a strong living force since the Upanishads had initiated freedom of speculation into the fundamental problems of life. Discontent with the existing state of things, brooding over the ills and sorrows of life, a passionate desire to remove them by finding out a new mode of salvation, and an earnest endeavour to discover the ultimate reality became the order of the day. It created a ferment of new ideas and philosophical principles, leading to the establishment of numerous religious sects, such as never in India before or since.
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> Of these religious sects, which may be regarded as direct or indirect products of the thought-currents of this period, four alone deserve special mention as having permanently influenced the religious history of India. Two of these, Buddhism and Jainism, were heterodox and revolutionary in character, while the

other two, Vaishṇavism and Śaivism, may be regarded as Reformist movements."[84]

"As a result of this rapid cultural and social change occurring throughout the civilized world, a new self-consciousness emerged. Men were no longer satisfied with the values, rituals and intellectual content of the older religious traditions. A need was felt for new principles or criteria by means of which one could relate oneself meaningfully to the new world that was coming into existence. The most creative minds in China, Greece, India and the Ancient Near East began to fashion new images of man and to generate new perspectives with respect to the nature and structure of the world. Some of these new images and perspectives were destined to become permanent visions by means of which generations of men would interpret their world -e.g., the intellectual visions of men like Plato, Lao Tzu, Second Isaiah, Yãjñavalka, etc. Other images and perspectives were short-lived and were judged in subsequent generations as 'heterodox,' unproductive or at best 'maverick' or non-conformist -e.g., the early Stoic perfectionists, the Greek sophists, many of the 'hundred schools' in Ancient China, the Carvãkas and Ãjivikas in Ancient India, etc."[85]

84 *Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 18.

85 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 74-75.

Political conditions

There was a crisis of change in the whole society, marked by the uncertainty regarding the survival of old forms and the rise of new ones. Undoubtedly, this turning point was not confined to the political or institutional field, but affected all other areas and, indeed, people, who had to adjust to those changes. Psychosocial unrest must have been current.

Notwithstanding the vast differences, one will not fail to notice a few similarities with the present-day weakening (or demise?) of the nation-states, the regionalisation, the overwhelming advance of globalisation due to the concentration of power in international banking and multinational corporations.

"Since at the time of Lord Mahavira there was no paramount power in North India, the region was divided into many independent states. The period, however, was politically very important in ancient Indian history and marked the end of the tribal stage of society, while it also gave rise for the first time to those organized states which were known as sixteen great countries *Solasamahãjanapada*. These states formed some definite territorial units and included both monarchies and republics. A trial of strength was taking place amongst the monarchies, and, what is more, between the monarchical and non-monarchical forms of government. It led to the decline of the

republics, the rise of absolutism, and the growing success of Magadhan imperialism."[86]

Social organisation

Caste

From the four original Varnas (castes), many new castes and subcastes came into existence. Dr. K.C. Jain explains that there must have been a steady increase in the mixed castes during this period. They resulted from marriages (both permitted and prohibited) between different castes and occupations. [87]

Jainism and Buddhism tried their best to improve the general condition of down-trodden people, that is, the lower castes that comprised the majority of people. However, most probably they could not advance beyond a certain point due to social constraints. While Buddha had prohibited the Bhikshus (monks) to accept slaves - quite common in society- as gifts, no slave was accepted into the Buddhist Order.

"Both Mahavira and the Buddha opposed the idea of a hereditary caste system, emphasising all the time that one's caste should be determined by what one did rather than by the caste of the family to which one belonged. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that caste distinctions were abolished once for all during this period. No doubt, both succeeded in removing caste distinctions in their

86 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 196.

87 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 246.

monastic order, but they failed in their attempts to abolish it permanently from society."[88]

However, these need not be seen as definitive failures. The Wright brothers also "failed" to achieve a transoceanic flight. Every generation contributes its share towards humanisation, creating precedents for further attempts. To whatever extent, those "failures" created an impact, produced changes, and were later on resumed and further developed by other currents. This is especially true regarding the issue of caste discrimination.

Sacrifices (yajña)[89]

The Brahmanas offered animal sacrifices to the gods, believing that the gods would satisfy pleas, or, moreover, that they were compelled to satisfy them if the right rituals of sacrifice were performed properly. Thus Brahmanas, in a way, became higher than the gods, since they could compel them to grant requests. In any case, they became intermediaries between gods and believers, monopolising religious rites and the power derived. Not less important is the fact that they demanded to be paid handsomely for their services, thus imposing a heavy burden on believers, making a source of income out of religion.

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88 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 238.

89 In Greece, human sacrifice existed as an immemorial and enduring tradition, and lingered till the end of paganism. The Olympian gods demanded occasional human sacrifice, and this practice was recorded in myth and drama. *A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell, page 249.

In the words of S. Radhakrishnan, "the age was, on the whole, one of Pharisaism, in which people were more anxious about the completion of their sacrifices than the perfection of their souls. There was need for a restatement of the spiritual experience, the central meaning of which was obscured by a legalistic code and conventional piety."[90] Jainism, Buddhism and the Ajivikas (among other Sramanic currents), and the Upanishads (within the Brahmanic current) catered to this need.

Jaina and Buddhist doctrines strongly attacked this practice on the grounds of non-violence regarding all forms of life, and the cult of sacrifice gradually declined with their spread. Here we have an early historical precedent that non-violence need not remain as a passive and mind-your-own-business attitude, but can take an active form of opposing violence -which is dear to humanism.

Family

> "The conception of proprietary rights came into existence in the family circle. The reason was that trade and commerce prospered highly, and the number of professions increased. The members of the family began to earn their living independently... With the beginning of the *Vãnaprastha* system, the joint-family system began to crumble. Before becoming a *Vãnaprasthi,* the father had to divide his property

90 *Indian Philosophy*, S. Radhakrishnan, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, page 136.

among his sons. Sometimes he had to divide his property among his sons against his will."[91]

Here we see a familiar feature of present times, characterised by the rise of economics, invading all spheres of life with its destructuring effect.

Marriage

Marriages were of many forms, but parents arranged the most popular forms. The *Darmasãstras* prescribed that the bride should be of the same caste (*jãti*). Generally, endogamy was in practice, and restrictions were imposed on the intermixture of castes. Inter-caste marriages were not a common practice. Only the people of higher classes practised it, but not quite often. *Gãndharva,* or love marriage, was also popular among the nobles of the time, and was carried out without rites or ceremonies. Polygamy was a fashion among the privileged classes. *Svayamvara* (self-choice) was confined originally to the Kshatriya class, wherein a princess selected her husband of her own free will.

Other aspects

The stable village life was giving way to a rising urban culture. Merchants were beginning to exert political power. The prestige of the priests was declining while that of the "warrior class" (ksatriyas) was rising.

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91 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 252-253.

> "The progress of civilization during this period brought with it certain amenities, such as furniture and utensils, to make life easy and the homes comfortable."[92]

Most probably, not all could afford such amenities; but, as in present times, it must have had a certain impact on daily life.

Economic conditions

> "The period of Lord Mahavira was epoch-making in economic history because of the numerous important changes that occurred in it. States well organised came into existence for the first time, leading to the establishment of peace and order. As a result, this period witnessed an all-round development of agriculture, industry and trade. The increased use of iron for different purposes resulted in the surplus of wealth and prosperity. Many new arts and crafts came into existence, and they became localised and hereditary. Both trade and industries were organized into guilds. The coined money was introduced, which facilitated trade and commerce. The merchants became very prosperous and a number of cities and towns came into existence. Population increased by leaps and bounds on account of better means of subsistence and living condition."[93]

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92 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 269.

93 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 276.

"Arts and crafts made considerable progress during this period. The earlier industries continued to make progress, but there was a tendency towards specialization in different branches of the same industry. With the growth and development of urban life, some new arts and crafts also began to meet the needs. With the establishment of big kingdoms, military needs also increased. Wide use of metal further increased the efficiency of several industries."[94]

"Trade and commerce prospered greatly during this period owing mainly to plentiful production. Numerous crafts and industries sprang up for preparing manufactured goods. Facilities for transport and communication led to their proper distribution and utilisation. The beginning of coinage provided facilities for the exchange of goods."[95] "The most remarkable feature of this period is the introduction of regular coins in business transaction."[96] "Loans and debts could be taken on interest... Letters of credit as substitutes for money were known."[97]

Therefore, India was witnessing the rise of a money economy.

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94 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 284.

95 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 294.

96 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 307.

97 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 313.

Writing and languages

> "...most scholars now agree in referring the introduction of writing in India to seventh century B.C."[98]
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> "The Vedic scriptures were transmitted by oral tradition alone in ancient times. This was an almost unbelievable fact to Fa-hien the Chinese pilgrim to India, who exclaimed, 'Brahmins recite a hundred thousand verses from memory!' Even today, although important texts are accessible in inexpensive printed editions, these scriptures are taught orally. The written text can at most be used as an aid to memory, but it has no authority. When Western scholars first wanted to publish critical editions of the Vedas, they consulted living manuscripts, whose memory was much more accurate than written manuscripts. Writing and copying were more liable to error. It was regarded as a great sin for an Indian Pandit to make even a tiny mistake in memorizing the scriptures."[99]

However, the fact remains that, until the development of writing, knowledge was monopolised by a certain class. Writing and, much later printing, makes knowledge widely accessible to all. After all, once the "living manuscripts" are consulted, and their quotations and elaborations are carefully recorded, everybody can avail of it in printed copies. There may

98 *Ancient India*, R.C.Majundar, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1994, page 41.

99 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 23.

remain discussions regarding interpretations, but these are now open to any scholar, no matter his caste or sex. In XVth century Europe, Gutenberg's movable type printing press will trigger a similar demonopolising impact, making texts available for reading and interpreting to increasing numbers of people beyond the clergy. We shall see something similar at the time of the Bhakti movement, with the literary production in vernaculars.

> "The period of Lord Mahavira is noteworthy for the evolution of the art of writing... no positive evidence regarding writing has been found in Vedic literature The definitive traces of writing hail from the sixth century B.C."[100]

> "The most remarkable feature of this age is that Sanskrit lost its position as the medium of expression and its place was soon taken by the Prakrits (Vernaculars) which also grew as literary languages. It is for this reason that both Mahavira and Buddha propagated their faiths among the masses with the help of the Prakrits and not Sanskrit... Sanskrit language ceased to be the language of the masses and its use was restricted only to the highly educated class."[101]

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100 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 353.

101 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 355-356.

The development of literary production in vernacular languages is a characteristic feature of the Bhakti movement, which is discussed in a separate chapter.

In view of the similarities with today's times, one can almost feel the effervescence and turmoil that all that must have generated throughout society.

The XXth century has also witnessed unparalleled leaps of industrial production, international trade, communications, introduction of new instruments for economic transactions (telegraphic transfers, plastic money, electronic money, virtual money, etc.), urban growth, demographic explosion, global (UNO, WHO, UNESCO, ILO, IMF, WB, etc.) and regional (EEC, NAFTA, SAARC, MERCOSUR, NATO, Warsaw Pact, etc.) organisations, increased lifespan expectancy thanks to scientific advances, new professions and trades, etc.

And these are also times of psychosocial unrest and search for new responses to new challenges.

Those times were characterised, among others, by frequent and bloody wars, great economic prosperity, social distress due to a rigid caste system, and a clash or rival schools and sects. These sects were mainly divided into two classes, namely, the Sramana or Non-Brahmanical sects and the Brahmanical sects.

> "In Brahmanical sects, only a Brahmana or Dvija could become a Parivrajaka, while in the Sramana sects, all members of the community, irrespective of

> their social rank and religious career (Varna and Asrama), could be admitted to their church."[102]

They also accepted nuns in their ranks, which Brahmanical sects forbid. This humanist trait of non-discrimination against caste, sex, etc. is common among ascetic or mystical currents. We will come across it often in history, as we shall see in further chapters. Both Jainism and Buddhism belonged to this Sramanic tradition that, according to some scholars, continued an existing pre-Vedic stream.

> "Belief in heaven and hell was widespread at this date and it was said that those who perform various noble acts attain heaven, while those who indulge in evil acts go to hell."[103]

102 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 154.

103 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 195.

Chapter 3: Buddhism

"Comparing oneself to others in such terms as 'Just as I am so are they, just as they are so am I,' he should neither kill nor cause others to kill." *Sutta Nipata* 705

"All beings tremble before danger, all fear death. When a man considers this, he does not kill or cause to kill." *The Dhammapada*129 [104]

"The Ariyan disciple thus reflects, Here am I, fond of my life, not wanting to die, fond of pleasure and averse from pain.

Suppose someone should rob me of my life... it would not be a thing pleasing and delightful to me. If I, in my turn, should rob of his life one fond of his life, not wanting to die, one fond of pleasure and averse from pain, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to him. For a state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must also be to him also; and a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?

"As a result of such reflection he himself abstains from taking the life of creatures and he encourages others so to abstain, and speaks in praise of so abstaining." *Samyutta Nikaya* v.353

Buddha, i.e. 'the enlightened one,' (c. 563-483 BC) lived in a very particular period of history, peopled by characters such as Pythagoras (c. 580-500 BC),

104 *The Dhammapada – The Path of Perfection*, translated from the Pali by Juan Mascaró, Penguin Classics, Great Britain, 1983, chapter 10, Life, page 54.

Confucius (551-479 BC), Lao Tzu (c. 604-531 BC), Zoroaster (618-541 BC) and Mahavira (c. 540-468 BC). Their lives overlapping each other, hypothetically they could have all met at one time. By around the time Buddha is born as prince Siddharta Gautama, in Kapilavastu (Nepal), Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Xenophanes challenge traditional beliefs, myths and legends in and around Greece.

Buddha's troubled times were apt for the introduction of a new thought. The eminent Indian historian Romila Thapar tells us: "The changing features of social and economic life, such as the growth of towns, expansion of the artisan class, and the rapid development of trade and commerce were closely linked with changes in another sphere; that of religion and philosophical speculation. The conflict between the established orthodoxy and the aspirations of newly rising groups in the urban centres must have intensified the process, which resulted in a remarkable richness and vigour in thought which was rarely surpassed in the centuries to come." [105]

"Meanwhile, Buddhism and Jainism emerge. Both develop the Hindu ideals of renunciation and love and use Hindu metaphysics of reincarnation, but the emphasis is considerably changed."

"Buddhism, however, leaves behind considerable influences on Hinduism - adding to its mythology, expanding its cultural content, and affecting its moral code."[106]

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105 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 63, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

106 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 19.

Humanist traits in Buddhism are mainly referred to the centrality of human being, non-discrimination and non-violence.

The Buddhist point of view is that man is accountable to *dharma* (universal law) and not to divine will. Bearing in mind that "divine will" had the Brahmanic caste as an oppressive interpreter and mediator, Buddhist stance represented a humanist way of restoring the human being as the central value.

Buddhism has sometimes being seen as a pessimistic or nihilistic doctrine of despair, given its emphasis on suffering (*dukkha*) and transiency in human life. However, the root of suffering and its removal are man-centred. The binding *karma* is man-made. Buddhism gave hope by stressing self-reliance, asserting man's freedom to make moral choices and build his destiny, the liberating power of discipline, and the perfectibility of all human beings, who can ultimately attain freedom from all bonds. Eternal damnation is alien to Buddhism (and to every religion of ancient India). Aptitude for goodness, observance of the *dharma* (precepts), and compassion for other beings distinguish -according to Buddhism- man from other beings.

Buddhism dismissed most metaphysical problems discussed in Buddha's times and addressed the main vital problem: the fact of suffering and the way to overcome it. This existential approach runs contrary to the theistic, ritualistic approach of established Brahmanism. The four noble truths lay the foundation for action and ethics starting from the human being, and not from starting points that are not immediately

evident. Divinity and its experience are not denied, but are not made a precondition for humanist behaviour. Whether one shares or not Buddhist tenets, the fact remains that it placed the human being at the centre of religious practice.

By opposing the orthodoxy of *Brahmans*[107] and denying the authority of the Vedas[108], Buddhism promoted rebellion against the oppressive social organisation based on fixed castes according to birth. For instance, although economically powerful, the *Vaishyas* (the third or trading and agricultural caste) were not granted corresponding social status, and the *Shudras* (the fourth or servile caste) were obviously oppressed. "Buddhism and Jainism, though they did not directly attack the caste system, were nevertheless opposed to it and can, to that extent, be described as non-caste movements.

> "Na jaccã vasalo hoti, na jaccã hoti brãhmano,
> kammanã vasalo hoti, kammanã hoti brãhmano ti.[109]
> (Not by birth does one become an untouchable,
> not by birth does one become a Brãhmana.
> By conduct one becomes an untouchable,
> by conduct one becomes a Brãhmana).

This provided an opportunity for those of low caste to opt out of their caste by joining a non-cast sect. The lack of expenses involved in worship, as contrasted with brahmanical worship, also attracted the same

107 The first (upper) priestly of the four-caste system in Brahmanism, the earliest stage in the development of Hinduism.

108 Sacred scriptures of Brahmanism.

109 *Sutta-Nipãta* 142.

stratum in society."[110] The Buddha said, "For worms, serpents, fish, birds and animals there are marks that constitute their own species. There is difference in creatures endowed with bodies, but amongst men this is not the case; the difference amongst men is nominal only."[111] For the first time in the history of India, Buddhism was preached to any person regardless of his social status or class distinction, and in their vernacular languages.

In the first period, the brethren addressed each other using the epithet "avuso" (friend).

This also means that Buddhism contributed its share for non-discrimination not just in social terms, but specifically in matters of religious practice. As different from Brahmanical temples, Buddhist places of worship were open to everybody without distinction.

Buddhism also gave an unprecedented status to women. While Vedic ritual was a monopoly of men and Brahmanic orthodoxy was gradually trying to place limitations on women activities, Buddhism took the revolutionary step of accepting them as nuns. "After Buddha, no great religious teacher in India encouraged monastic life for women, though there were female ascetics."[112] Moreover, monks and nuns came from all layers of society, thus education, then in the hands of the Brahmans, became available to all. Of course, this did not

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110 *A History of India*, Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 68, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

111 *Suttanipāta* 602-611.

112 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 139.

reach the whole population, but considering the circumstances in those times, it created an impact and a precedent of far-reaching consequences.

> "The effect of Buddhism towards the emancipation of women and *śũdras* from the rigours of Brahmanical society was profound. But not so in its earliest stage."[113]

Not only did the example reach other countries into which Buddhism expanded, but also Hinduism was influenced as well. As we shall see in its own chapter, the *Bhakti* movement -as well as all the socio-religious reform movements in India- promoted the participation of women in a wider area of social activity than allotted by Brahmanical authority.

As a digression, today's protectors of animals and endangered species may be glad to know that Buddhism was antagonistic of animal sacrifices, a monopoly of brahmanical power.

Somebody may argue that the above were populist tactics showing Buddha's acumen for ideological warfare. Coming from the ruling caste, the *Kshatriya*, this may (or may not) be the case; but this is not our concern. The point is that the humanist cause of non-discrimination got benefited.

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113 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 134.

As regards to non-violence, Buddhism also upheld a version of the humanist Golden Rule: "Do as one would be done by."[114]

Buddhism as a whole defies a restrictive, all-encompassing classification in terms of humanism. Originally non-theistic, agnostic in its Hinayana version, it later developed branches with theistic and devotional traits in its Mahayana variants[115]. In other words, Buddhism developed (for some, it deviated) into a religion. Whatever the case, in practice, it shows marked humanist traits.

Some authors allege that Jain doctrine of *karma* leads to unbridled individualism, since it fails to see that we all belong to a community, that there is what is called "joint karma," corporate evil and guilt. This may be the case on philosophical grounds, but is not supported by Jain historical record of social involvement. In any case, this idea of "joint karma" appeared in the Buddhist philosophy of Abhidharma. This links with the humanist conception by which suffering and contradiction, and their removal, is not just an isolated individual fact. In the Buddhist conception of *karma*, the individual is the result of a multitude of causes from his past existences, and is intimately related to all other causes in the world. There is interconnection between individuals and the whole universe.

> "Wing-tsit Chang says the following about *karma*: 'Karma, which to the Brahmins was hardly more

114 *Itivuttaka*, No. 27.

115 Mahayana (i.e., 'great vehicle'), the majority branch of Buddhism rose between c. 100 BCE and 200 CE.

than a mechanical, superstitious, fatalistic operation of retribution was transformed by the Buddha to mean moral energy with which may exercise his free will, break the Chain of Causation, chart the course of his future, and produce the meritorious fruits of his own conduct.' (*An Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Vergilius Ferm [New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945], p.95)"[116]

This is another example of the militant character of Buddhism against fatality and passivity, asserting human intentionality against suffering. The same activism is further manifested in social terms, extending it to worldwide proselytization and shaping social organisation according to Buddhist principles.

In terms of freedom of thought and belief, Buddhism offers a trait that resembles Jain *Anekanta* (doctrine of open-mindedness). Early Buddhism held the theory of partial veracity (truthfulness) of various thoughts, particularly regarding metaphysical views prevalent in those times, most of which Buddha refused to discuss. This also meant an acknowledgement of plurality that greatly contributed to tolerance.

"Although Buddhism was predominant in many Asiatic countries, there is no record of any Buddhist persecution of the followers of another faith. They waged no religious war. Buddhism is probably the only world religion which has spread by persuasion alone, not by resorting to force. It is very difficult to have a firm conviction and at the same time to be

116 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 207.

tolerant. Many have deemed it almost impossible. Yet not only the Buddha himself but many of his followers achieved such tolerance."[117]

Mahãyãna -the most diffused sect of Buddhism- was characterized by its stress on *Karuṇã* or universal compassion, a feature that is conspicuous by its absence in Hinayãna Buddhism. The avowed object of *Karuṇã* is to stimulate one to make use of one's perfect knowledge in missionary activities for the welfare of the suffering world and the release from suffering of all beings. Every human being is, according to Mahãyãna, a potential Buddha. "This broad outlook of Mahãyãna, coupled with the spirit of benevolence and humanity, elevated it to the sublimity of a religion of love and tender sympathy for all sentient beings, and formed an important factor in popularizing Buddhism far and wide. For the liberation of all people being the sacred pledge of Mahãyãna, it stood out prominently as a religion for all."[118] The devotional aspect of Mahãyãna Buddhism created one more precedent and contributed to the *Bhakti* movement in medieval India.

Whilst the influence of Buddhism declined in India after the seventh century CE, and it may have almost disappeared from the country of its birth, it did it not before leaving behind an indelible and profound mark on Indian culture. For the sake of meeting the challenge it posed to Brahmanism, some of the

117 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 222-223.

118 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. V, page 406.

Buddhist banners had to be also taken by Hindu orthodoxy, thus modifying its previous rigid stances and identity. It gave Vedic ritual and sacrifice a deathblow,[119] influenced the reformulation of Brahmanical religion as a new synthesis known as Hinduism, and it resurfaced time and again throughout later history. We shall see some examples of this in twelfth century *Bhakti* movement and twentieth century Ambedkar's movement.

There may be an argument as to whether Vedic and Brahmanical currents are "life-affirming," while Sramanic currents (Jainism, Buddhism, Ajivakism) are "life-denying." This may be relevant to our subject, since Humanism is strongly life-affirming. However, in practice, we notice strong life-affirming traits like, among many others, unconditional *ahiṃsã* in Jainism, and *Maitri* (true friendliness) and *Karuna* (compassion) in Buddhism. On the other hand, Vedic and Brahminical currents make innumerable exceptions to the application of ahimsa. Therefore, those sharp distinctions tend to be blurred, and one may rather search for life-affirming traits in both.

119 "It may also be observed in this connection that the permanent influence of Buddhism in India was the disappearance of the Vedic sacrifices, against which actually Buddha had preached." A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 33.

Chapter 4: Jainism

Here we deal with one among the oldest religions of the world, coexisting or preceding Buddhism. Jainism has the high distinction of having formulated non-violence (Ahimsa) in clear terms for the first time in history. We will need a longer comment on Jainism, considering the relative lack of information about it as compared with Buddhism.

"A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated."

Sutrakritanga 1.11.33

"One who you think should be hit is none else but you. One who you think should be governed is none else but you. One who you think should be tortured is none else but you. One who you think should be enslaved is none else but you. One who you think should be killed is none else but you. A sage is ingenuous and leads his life after comprehending the parity of the killed and the killer. Therefore, neither does he cause violence to others nor does he make others do so."
Acarangasutra 5.101-2

"In the light of modern researches, there is a consensus that Jainism is one of the oldest living religions of the world: The Mohenjo Daro culture, the Vedic literature and the pre-Mahavira period exhibit remarkable traces of the existence of Jainism in this country (i.e. India).

"The basic tenets of Jainism can be epitomised in two words, namely, Ahimsã and Anekãnta, the two

principles of peaceful co-existence, philosophically and socially." [120]

Some scholars sustain that Jainism is a pre-Vedic religion, and the excavations at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa have unearthed relics related to Sramana or Jaina tradition. However, there seem to be no definite evidence for the existence of Jainism in pre-Vedic times.

According to scriptures, Jaina religion is eternal. Jains trace their traditions back to immemorial times, preserved by a lineage of twenty-four Tirthankaras or Jinas of whom there is no historical evidence, except for the last two, namely, Mahavira (599-527 BCE), usually considered the founder of Jainism and its last tirthankara, but actually a reformer, and Parsvanatha or Parsva (877-777 BCE[121]). Dr. Kailash Chand Jain tells us that, "About the teachings of Parsva, it must be admitted, we have no exact knowledge. His religion was, however, meant for one and all without any distinction of caste or creed. He allowed women to enter his Order. He laid stress on the doctrine of ahimsa."[122] Parsva, whose influence and followers were still extant during Mavahira's and Buddha's times, lived during the times in which the earliest pre-Buddhist Upanishads were being composed (800-500 BCE). What relation was there, if any, between the

120 Dr. P.S.Lamba in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 2.

121 In this field, there is no single definite date in Indian history before Buddha's time.

122 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 15.

Upanishadic thinkers, who were changing the old Vedic world-view, and Parsva?

As seen in the previous chapter, Vardhamãna (540-468 or 599-527 BCE according to some sources), called Mahavira (Great Hero), was an elder contemporary of Buddha, and shared much of the conditions placed by his times.

> "The age of Lord Mahavira (6th century B.C.) was of far-reaching religious reformist activities not only in India but also throughout the ancient world. It was an age of enlightenment for the human race... Suddenly and almost simultaneously and almost certainly independently, there started religious movements at separate centres of civilization. Zoroaster gave a new creed to Iran; Confucius and Lao-tse thought in China; the Jews in their Babylonian captivity developed their tenacious faith in Jehovah, and the Sophists in Greece began tackling the problems of life.
>
> Even in India, this was an age of freedom of thought which gave rise to new religious movements and brought about radical changes for the better in the old ones."[123]

So here we come across a historic moment in which at least two points of the humanist attitude find clear expression, i.e., to develop knowledge beyond that accepted as absolute truth, and freedom of thought and belief. We cannot overemphasise the importance of this

123 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 152.

period since those religions were all-encompassing moulders of civilisations. No less amazing is the fact that such freedom was enjoyed in times when rulers and ruling elites could enjoy a total monopoly over all fields of human endeavour.

However, in the case of Jainism and Buddhism, we should note that they were originally simple, practical and ethical teachings, rather than the complex religious or metaphysical systems that they later became.

> "Mahavira was not the founder but only a reformer of the existing faith of Jainism. His teachings are partly based on the religion of his predecessor, Parsvanatha, and partly independent. He appears to be a religious philosopher who gave a philosophic justification for the rules of conduct propounded by Parsvanatha. He was responsible for the codification of an unsystematic mass of beliefs inhering the earlier religion of his predecessor into a set of rigid rules of conduct for monks and laymen. Besides, he had to introduce changes in the existing religion in order to meet the needs of the time... Sometimes he borrowed certain ideas from others in order to bring them into harmony with his own system. He also formulated his own doctrines under the influence of the controversies endlessly going on with his religious contemporaries. Some of his teachings also arose as a natural reaction against corrupt practices current in the society of this period."[124]

124 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 91.

Mahavira went to countless places for the propagation of his doctrine, and for making converts.[125] One can only wish that such a zeal for the conversion of lives to non-violence would be displayed by present-day adherents of ahimsa. As Buddha, but seemingly less reluctantly, he also accepted women as nuns and laywomen. Considering those times, it was no mean favour for the cause of non-discrimination of sexes. Actually, he made no distinction between men and men, or between men and women. When he wandered about in the country, he was accompanied by male as well as female recluses.

> "The permission granted by Mahavira and the Buddha for the admission of women into their respective Orders, provided and impetus to the spread of education and philosophy among the ladies. Some of them distinguished themselves as teachers and preachers."[126]

> "Ahimsa is the central theme of Jainism. In Jain literature, the word 'dharma' is synonymous with ahimsa. Jain dharma is identical with Ahimsa dharma. Ahimsa is so central in Jainism that it may be incontrovertibly called the beginning and the end of religion."[127] "In the system of Jain ethics it constitutes the first of the moral vows. Jain ethics

125 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 56.

126 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 352.

127 Dr. N.H. Samtani in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 141.

> can be said to be built on non-violence, because all other moral virtues are included as specific aspects of non-violence."[128]
>
> "Probably, no other religion in the world has defined, discussed, analysed and categorised the concept of non-violence in such details as Jainism has done."[129]

Wherever Jainism spread or extended its influence, its basic tenets of non-violence and open-mindedness have contributed to avert violence and discrimination. Jaina monks and lay followers (including kings) were always keen on either establishing or preserving a non-violent social order.

Regarding violence and non-violence, Jainism offers an original view that runs against pessimistic and degrading notions of human nature.

> "What do Jainas mean when they speak of violence as unnatural and non-violence as natural? Let us take a gross example. If one throws a man into the river, his action is not natural. We always presume that it should have some immediate or distinct cause. If one, on the other hand, saves another man from drowning into a river, we do not require an explanation for it. We presume that, if a man knows swimming and sees another man drowning, he saves him without any previous familiarity with the drowning man. We, however, do not presume that

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128 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 90.

129 Dr. N.H. Samtani in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 143.

any man will push another man into river without any previous enmity with him. It means that love or non-violence is inherent in the nature of things."[130]

Although humanism attributes intentionality -not "naturalness"- to every human action, whether good or bad, it cannot but sympathise with a notion that attributes dignity to human beings. If nothing else, it is diametrically opposed to antihumanist notions of human natural wickedness, or of *Thanatos,* the instinct for death and destruction. However, the "naturalness" attributed to non-violence can be understood as the spontaneous attitude that prevails when human beings are not entangled in the webs of mental suffering. Mahavira believed in the freedom of the will.

"The third exception that Jainism has made for laymen is the injury which one inflicts on another being in self-defence. If somebody attacks you and you injure or kill the aggressor in self-defence, you do not violate the principle of ahimsa."[131]

"The late Dr. B.A. Saletore has observed in plain terms that throughout our history whenever the Jaina rulers were in power there is not a single instance of tyranny on the followers of other religions. This is but natural. In the behaviour towards their subjects, the rulers were guided by eminent teachers wedded to Ahimsa. They were, in addition, broad-minded; and there was nothing like

130 Dr. D.N. Bhargava in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 122.

131 Dr. Purushottam Lal Bhargava in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 120.

> proselytisation at the point of sword. They were tolerant, and never ill-treated anybody, nor did they discriminate their subjects on the basis of religion or creed. All this we have on record, so far as Jaina rulers were concerned."[132] "During the period of Mahavira, its influence seems to have been confined only to the modern states of Bihar and some parts of Bengal and U.P. and it is probable that most of the ruling chiefs of this area patronized Jainism."[133]

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, although a Hindu Brahmin by birth, was raised in Western Gujarat where Jainism is still prevailing. He was strongly influenced by Jain religion, accepting ahimsa as the basis of his policy and life. Before leaving India for higher studies in England, he took certain vows at the behest of a Jaina monk. Among them, *ahimsa-vrata,* the vow of non-violence, is binding on all members of Jain society, whether householders or ascetics. Rãjachandra taught and inspired the would-be Mahatma with the spirit of Ahimsã.

> "The fundamental standpoint of Jainism is logically called 'The Maybe Theory' (syãdvãda).[134] It signifies that the universe can be looked at from many points of view, and that each viewpoint yields a different conclusion (anekãnta). Therefore, no conclusion is

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132 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 10.

133 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 71.

134 Syãt is derived from the Sanskrit root as meaning "to be," and means "maybe" as its form in the potential mode. Substantially it means "Seen from one point of view," "somehow."

decisive. The Jains enumerate the nature of reality in seven steps. This method is called the 'Seven-fold formula' or the 'Seven-fold mode of predication' (saptabhangi)(-naya):"[135] "Jainism shows extreme caution and anxiety to avoid all possible dogma in defining the nature of reality."[136]

In its worth the while noticing the importance of this early realization of role that the point of view or perspective plays in human subjectivity.

"The term *anekãnta*, again, indicates the ontological nature of reality according to which every object possesses infinite aspects. Speaking of a particular aspect, we use the term *syãt*, meaning 'from a particular point of view'.[137]…Therefore non-absolutism is held as important as non-violence by Jain philosophers."[138]

"Anekãnta, as stated earlier, is the doctrine of open-mindedness. It is based on the conviction that a thing is constituted of diverse aspects and its proper understanding requires the consideration of as many aspects as possible. The comprehension of a thing from different points of view develops in us a catholic outlook necessary for peaceful co-existence.

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135 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 167.

136 *A Comparative History of Ideas*, Hajime Nakamura, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1992, page 169.

137 M.L. Mehta, Jaina Philosophy, page 177.

138 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, pages 84-85.

By virtue of this doctrine of Anekanta Jainism has been able to appreciate the view-points of others in the field of philosophy. What is decried by it is the one-sided obstinate approach to a thing which is at the rot of all dissensions. Open-mindedness, I need not tell you, fosters magnanimity and balance of mind. Thus Anekãntavãda along with its corollaries of Nayavãda and Syãdvãda supplies us the necessary basis for easing national and international tensions and for developing the attitude of intellectual honesty in an individual." [139]

"If the doctrine of Ahimsã on ethical plane is a grand effort to accommodate in a harmonious manner all the life under the sun, the Syãd-vãda is its counterpart in the realm of epistemology being an effort to accommodate in a harmonious manner divergent views and ideas about an entity."[140] Mahavir, who formulated Syãd-vãda, was tolerant in religious matters. "In the post-canonical works, the doctrine of Nayas was called Syadvada (Saptabhanginyaya), according to which there can be seven alternatives to a decisive conclusion. Nayas were actually the ways of expressing the nature of things from different points of view; there were the ways of escaping from the tendencies of insensitivity and dogmatism which Mahavira disliked. They appealed to the masses

139 Dr. P.S.Lamba in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 3.

140 Dr. T.G. Mainkar in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 112

because they encouraged a tolerant attitude towards different religions."[141]

Thus judgement was suspended regarding certain matters (avoiding entanglement in theoretical arguments) in a sort of proto-phenomenological *epoche* (bracketing), introducing the awareness of the point of view with which assertions are made. It was the position neither of a dogmatist nor of the sceptic, but a revolutionary one. To my knowledge, for the first time in History, it recognised that assertions about truth or reality imply an observer and a standpoint.[142] Much like what Einstein pointed out almost twenty-five centuries later in the field of Physics. S*yãdvãda* and *anekãnta* present points of affinity with "perspectivism" as developed by great philosophers -German Friedrich Nietzsche and Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). According to it, there is no single absolute point of view about reality, but rather diverse complementary perspectives.[143] Thus, in ancient times, the humanist cause was served in at least two of its aspects, namely, to develop knowledge beyond that accepted as absolute truth, and to uphold freedom of thought and belief.

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141 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 110.

142 In Greece, the standpoint of Aristippus (c. 435-356 BCE) may be seen as similar to that of Jainism, though it is not the same. He taught that we know, not things, but only their worth for us, and the states (pathe) into which they put us.

143 José Ortega y Gasset, *El Tema de Nuestro Tiempo*, Espasa-Calpe S.A., Madrid, 1980. (The theme of our time, 1923)

"Another theory which provides the sound basis for neutrality in the field of thought is anekantavada - the non-absolutism.

We know that the line of distinction between right and wrong is very thin. Anekanta, therefore, says that no ism can claim absolute truth for itself, and no ism can be condemned as absolutely wrong. Every statement has an intermixture of right and wrong. We have to adopt, an attitude of neutrality towards two apparently contradictory statements. It is not a case of indecisiveness but a case of clear understanding of what is right and what is wrong in a statement. We would find that there is no occasion for dispute, if we look at things from this angle."[144]

However, Anekãnta "does not mean compromise or doubt or uncertainty, but it means that Truth is many-sided; and one must be tolerant enough to understand the view-point of others." [145]

However, not everything was philosophical. "As members of the society, the Jainas have been advised to practise Aparigraha, i.e., your possessions must be only to the extent of your minimum needs; and the surplus should be given to others who are less fortunate." [146]

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144 Dr. D.N. Bhargava in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 125.

145 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 25.

146 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 25.

Of course, there may be a debate as to what are the "minimum needs," but undoubtedly there is a clear note of solidarity in this precept. It promotes an awareness of others' needs, and a social bond to help alleviate the inequalities. It is but one step prior to inquiring into the causes of such economic violence, and try non-violent action to uproot it. But historical circumstances also placed limitations to certain realisations and their consequences. It will take Mahatma Gandhi to take such step.

Another interesting, ancient and original feature of Jainism from a humanist point of view, is its concept of *karma* (retribution). The notion of *karma* (and transmigration or metempsychosis) appeared for the first time in the Upanishads and became overwhelmingly predominant, and systematised in minute detail, in later Indian thought.

> "Mahavir's theory of Karma is known as Dynamistic philosophy or notion of the freedom of the will. According to it, pleasure and pain, and happiness and misery of the individual depend upon his free will, exertion and manly strength. Karma is the deed of the soul."[147]

This clashed with stances prevalent in his times, which denied intentionality to man (attributing it instead to gods, fate or necessity) or denied man's responsibility for his actions.

147 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 104.

> "In Jainism the Karma functions automatically. One is responsible for one's thoughts, words and acts: these attract a sort of material forces into one's soul which is liable to their consequences, good or bad. No one, even the God, can intervene in this routine. This is something very characteristic of Jainism."[148]

In other terms, this gives human beings back their central role in shaping their own lives. It asserts human intentionality and freedom of choice, far from behaviourist or materialist determinism. Jainism, as well as Buddhism, considered man as the arbiter of his own destiny.

> "The Karma doctrine, denial of a Creator and worship of the Ideal knock down the agency of priests. This may be one of the reasons why some authors have talked about the natural antipathy between the Sramana and Brahmana, the recluse and the priest. If a Sramana goes on preaching publicly that the God cannot give you anything, and your prospects depend entirely on your own Karmas, the priest is sure to be offended, because all this cuts at the very root of his position. All along a priest has behaved in theistic religion as an agent of the God on earth."[149]

Both Jainism and Buddhism, belonging to the pre-Aryan Sramana (ascetic) tradition, clashed with the Brahmanic priests acting as intermediaries between believers' worldly requests and gods' grants. Actually,

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148 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 24.

149 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 24.

both arose in the eastern provinces, far removed from the centre of the Vedic culture.[150]

> "Jainism does not believe in personal God. Every soul, which is capable of salvation, is possessed of the innate nature of Godliness. It can attain the state of Godhead through right belief, right knowledge and right conduct. This state is nothing more than final liberation. All the liberated souls are essentially equal. None of them enjoys any privilege. Every emancipated soul perfectly shines with infinite knowledge, infinite intuition, infinite bliss and infinite power."[151]

This is one more example that ethical behaviour does not necessarily need a personal god as a deterrent of undesirable conducts, whether social or individual. The emancipated souls, the Siddhas or Perfect Ones, "are not creators, nor have they anything to do with the worldly affairs like bestowing reward or giving punishments."[152] Those who, with their example, show the right belief, right knowledge and right conduct to attain liberation, are also human beings.

In this egalitarian conception, all human beings are equal on the basis of their spiritual essence, their godliness. Surely, this should bring about consequences

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150 This is a fact of the birth of religions that has been repeatedly noticed by historians. Revolt or renewal originates from the periphery of established empires.

151 Dr. Mohan Lal Mehta in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 117.

152 Dr. A.N. Upadhye in *Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture*, edited by Dr. R.C.Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1975, page 23.

of brotherhood and solidarity that transcends barriers of race, caste or creed. The means for salvation is non-injury to animate beings, rather than worship of God - which both Jainism and Buddhism ignored.

> "Rajputana, Gujerat, and some parts of South India are still strongholds of the *Jaina* faith, and at one time it was prevalent in many other parts of the country, for example in Bengal in its pre-Buddhist period. Jainism contributed to Hindu thought and practices to a very considerable extent. The well-known austerity of *Jaina* ascetics had its impact on Hindu traditions. Vegetarianism of some sects of Hindus may be due to Jaina influence. Another contribution of Jainism, which is not often recognized, is its part in the growth of medieval mysticism."[153]

153 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 65.

Chapter 5: Ashoka

Ashoka (304 - 232 BCE) was one of the kings of the great Mauryan dynasty, which ruled over almost the entire sub-continent. His all-round achievements as a ruler made him a world-level figure, held in high respect and popularity in India. The emblem of the present Indian Republic has been adopted from the four-lion capital of one of his famous pillars.

Ashoka converted to Buddhism two and a half years after 260 BCE, when he led the famous campaign against the kingdom of Kalinga. This war seemed to have had a strong impression on the emperor for, in his words, "A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed, and many times that number perished…" Deeply shocked and disgusted by the horror, afterwards he embraced non-violence as a State policy, thus foreswearing war as a means of conquest. "He realized the futility of war and abjured it as a state policy. In place of the traditional policy of territorial conquest, he substituted conquest through diplomacy. But he was not speaking as a pacifist. In the Kalinga edict, he threatens certain tribes announcing that the 'Beloved of Gods' is powerful and not reluctant to slay those tribes which fail to become peaceful. For the Beloved of Gods desires safety, self-control, justice and happiness for all beings.[154"155]

154 Asoka Inscriptions, Rock edict XIII.

155 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 95.

Ashoka expounded an idea that was new to Indian political and social theory. It is based on his interpretation of the 'philosophy' or idea of *Dhamma*, as he called it. *Dhamma*, in Prakrit, (*Dharma*, in Sanskrit) means, according to context, the Universal Law or Righteousness or, by extension, the Social and Religious Order as found in Hindu society. However, the word had a much more general connotation at the time and Ashoka used it in a very wide sense as is evident from his edicts. "He did not see *Dhamma* as piety resulting from good deeds inspired by formal religious beliefs, but as an attitude of social responsibility. In the past, historians have generally interpreted Ashoka's *Dhamma* almost as a synonym for Buddhism, suggesting thereby that Ashoka was concerned with making Buddhism the state religion. It is doubtful if this was his intention. *Dhamma* was aimed at building up an attitude of mind in which social responsibility, the behaviour of one person towards another, was considered of great relevance. It was a plea for the recognition of the dignity of man, and for a humanistic spirit in the activities of society."[156]

"The principles of *Dhamma* were acceptable to people belonging to any religious sect. Dhamma was not defined in terms of rules and regulations. It seems to have been deliberately left vague in details, only the broad policy being indicated, which was required to mould general behaviour. Of the basic principles, Ashoka laid most stress on toleration. Toleration , according to him, was of two kinds: toleration of people themselves and also of their beliefs and ideas. He defined it as "…consideration towards slaves and

156 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain page 86.

servants, obedience to mother and father, generosity towards friends, acquaintances, and relatives, and towards priests and monks…"

However, the Beloved of the Gods does not consider gifts of honour to be as important as the essential advancement of all sects. Its basis is the control of one's speech, so as not to extol one's own sect or disparage that of another on unsuitable occasions … On each occasion one should honour another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man, while by doing otherwise, one diminishes the influence of one's own sect and harms the other man's … therefore concord is to be commended so that men may hear one another's principles…[157"158]

"Non-violence was another fundamental principle of *Dhamma*. Non-violence implied both a renunciation of war and conquest by violence and a restraint on the killing of animals. But he was not adamant about wanting complete non-violence. He recognized that there were occasions when violence might be unavoidable, as for instance when the more primitive forest tribes were troublesome. In a very moving passage on the general suffering, physical and mental, caused by war, he declares that by adhering to *Dhamma* he will refrain from using force in the future. He also states that he would prefer his descendents not to conquer by force, but should they have to do so he

157 Rock Edict III, transl. R. Thapar, Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas, p. 251.

158 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain page 86-87.

hopes that this conquest will be conducted with the maximum of mercy and clemency."[159]

> "Ashoka was certainly attracted to Buddhism and became a practising Buddhist. But the Buddhism of his age was not merely a religious belief; it was in addition a social and intellectual movement at many levels, influencing many aspects of society. Obviously, any statesman worth the name would have had to come to terms with it." [160]

> "Asoka mentioned that anyone who had done wrong (*apakāra*) should be pardoned (*chamitavya*) by the king as far as this was possible.[161] One who was sentenced to death should be granted a period of grace of three days.[162] The ideal implied in these edicts is different from the ideal of the *Dharmaśāstras*. It is not a duty of the king to punish, rather it is good not to punish. It is even better to settle disputes peacefully."[163]

> "Ashoka was careful to make a distinction between his personal belief in and support for Buddhism, and his duty as emperor to remain unattached and unbiased in favour of any religion."[164]

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159 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain page 87.

160 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 85, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

161 Asoka, Rock Edict XIII, Sahavājuguḍhi version.

162 Pillar Edict IV, Delhi - Topara version.

163 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 103.

164 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 73, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

Chapter 6: Hinduism

> "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire."
>
> *Mahabharata*, *Anusasana Parva* 113.8

> "Hinduism is more like a tree that has grown gradually than like a building that has been erected by some great architect at some definite point in time. It contains within it, as we shall see, the influences of many cultures, and the body of Hindu thought thus offers as much variety as the Indian nation itself."[165]

Hinduism is a composite product, drawing from many cultures. Hinduism acknowledges the diversity of ways through which the Supreme can be reached. For "God is one although the wise call it by many names."[166] There is no contradiction between belief and devotion for a single all-embracing, all-pervading, omnipresent God, and that devotion expressed to any or all of the gods or goddesses who are a representation of His multifarious aspects.

> The non-Aryan "Śiva was at first associated with Rudra, the Vedic storm god. Later, besides his association with fertility, we also find him as the lord of the *Yoga* (Yogeśvara) and the lord of the cosmic dance of creation and destruction (Nañarãja). We can follow how Śiva, like Kãlî, developed from

165 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 15.

166 *Rigveda Mandala* I,Sukta 194, verse 49.

one of the many folk-gods into a personified version of the Supreme to a particular group of worshippers. This power to sublimate an originally crude concept and to personify the Supreme in many forms seems a typical feature of Hindu religion."[167]

This has led uninformed outsiders to see Hinduism, erroneously, merely as a polytheistic religion. Therefore, no particular practice is compulsory for everybody, and there is ample freedom of thought and belief, preaching and practice. Hinduism encompasses monism, dualism, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, and even complete agnosticism.

By the time Hinduism takes its basic shape, it has been given a humanist touch, bringing human beings closer to the centre of religious concern. Now God "dwells in the heart of all beings."[168] This identification of the universal divine principle with the essential identity of every human being was first formulated in the Upanishads, and was further elaborated by Shankara[169]. Furthermore, they declared: *Purushãnnaparãnkinchit*, that is, nothing is greater than man. This monism, as it is known, poses some difficulty to rigid classifications since it is not a typical dualistic theism in which God is different and greater than believers. Here man is made essentially equal to the divine principle that permeates

167 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 59.

168 *Bhagavad-Gãtã*, Lesson 18, verse 61.

169 c. 799 CE. Shankara o Shankaracharya was a Brahmin from Kerala, famous as new interpreter of the Vedanta school and a propagator of Advaita (Monism) philosophy. Its philosophy helped organized Brahmanism face the challenge posed by heterodox sects and the popular devotional cult.

the whole reality. In theistic terms, there is nothing closer to placing the human beings as the central value than this. This dignifying tenet is at the heart of Hinduism, still struggling against the inertia of caste discrimination, communalism, and national chauvinism.

Besides, there is in Hinduism nothing like eternal damnation. The cycle of rebirth,[170] understood as an ever-renewed opportunity for learning and improving, goes on drawing human beings closer, maybe slowly but surely, to their ultimate realisation of the Self, and thus liberation from all suffering.

> "Different religious leaders have belonged to different schools, and most Hindus are rather proud of the fact that there have not been any violent conflicts or persecution, thanks to mutual tolerance. This is a field where no one theory can claim to explain all the mysteries, and tolerance may well be the path to wisdom rather than that of confusion."[171]

> "Hinduism and Brahminic mysticism shared themes which might co-inspire a mystical, humanistic ethics for the future."[172]

One of the earliest sets of moral aphorisms, i.e., *The Kural* of Tiruvalluvar, written in Tamil between the first and the sixth centuries C.E., gives another expression of the humanist Golden Rule: "When a man

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170 The theory of the transmigration of the souls had been developed by the Upanishads, and interpreted with variations by Buddhism and Jainism.

171 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 85.

172 Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, second revised edition, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996, page 157.

hath felt a pain for himself, let him take care that he inflicteth it not on others" (*Kural*, No. 316).[173] According to the Kārma-Purāṇa 2.16.36, action which is against one's own desire (*ātma-pratikàla*), should also not be done to others. "This Golden Rule was formulated in the *Anuśāsana-Parva* long before the Christian era. One should never do that to another which one considered undesirable (*pratikāla*) for one self (*ātman*).[174] The Golden Rule of the *Anuśāsana-Parva* is given in a negative form, but the following explanation involves both negative and positive expressions.

"Śaṃkara mentions that a yogin should compare the self of all beings (*sarvatra*) with his own, and therefore he should do only that to others which is desirable (*anukāla* or *iṣṭa*) and pleasant (*sukha*) to his own self but should refrain from doing to others which is undesirable (*pratikàla* or *aniṣṭa*) and unpleasant (*duḥkha*) for himself. Śaṃkara's conclusion is that a yogin should be non-violent (*ahiṃsaka*) towards others.[175]

"The Golden Rule may be considered as a moral explanation of *ahiṃsā* without involving any metaphysics. It is the common ethical ideal in Indian thought."[176]

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173 Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, second revised edition, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996, page 163.

174 *Anuśāsana-Parva* 113.8. (Mahābhārata) - Cf. St. Matthew 7.12 and St. Luke 6.21.

175 Śaṃkara's commentary on the Gītā 6.32.

176 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, pages 45-46.

In the *Rig-Veda*, which according to some sources may have been written as early as 3700 BCE, we have a clear proclamation of catholicity:

> "Aa na bhadra katavo yanto vishwatah" [Let noble thoughts come from all sides]."[177]

In the *Atharva Veda* there is also acknowledgment of the equality of all human beings:

> "Vasudeva kutumbubakam" [The entire universe is one family].

This brief chapter on Hinduism does not pretend to exhaust the subject. We will see Hinduism always assuming new expressions, starting by the *Bhakti* movement in the next part.

177 *Rigveda*, 1-89-i.

PART 4

RESPONSE TO THEOCRACY

Chapter 1: Background

Between 1300 and 1526 C.E., foreign Muslim conquerors, mostly of Turkish origin, established an effective suzerainty over the greater part of India. India was divided into a congeries of States, both big and small. The constant rivalries and struggles between these States, which were generally, but not invariably, grouped on religious lines, form the main feature of the political history of this period. This state of things continued for nearly two centuries and a half, until the Moghuls established a stable and durable empire in the second half of the sixteenth century C.E. The arrival and settlement of Islam -an altogether different culture- created a strong impact in all fields. "Islam touched Hindu life, and was itself touched by Hinduism, at many points."[178]

The arrival and settlement of Islam was carried out at the point of wholesale violence and discrimination against the existing people of India and their cultures - none excluded. This left scars that centuries could not erase completely. On the other hand, with the establishment of the Sultanate (13th to 16th century), new social ideas were introduced and became an integral part of Indian life. "The Muslims made a large number of converts in India and, by the end of the period, the vast majority of Indian Muslims must have been descendants of Hindu converts. Even the Muslims

178 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page xxix.

who claimed descent from foreigners or foreign immigrants into India lived as close neighbours to the Hindus for generations."[179] "…many social practices of Indian Muslims, such as marriage and class distinction, and some of their ideas and beliefs which differ materially from those of their co-religionists elsewhere, were probably due to the influence of the Hindu society. As regards dress, food, language, music, art and architecture, each influenced the other to a certain extent, at least in some regions, mostly in North India."[180]

Unluckily, none of them could influence the other with their most progressive traits: "The ultra-democratic social ideas of the Muslims, though strictly confined to their own religious community, were an object-lesson of equality and fraternity which Europe, and through her the world, learnt at a great cost only in the nineteenth century. The liberal spirit of toleration and reverence for all religions, preached and practiced by the Hindus, is still an ideal and despair of civilised mankind."[181]

The impact of Islam on Indian culture has been inestimable. It permanently influenced the development of all areas of human endeavour - language, dress, cuisine, all the art forms, architecture and urban design, and social customs and values. Conversely, the languages

179 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 615.

180 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 616.

181 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, pages 616-617.

of the Muslim invaders were modified by contact with local languages, to Urdu, which uses the Arabic script, and the more colloquial Hindustani, which uses the Devnagri script. Both are major Indian languages today. "There can be hardly any doubt that the impact of Islãm was felt by the Hindus, and a class of Muslim thinkers was influenced by the rich heritage of thought in India."[182] "Since caste loyalty was stronger than political loyalty the really significant impact of Islam was upon social structure, and was seen in the creation of new sub-castes and of new sects within those castes most permeated with Islamic ideas."[183]

In spite of the undeniable cultural merge that took place, the great divide that separated Hindus and Muslims for centuries was based on two main points of difference, "These are primarily the religious bigotry on the side of the Muslims and social bigotry on the part of the Hindus."[184]

"The Hindus combined catholicity in religious outlook with bigotry in social ethics, while the Muslims displayed an equal bigotry in religious ideas with catholicity in social behaviour."[185] However, this bigotry on both sides was mostly fuelled by their

182 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 552.

183 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 320, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

184 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page xxxi.

185 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 617.

respective orthodox minorities, namely the Muslim theologians (Ulema) and the Hindu Brahmin caste. These minorities monopolised the interpretation and application of religion, acting as intermediaries between scriptures and people, between the divinity and the believers. They were the "custodians of the faith" and preservers of dehumanising traditions that often were not sanctioned by original scriptures. This was going to be explicitly denounced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Mahatma Gandhi told the students of Mannar Gudi: "Respect tradition. But if any tradition, however ancient, does not agree with what is right and good, it is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered a tradition. Child-marriage may be considered an ancient tradition. But I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power."[186]

On different grounds, either religious or social, both orthodox minorities discriminated against their own people and were intolerant of dissent. Apart from the violent attitudes that they promoted against each other -either as actions or as reactions- both also oppressed their own respective brethren. The brotherhood of Islam did not extend beyond its own fold, and non-believers (Kãfirs) were discriminated against both in theory and practice. Within the Hindu fold, "Theoretically speaking, no religion or philosophy preached the universal brotherhood of man more eloquently than the Vedãnta, which place it on the

186 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 128.

fundamental basis of the identity of all individual souls, all being identical with Brahman. Of course, there was no practical application of this doctrine in social life."[187]

At the beginning of the fourteenth century C.E., the orthodox Brahmanism reigned supreme over nearly the whole of India, but it had ceased to be a homogeneous sect, and was practically a heterogeneous compound of the relics of the various developments in the past.

It is among the oppressed within both folds that humanist rebellion sprouted. "As regards 'old traditions and ideas of religious authority', the medieval saints could hardly find much difference between the orthodox Islãm and orthodox Hinduism."[188] "The coming of Islam did not introduce major changes in political institutions, but, as is evident from the development of the *Bhakti* movement, the challenge to the social pattern was intensified."[189]

In a milieu of pervading oppression, both foreign and domestic, both Hindus and Muslims further developed their pre-existing humanist struggle.

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187 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 553.

188 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 553.

189 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 320, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

Chapter 2: The Hindu humanist response

The *Bhakti* Movement (Renaissance)

"It was hardly possible for the generality of people, however, to reach the intellectual level necessary to understand Sankara's non-dualism, and difficulty was created by his refusal to impart knowledge of Brahman to non-*brãhmanas*. These demands were fulfilled by the *Bhakti* doctrine preached by Rãmãnuja, and thereafter *bhakti* based on Vedãnta became, so to say, the dominant theme in India's religious life. Bhakti, however, was not a new doctrine in India nor was Rãmãnuja its first preacher. The beginning of the medieval *bhakti* movement was more in the nature of re-statement of values than an innovation."[190]

Bhakti movement refers to the religious, social and cultural movement that under the guise of devotional religious expressions that swept all over India using the regional languages. It developed strongly between the twelfth and the eighteen century in all the regions and languages of the subcontinent, though an early beginning may be even traced back to Tamilnadu (South India) in the fourth century with the saints under the Pallava rulers of Kãnchi (*c.* fourth to ninth centuries) and with the Ãḻvãrs (from sixth century onwards), who influenced Rãmãnuja and were pioneers in expressing love for God in everyday human emotions

190 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 1.

and terms. The majority belonged to the lower castes, and there were women saints, which in itself was a revolutionary feature. For example, *Andal, who* sang verses on her love for Vishnu. From the south and the Deccan, the devotional cult moved northwards.

"Instantaneous, devotional self-surrender, not to mention the attainability of Brahma(m)-realization by all castes, rendered Rãmãnuja's teachings more popular."[191]

"Another point in favour of the Śrî-Vaishnavas was Rãmãnuja's attitude towards non-Brahmins whom Śaṅkara had denied the right of Vedic knowledge, and therefore salvation in their present life. Ramanuja, as we have seen, took lessons from a Śũdra and admitted Jains, Buddhists, Śũdras and even untouchables to his fold."[192]

Some scholars have tried to see the influence of Christian religion on the birth of the *Bhakti* movement. However, given the negligible connection with and influence of Christianity in India, this is a preposterous (if not wishful) thinking. According to Occam's razor, it is far more immediate to assume some connection with Sufi mysticism. Of such connection, which is not one of subsidiarity, there is much more evidence. Besides, Islam was at that time far more influential than Christianity ever was. It was precisely the period of Muslim ascendance and formation of the Moghul Empire. However, there is an even more immediate explanation in the fact that theistic

191 Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, second revised edition, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996, page 187.

192 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 37.

devotion was present in Indian civilisation much before the birth of either Christianity or Islam. Hinduism, Buddhism and non-Aryan cults abound with antecedents. Even Indus Valley Civilization offers evidence.

> "With the introduction of the Mahãyãna doctrine, Buddhism was profoundly transformed as if by the addition of a new element: *bhakti*. *Bhakti* was not absent from the earlier or Hinayãna Buddhism"[193]

> "If Buddha's compassion is unlimited, he must save also the ignorant and the fools. In this attitude, the Mahãyãnists found support in one of Buddha's recorded sayings in the *Majjhima-nikãya* (22), in which he says that those who have not yet entered the Path 'are sure of heaven if they have love and faith towards me.' "[194]

The *Bhakti* literature with its emphasis on love and adoration is seen by some authors as a revolt against the formalism of the Vedic system.

> "The *Vedas* are chary of the 'way of devotion' (*bhakti*), and the rise of the devotional cults in Hinduism can only be explained by the influence of non-Vedic cultures. According to the *Padmapurãṇa*, the school of devotion had its origin in the south, i.e., in the Dravidian country. The cult of devotion brought in a new class of *guru* in place of the old Vedic *ãcãryas*; at the same time the centre of learning shifted from the

193 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 25.

194 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 28.

sacrificial ground to the more democratic places of pilgrimage and bathing. Instead of altars there grew up temples with their special deities. The *Vedas* contain little reference to iconolatry or image-worship, so that the growth is also non-Vedic."[195]

"From about the sixth century B.C., the old Vedic religion and practices gradually underwent transformation, and formed some sort of a new religion. Although the final form is not clearly perceptible, its beginnings were marked in this age by the adoption of theistic Vaishnavism and Saivism within the fold of the Brahmanical religion. These two theistic religions centred round two deities, Vishnu and Siva, and they both emphasized devotion."[196]

"The *Bhakti* movement seems therefore to have non-Aryan roots, and indeed the *Padmapurãna* declares *Bhakti* to be a product of the Dravidian land. There is no doubt that the *Bhakti* movement was long opposed by Brahmins, because its disregard of traditional religious ceremonies and its indifference to caste divisions annoyed the Brahmins."[197]

Any person irrespective of age, sex, or caste could have the *darśana* or vision of the deity through His grace or surrender to Him. Therefore the sectarian creeds like Vaishṇavism, Śaivism or Śakti worship developed catholicity of spirit and universal outlook

195 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 58.

196 *Lord Mahavira and His Times*, Dr. Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, page 154.

197 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 91.

which are absent in Vedic religion, in which the knowledge of the Vedas, confined to the males of the upper castes, was a pre-requisite for the realization of Brahman or Supreme Reality."[198]

Thus, the *Bhakti* movement seems to have very early non-Aryan roots.

"The tradition of *bhakti* is found from the time of the *Vedas*, though it is on the whole a non-Aryan tradition. In the latter part of the first millennium B.C. the idea of the *avatãra* (Divine incarnation) develops, and this helps *Bhakti*... "[199]

Although somebody is of the opinion that:

"...simple *Bhakti* tradition is so deeply rooted in the soil, springing up in every age in different parts of the country, that it is really very difficult to trace the origin of these movements."[200]

Rãmãnuja (1016-1137 or 1046-1137 CE, according to different sources), with his *Viśishṭãdvaita* or qualified monism, re-emphasised devotion.

Through Bhakti seems to places the divinity above or apart from human beings, it made believers free from dependence on priesthood and caste, and provided another way for religiousness.

The *Bhakti* had been rendered impossible by Sankara's monism in which individuality is illusion (*mãyã*).

198 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 129.

199 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 20.

200 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 105.

Rãmãnuja asserted things and selves as real, Brahman as a personal being with qualities (e.g. infinitely good and pure), and *bhakti* as a requisite for realization. "It was hardly possible for the generality of people, however, to reach the intellectual level necessary to understand Sankara's non-dualism, and difficulty was created by his refusal to impart knowledge of Brahman to non-*brãhmanas*. These demands were fulfilled by the *Bhakti* doctrine preached by Rãmãnuja, and thereafter *bhakti* based on Vedãnta became, so to say, the dominant theme in India's religious life. *Bhakti*, however, was not a new doctrine in India nor was Rãmãnuja its first preacher. The beginning of the medieval *bhakti* movement was more in the nature of re-statement of values than an innovation."[201] "Instantaneous, devotional self-surrender, not to mention the attainability of Brahma(m)-realization by all castes, rendered Rãmãnuja's teachings more popular."[202] "Another point in favour of the Śrî-Vaishnavas was Rãmãnuja's attitude towards non-Brahmins whom Śaṅkara[203] had denied the right of Vedic knowledge, and therefore salvation in their present life. Ramanuja, as we have seen, took lessons from a Śũdra and admitted Jains, Buddhists, Śũdras and even

201 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 1.

202 Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, second revised edition, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996, page 187.

203 c. 788-820. The most renowned propounder of radical nondualism or monism (Advaita Vedanta)

untouchables to his fold."[204] After the death of Rãmãnuja, his followers continued the tradition (particularly the Tenkalai sect), and there were other schools within Vaishnavism supporting *Bhakti* and opposing Sankara's *mãyã* (e.g., Madhva[205] or Ãnandatãrtha, Nimbãrka, etc.). The theistic interpreters of Vedãnta among non-vaishnava vedantists emphasized devotion to God as more important and as the true means of realization.

In the region of Maharashtra, the Nãtha-*sampradãya* sect, renovated at the beginning of the tenth century CE, produced **Jñānadeva** (*c.* 1275-1296), the celebrated author of *Jñāneśvarã* and *Amṛitänubhava.* The Mahãnubhäva sect, founded by a Gujarãti called Chakradhara in 1263 CE, did not observe the Varṇāśramadharma of the caste-Hindus, threw open the path of self-renunciation (Sannyãsa) to all, did not believe in image-worship. The poet-saints of the Bhãgavata School (also known as the Vãrakarã-*sampradãya*), existing since the ninth century CE or earlier, had Namãdeva (1270-1350 CE) as its greatest exponent and propagator, and the celebrated poet-saint Tukãrãma. "The spread of the Bhagavata Dharma in Maharashtra had resulted not only in the fusion of the warring sects of the Vaishnavites and the Saivites in this part of the country, but also affected the followers of other religions as well, especially the Muslims, who had come

204 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 37.

205 c. 1190-1276 CE (sometimes given as 1199-1278). Founder of the dualist branch of Vedanta.

under the influence of Kabir.[206] They also wrote devotional songs and spread the gospel of toleration in religious outlook, recognizing and respecting different manifestations of the Supreme Spirit."[207]

"On the Hindu side the man who gave medieval mysticism its momentum was **Rãmãnanda** (c. 1370-1440)….He challenged caste-divisions, questioned the traditional religious ceremonies, and by preaching in Hindi rather than in Sanskrit, which was confined to the upper classes, gave an impetus to popular literature."[208] Rãmãnanda, regarded as the beginner of medieval religious renaissance, founded a new school of Vaishnavism. "The most important reform attributed to him is the abolition of considerations of caste among his followers. He made no distinction between a Brãhmana and a member of the lowest castes. He was himself a Brãhmana, but had no objection to dine with members of the low castes if they were Vaishṇavas. He took pupils even from the so-called degraded castes. . . . Although a spirit of sympathy for the low castes was a feature of Vaishṇavism, the earlier Vaishṇavas did not put sufficient emphasis on this point. Rãmãnanda, however, made it a fundamental tenet of his

206 We have a number of Muslim poets in Marathi, who in imitation of the poets of the Bhagavata School, wrote devotional songs to Vitthala. Cf. Shaikh Mohammad and others. Hussain Ambar wrote a commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita* and Shahamuni a philosophical treatise called Siddhãntabodha. Shaikh Mohammad has also written several works of this type.

207 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. V, page 356.

208 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 97.

doctrine."[209] The most famous disciple of Rãmãnanda was Kabīr, whose contribution is dealt with below.

From the fourteenth century onwards, the *Bhakti* movement became a dynamic force in north Indian society and, up to a point, filled the vacuum created by the retreating Buddhists, since it attracted the professional castes.

The movement spanned the whole country. Renowned names are many: **Chaitanya** (1486-1533), a Bengal school-teacher, concerned almost solely with bringing *Vaishnava* teaching to as many people as possible. He did not care for rituals, admitted both Hindus on any caste and Muslims as disciples, emphasizing universal love and brotherhood as the first step to the love of God. "He disregarded all distinctions of caste and creed so far as religious initiation was concerned, and one of his most favourite disciples was a Muslim devotee named **Haridãsa**.... There is, however, no doubt that his catholic spirit made no distinctions between the Brãhmanas, Chaṇḍãlas, and the Yavanas (Muslims), and brought them all within the fold of his religion of love and charity. This liberal outlook, which formed an essential feature of Chaitanya's sect, at least to begin with, was one of the most important reasons for its wide popularity among the masses."[210] The sect, still existing, had a wide popularity among the masses. The Chaitanya school of Vaishnavism produced a high

209 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 560.

210 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 568.

development of literature and philosophy during the medieval age.

We also find **Vallabha** (*c.* 1479-1531), a renowned teacher of *Bhakti* centering on Krishna worship; **Mirabai (**1450?-1547?), a sixteenth-century Rajput princess who become a wandering mendicant composing songs on her love for Krishna; **Surdas**, the blind poet of Agra; and **Lalla Ded**, who lived in Kashmir and dedicated her mystical verses and songs to the god Shiva.

It should be noted that many among the mystical saints did not remain just in one place or area, but travelled all throughout the country and, in some cases, to other countries. Hence their influence spread beyond their original places even when they were alive.

Most leaders of the *Bhakti* school throughout the country have been opposed to caste divisions, for "The indwelling God is in all created things and in all the religions professed by man;"[211] Thus non-discrimination does not remain confined to followers of a particular sect, but encompasses all believers. Actually, many of the movement's leading figures came from the lower castes, particularly at the early stages of the movement. *Saiva bhaktas* (i.e., Shiva's devotees) were non-Brahmins.[212] Most *Vaishnava Bhakti* literature shows a belief in the equality of human beings. During the Middle Ages there was a

211 A verse of Nammāḻvār of the influential south-Indian āḻvārs' faith, quoted by A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 54.

212 Śiva-jñāna-bodham (1223).

considerable decline in the social status of women. In this context, the *Bhakti* movement promoted the participation of women. Historical constraints may have imposed limitations to the full expression of such belief, but the attempt remains as a clear signpost of humanist attitude.

Virasaivism: Mysticism for social change

One outstanding but continuing till today, is one more example of the above is offered by one of the regional expressions of the *Bhakti* movement in Karnataka. The adherents called themselves *Virasaivas* (heroic, ardent worshippers of god Siva), and were later usually called *Liṅgãyatas*. It was founded by Basava in the second half of the twelfth century and continued until today It differed from other devotional movements in medieval India because of its strong social orientation. Profound mysticism tightly coupled with social awareness and criticism was typical of the movement. The Upanishadic tenet that it is the same divine principle that dwells in all human beings was taken by Virasaivas to its unavoidable social consequence: all men are basically equal in dignity and should be treated accordingly.[213]

"In opposition to the dominant culture, the Virasaivas developed new ideals: about the equality of all human

213 The untenable incoherence between lofty religious tenets and obvious social discrimination resurfaces time and again throughout centuries.

beings, the value of all kinds of labour, and the necessity of education for all people".[214]

They accepted anyone in their fold regardless of birth, sex, social status or economic position, even those regarded as "untouchables" according to Hindu caste system. They rejected completely birth-based, occupation-based caste discrimination, thus launching a direct attack to the main pillar of orthodox Hindu social structure. Traditional concepts of purity and rules of conduct were criticised, for devotees of the same god cannot be separated by human regulations and those who know their real Self cannot discriminate anymore. As Buddhism did before, they saw status as a moral category, irregardless of birth, wealth or power; hence promoted a much-needed social mobility. This is one more example of the composite character of Indian culture, in which currents did not develop in hermetic compartments. Similarly, professions were not seen as connected to caste, i.e., birth, but free choice and capacity -a remarkable assertion as per those times. All the above resulted in configuring the Virasaiva community as a conglomeration of castes with its own characteristics.

There was no need to renounce worldly life for attaining spiritual goal, and Basava rejected temple cult, dominated by the Brahmana priests, and pilgrimages. Once again, man was made the central value and concern, since it wrestled god from temples, higher castes and rituals, and gave it back it to the devotee through an intimate relation from the heart. Not even the traditional

214 Dr. J.P. Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics - On the Social Aspects of Virasaivism*, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., first Indian edition, Delhi,1995, page 1.

figure of the guru remained as the sole authority in religious matters, since the fellowship of devotees became an authority as well. Hence, religious discussions were democratically held at the "Hall of Spiritual Experience."

The traditional scriptures were also disregarded, and a new literature arose written and preached in simple terms accessible even to illiterates in their vernacular language.

It presented a practical ideal, both religious and social, that could be realised by everybody without any distinction whatsoever, whether poor or illiterate.

Another interesting aspect of Virasaivas is that they could even freely shift to "rival" devotional sects as it depended on free choice, not birth. Similarly, marriages of different sects were not seen as a problem in any sense.

As Jainism (then an influential tradition in Karnataka along with Buddhism), Virasaivas were critical of accumulation of property, for only honest labour for a just price is acceptable for God, and stressed the moral duty to give away every surplus. This was linked to the value attached to all work (manual labour in particular) as a freely-chosen vocation, its purpose being not profit-making but service (dãsōha) to the community. Thus, personal devotion was tightly linked to a strict moral conduct and social responsibility.

In a historical context in which not only lower castes were severely oppressed, but more so women within them, the latter were greatly benefited from Virasaiva (or Bhakti movement) sex equality and consequent freedom. They were not seen with the mixture of contempt and fear (the root of all evil), deeply rooted in

orthodox culture (as in the *Dharmaśãstras)*, but with a new dignity entitling them to full participation in the community. Thus, female members of all conditions readily availed of the opportunity and played important roles in the movement.

In medieval India, institutionalised education (particularly religious knowledge) was mainly a privilege of high-caste men. Teaching was almost exclusively the right of the Brahmanas. This is the context in which Virasaivas started giving much importance to education for all, and became one more among their achievements.[215]

Although they may have partly lost their initial impulse or identity, while incurring in some contradictions of its own tenets, Virasaivas were really revolutionary in the cultural and historical milieu in which they arose, and certainly contributed their share to the humanist struggle against antihumanist values.

215 "During the last decades, the lingayata community stands out with regard to education. The educational activities, which already started in the first half of the century, have been expanded tremendously. The result is that the community has nowadays the highest level of education after the Brahmanas, who traditionally held the monopoly position in this domain." Dr. J.P. Schouten, *Revolution of the Mystics - On the Social Aspects of Virasaivism*, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., first Indian edition, Delhi,1995, page 278.

Chapter 3: The Muslim humanist response – Sufism in India, Akbar the Great

> "Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."
>
> Forty *Hadith* of an-Nawawi 13

Sufism in India

"The coming of the Arabs, Turks, and Afghans brought a totally new religion to India --Islam. Apart from the Muslim theologians, the initial impact of Islam in the religious sphere was the arrival of the Muslim mystics from Persia. The *Sufis*, as they were called, first settled in Sind and Punjab from where their teaching trickled into Gujarat, the Deccan, and Bengal. At first, the *Sufis* in India were an extension of the Persian schools of mystics, but later the amalgamation of Indian and Islamic ideas produced an Indian school. The *Sufis* lived an isolated life, devoting themselves to the means of perceiving God. They were generally disapproved of by the Muslim theologians, who often found *Sufi* methods and beliefs too unorthodox. But *Sufi* ideas attracted sympathy and interest in India, particularly among those who were in any case inclined to mysticism and ascetism. In the centuries immediately following, the impact of the *Sufis* on the devotional cult was considerable."[216]

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216 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 264, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain

"...the first Sũfi teacher to come to India was Khwãjã Moinuddin Cisthi, who was born in Seistãn in 1142. He arrived at Delhi in 1193 and finally settled down in Pushkar, a place of Hindu pilgrimage in Ajmer. He had many disciples, both Muslim and Hindu."[217] The Chishtiya School, with its liberal and tolerant outlook counted on the largest number of common people among its adherents.

According to many authors, although the *Bhakti* movement was a continuation of earlier devotional cults, Sufi ideas also influenced its doctrines, as did also certain typically Muslim concepts, particularly those about social justice; for instance, regarding the practice of widow-burning (Suttee or Sati). "Even the Muslim rulers endeavoured to put a stop to the practice of Suttee. Akbar was against compulsion. Jehangir prescribed death penalty for forcing a woman to be a Suttee. Aurangzeb declared that no woman within the Mughul territory would be allowed to be burnt alive."[218] In all cases, this was opposed by Hindu fundamentalists. The development of the *Bhakti* movement is tightly related to *Sufism*. It is one more among many examples showing that no development in India followed an isolated course. In the land of plurality, mutual influences were the norm rather than the exception, and always greater than what orthodox sectors wanted to acknowledge. The *Bhakti* cult and the tradition of the Islamic *Sũfis* have plenty in

217 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 97.

218 Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 50.

common. Actually, So much so, that they influenced each other. The names of Ãllah, Rãma, or Hari, were used to refer to the Supreme indistinctly. Just as Islam influenced Hinduism through *Sufism*, Hinduism too modified Islam through the Hindu converts, who were the vast majority of Muslims. So much so, that some movements arose within Islam to try to eradicate alien elements that had crept within it. Notwithstanding such anti-historical attempts, both within the Hindu and Muslim folds people kept on going beyond that established as official.

"The outstanding aspect of Indian medieval mysticism is its complete independence from sectarian organizations and orthodox scriptures."[219] Historical immobilism has been always at the losing end throughout centuries. A fictional preservation of orthodoxy could only be claimed by referring to scriptures without the support of matching social developments. On the other hand, many a times scriptures had to be reinterpreted to cope with ongoing developments -such is the case of Shankaracharya's monism.

During the medieval period, there were reformers within Vaishnavism in the north. Among these, some were associated with the *Bhakti* movement while others were influenced by Islamic ideas. "The leaders of the *Bhakti* movement, who were to make a deeper impact on social rather than purely religious ideas, were those who had been influenced by Islam, and

219 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 97.

more particularly by the teachings of the *Sufis*."[220] The two dominant sects of Islam are the *Sunnis* and the *Shias*. The *Sufis* mystics (and dervishes) derive from the latter, and came to India with the establishment of Turkish power. The Sufis came into prominence in about the tenth century in Persia, with their mystical doctrines of union with God achieved through the love of God. Such doctrines were attacked by orthodox Islam and the *Sufis* were regarded as heretics. The Sufis in India dissociated themselves from the established centres of orthodoxy, contesting the *Ulema*[221] on grounds that they were deviating from the original democratic and egalitarian principles of the *Quran*. Being ascetics and recluses, *Sufi pirs*[222] were as much revered by the Hindus as were the Hindu gurus and ascetics. Romila Thapar gives an example: "To this day an annual fair is held at the tomb of a comparatively obscure *pir* in one of the most hallowed sites of Hinduism, Kurukshetra, where thousands of Hindu villagers from the countryside around gather to worship at the tomb. The same villagers will point to a site barely half a mile away, where on an island in the midst of the sacred tank are the visible remains of a Hindu temple believed to have been destroyed by an irate Muslim governor."[223]

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220 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 305, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

221 Muslim theologians.

222 Sufi *pir* or *shaikh* is the equivalent of Hindu guru.

223 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 307, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

For *Sufis*, love of God implied the love of humanity, so service for humanity was regarded as part of their mystic discipline. The Islamic stress on equality was highly respected by *Sufis*, which brought them in close contact with artisans and cultivators. The *Sufis* "in the early crucial years were the most effective original thinkers in the spheres of both politics and religion,"[224] and often reflected the non-conformist elements in society.

Akbar the Great

Although it is arguable to consider Akbar a full-fledged humanist, considering his historical and personal circumstances he made some efforts in that direction. This is why we include him within this period of Indo-Islamic interaction, in which he stood out as a significant exception among all other Muslim rulers who acquiesced to bigotry.

The most important Islamic empire in India was that of the Mughals, a Central Asian dynasty founded by Babur early in the sixteenth century. Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun and under the reign of Humayun's son, Akbar the Great, Indo-Islamic culture attained a peak of tolerance, harmony and a spirit of enquiry. Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar was born in Sind in 1542, and acceded the throne following his father's death at the age of thirteen in 1556. Through his military might he extended the empire to most of India. The nobles of his court belonged to both the Hindu and the Muslim faiths. He married the daughter of the Rajput prince of Jaipur, and

224 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 307-8, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

overcame Rajput resistance, winning the loyalty of many. He did not force Islam on them, abolishing the poll tax and pilgrim tax, which made him popular with his Hindu princes and subjects.

Akbar was an enlightened monarch who worked hard to fight religious intolerance and promote Hindu-Muslim unity. He also took great interest in philosophy and religion and was a benevolent patron of the arts. He established a cult of himself as ruler, and in 1575 he constructed a Hall of Worship, with seminars on religion every Thursday evening. Leaders of all the faiths (including Jesuits) were invited to his court at Fatehpur Sikri to debate religious issues at the specially built *Ibadat Khana*. Akbar tried to consolidate religious tolerance by founding the *Din-e-Ilahi* religion, an amalgam of the Hindu and the Muslim faiths. Most criticism was from Akbar's co-religionists, who rebelled in 1581 upon his proclamation of a new mystical faith; his Hindu subjects accepted his claims. He reserved the right to pronounce on religious doctrine, hoping for a synthesis of religious ideas to prevent sectarian quarrelling. He was partially successful: his new religion died with him, but the aura of divinity surrounding the Mughal throne continued. By all accounts the greatest of the Mughal rulers; certainly, the Mughal Empire under Akbar was equal to or ahead of Europe in most areas.

Chapter 4: Blend of currents - Kabir, Nanak and Sikhism, the Bãul Movement

Kabîr

Both Kabir and Nanak expressed a blend of Hindu and Muslim ideas, making them stand out among other leaders of the devotional movement. With the contributions of Kabir and Nanak, the *Bhakti* movement reaches the urban class in towns and the artisans in the villages who were in contact with the towns. This is a new development since, in the earlier period, the *Bhakti* movement was very much in the background, not having the support of a large urban class. The mystical sects were not essentially of urban origin.

Kabîr "On the Hindu side the man who gave medieval mysticism its momentum was Rãmãnanda (c. 1370-1440-1518) was a Muslim weaver, a lower caste profession. As mentioned above, he was the most famous disciple of Rãmãnanda, the Vaishnava reformer, but eventually left him and began to preach his own ideas.)... He challenged caste-divisions, questioned the traditional religious ceremonies, and by preaching in Hindi rather than in Sanskrit, which was confined to the upper classes, gave an impetus to popular literature."[225]

225 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 97.

"By far the most famous of Rãmãnanda's disciples was a Muslim weaver, **Kabîr**. The exact dates of his birth and death are uncertain and there are conflicting theories about them. However, in all probability he lived mainly in the fifteenth century and may even have been a *direct* disciple of Rãmãnanda. The son of a Muslim weaver, converted to the movement, he struck at the roots of every kind of religious ritualism and superstition. He combined in him the *Sũfi* and *Bhakti* traditions of the Islam and Hinduism... **Kabîr** composed songs for the common people, and naturally chose Hindi rather than Sanskrit as his medium. He did not believe in austerity or celibacy. He was married, had a son and a daughter, and continued his life as a craftsman... Kabîr had many followers both among Hindus and the Muslims. Kabir was concerned with much more than mere religious reform. He wished to change society... The founder of the great Sikh religion, **Nãnak** (1469-1538),[226] was greatly influenced by *Kabîr*'s teaching, which was known as *Kabîrpanth*. Some of the attractive simplicity of Sikhism can be traced to *Kabîr* and the Sikh religious document *Granth Sãheb* is an important source of medieval mystic verses.

"Kabãr refused to acknowledge caste distinctions or to recognise the authority of the six schools of Hindu philosophy, nor did he set any store by the four

226 "...Nãnak was possibly the only medieval saint who attempted to harmonize Hinduism and Islam into a unified doctrine and on that basis establish a sect." A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 48.

divisions of life (Ashram) prescribed for Brahmins. He held that religion without *bhakti* was no religion at all and that ascetism, fasting and alms-giving had no value if unaccompanied by worship (*Bhajan*, hymn-singing). By means of *Ramainis*, *Shabdas* and *Sakhis* he imparted religious instruction to Hindus and Muhammadans alike. He had no preference for either religion, but gave teaching that was appreciated by the followers of both. He spoke out his mind fearlessly and never made it his object merely to please his hearers."[227]

In the *Bijaka* (the Seed Book), the sacred text of the Kabir-panthis, Kabîr's message is: "7. Be truthful, be natural; Truth alone is natural. Seek the truth within your own heart, for there is no truth in the external religious observances; neither in the sects nor in the holy vows, neither in religious garb nor in pilgrimages. Truth resides within the heart and is revealed in love, in strength, in compassion. Conquer hatred, and extend your love to all mankind, for God resides in all."[228] Thus is given in brief a message that synthesizes several Indian values and has influenced countless generations. It makes man, the devotee, the central value; it promotes non-violence, and refuses discrimination. Kabîr relentlessly campaigned against all kinds of dogmas and superstitions, against all discriminations based on caste, sex or creed. His poems and life was going to influence generations, and became one of Rabindranath

227 Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, (1957), page 1.

228 Quoted by A.K. Majumdar, in *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 68.

Tagore's main sources of inspiration. "There is no doubt that Kabîr had a large following both among Hindus and Muslims."[229] The spirit of Kabîr's teachings did not die out, and was kept alive by his numerous disciples and followers.

Outstanding among Kabîr's followers was **Dãdu** (1544-1603), a cotton-carder who came from a Muslim family... One of Dãdu's dreams was the unification of faiths, and with this object he founded the Brahma-Sampradãya for the worship of God without ritual or orthodoxy... It is this simplicity of faith and this confidence in knowing God, coupled with his liberal outlook, that attracted **Akbar**, the Great Moghul."[230]

The most famous of his followers was **Rajjab**, who considered man as God-man (*Naranarayana*) just as **Ravidas** considered man Divine Man (*Narhari*). "'All this world', said Rajjab, 'is the *Vedas* and the entire creation is the Korãn. Vain are efforts of the Pandit and the Kãzi who consider a mass of dry papers to be the complete world.' 'There are as many sects as there are men. Such is the creation of Providence endowed with a variety. The worship of different sects, which are like so many small streams, move together to meet Hari (God), who is like the ocean."[231]

In Sind, "The seventeenth century gave the movement **Shãh Karîm** and **Shãh Inayet**; **Shãh**

229 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 563.

230 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, pages 98-100.

231 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, pages 101.

Latîf was born in 1689; and this tradition has continued to the present day."[232]

Nãnak and Sikhism

The founder of the great Sikh religion, **Nãnak** (1469-1538),[233] was greatly influenced by *Kabîr*'s teaching, which was known as *Kabîrpanth*. Nãnak also joined and left the *Sufis*. Some of the attractive simplicity of Sikhism can be traced to *Kabîr* and the Sikh religious document *Granth Sãheb* is an important source of medieval mystic verses. Nãnak said: "II.: "2. Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looketh on all men as equal is religious."[234] He did not adopt the imagery or symbolism of Vaishnavism or any other creed. His was the first attempt to bring together the Hindus and the Muslims in a common fold of spiritual and social brotherhood. Nãnak laid emphasis on the purity of character and conduct and a high ethical code, rather than any dogma or creed of any sect, as the only way to realization. He denounced the worship of images and all distinctions of caste and creed.

Neither Kabir nor Nanak tried to reform institutionalized Hinduism or Islam. Kabir either denied the Hindu and Muslim ideas of God or else

232 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, pages 102.

233 "...Nãnak was possibly the only medieval saint who attempted to harmonize Hinduism and Islam into a unified doctrine and on that basis establish a sect." A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 48.

234 From Nãnak hymns in the *Ãdi-Grantha*.

equated them by stating that they were identical. Nanak described God without reference to either Hindu or Muslim conceptions. However, neither of them was trying to bridge the gulf between Hindus and Muslims by means of an eclectic ideology that deliberately combined facets of both faiths. Kabir and Nanak were leading a new religious group with new concepts. Thus, the antagonism of Brahmins and Ulema was sharper against these two *Bhakti* leaders in particular, since they were rightly perceived as propagators of new religions. Both had large followings from amongst the artisans and the cultivators to whom the emphasis on simple living and an absence of incomprehensible ritual made a strong appeal. There was also much honest common sense and practicality in the writings of both men, extreme patterns of living being rejected in favour of a normal balanced life as a part of society. "The popularity of these new orders was not due to religious reasons alone. Kabir and Nanak were concerned with the conditions of Indian society, where both caste and the distinctions between Hindu and Muslim, as expressed in organized religion, kept men apart. Their stress was on reordering of society on egalitarian lines and not the mere coexistence of differing ideologies. The call to social equality was a powerful magnet, and expressed itself in the firm denunciation of caste by both Kabir and Nanak."[235]

The *Bãul* Movement

"7. Be truthful, be natural; Truth alone is natural.

235 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 311, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

Seek the truth within your own heart, for there is no truth in the external religious observances; neither in the sects nor in the holy vows, neither in religious garb nor in pilgrimages. Truth resides within the heart and is revealed in love, in strength, in compassion. Conquer hatred, and extend your love to all mankind, for God resides in all."[236] Thus is given in brief a message that synthesizes several Indian values and has influenced countless generations. It makes man, the devotee, the central value; it promotes non-violence, and refuses discrimination.

In Bengal, the devotees of the *Bãul* movement, the origins of which are difficult to trace, refer to God as 'the Man of my heart' (*moner mãnush*). And God they approach with a direct relationship that ignores scriptures. They reject masters, injunctions, canons or customs, and man-made distinctions. *Bãuls* accept no divisions of society such as caste or class, no special deity, nor any temple or mosque. Actually, they seek freedom from outward compulsions, which they also seek as an internal state. There are many classes of men among the *Bãuls*, but as a rule they come from the lowest social strata of both the Hindu and Muslim fold. *Bãuls* emphasise the necessity of harmony between material and spiritual needs; and harmony between past, present and future (*trikãlã-yoga*).

There are many similarities between the poems of the *Bãuls* and those of the North Indian mystics. Sophisticated poets like Rabindranath Tagore were

236 Quoted by A.K. Majumdar, in *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 68.

vastly influenced by the works of these poets of the lowest strata of Indian society.

"'What need have we of other temples,' they ask, 'when our body is the temple where our Spirit has its abode?' 'The devotee has within him the scroll on which the scriptures are written in letters of life; but, alas, few care to read them; men turn a deaf ear to the message of the heart.'"[237]

237 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, pages 103-107.

Chapter 5: Common factors and interactions

The humanist currents on both camps, Hindu and Muslim, presenting many features in common, recognised and interacted with each other. "One may therefore reasonably believe in a close contact between the two and their deep influence on each other, resulting in the evolution of what may be called medieval saints or mysticism."[238] "The two parallel movements, based upon doctrines of love and selfless devotion, helped a lot in bringing the two communities close together, in spite of occasional reactionary movements, …"[239]

The medieval mystics shared certain distinctive characteristics. "They were non-sectarian in the sense that they were not affiliated to, or at least were not leading members of, any particular sect, and had no desire to establish a separate religious sect of their own. These saints were free from the bondage of any particular creed and had no blind faith in any sacred scriptures; they attained illumination by individual exertion through freedom of thought and self-culture. They did not observe any rituals or ceremonies, nor followed any dogma, and most of them severely denounced idolatry. They condemned polytheism, believed in one God, and, what is

238 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 554.

239 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 608.

more important, realized the unity of God invoked by various religious sects under different names such as Kṛishṇa, Rāma, Śiva, Allāh, etc. They believed in *bhakti* (love or devotion) as the only means of salvation, and gave a very comprehensive interpretation and profoundly psychological analysis of the conception of *bhakti*."[240] They asserted that God does not abide in temples but in the heart of human beings. Continuing the rebellion started by Buddhism and Jainism, they did away with caste discrimination, including everybody in their fold. They preached through vernaculars rather than traditional Sanskrit.

Among Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, the fundamental spiritual ideas of their medieval mystics had been expounded in their standard and well-known religious texts. However, through their living example, these mystics placed believers and their devotional relation with God above rituals, ceremonies, scriptures, sex, caste and creed discrimination. And, most importantly, they tightly linked spirituality to love and service to all human beings. Like previous rebellions, they also placed actual ethical behaviour above external formalities.

Regarding Hindu and Muslim mystics, "There are undoubtedly some striking common features between the two, in particular the stress on the approach to God through love, intellect and intellectual life being regarded not only as valueless but almost as a positive hindrance. Among other similarities may be noted (1) physical exercises like restraining of breath, (2) service

240 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 548-549.

and submission to *pīr* or *guru*, (3) recitation of sacred words, (4) toleration of other religions, and (5) belief in union with the Supreme being through love and *bhakti*. The general liberal and unorthodox attitude regarding rituals and ceremonies is also another point common between them. It has been pointed out that not only in ideology, but also in the poetic representation of the same, there is a general similarity between the poetry of the medieval saints and Sūfī poets on the one hand and the Buddhist Sahajiyās on the other."[241]

The examples of coalescence and commitment to struggle against discrimination abound. For instance, in Maharashtra, "In some areas the followers of the older heterodox sects now directed their loyalty to the devotional cult, which was in any case in sympathy with the social attitudes of the earlier sects. Drawing support from both *Vaishnavas* and *Shaivas*, it acted as a bridge not only between the two major sects of Hinduism but also between the esoteric and the popular levels of religion."[242]

The *Shaivas*, in particular, also included Tantric rites among their cults. Strongest in north-eastern India and some of it undoubtedly coming from Tibetan practices, Tantricism also influenced *Vajrayana* Buddhism. Tantricism had originated in the sixth century but became current from the eight onwards. It claimed to be a simplification of the Vedic cults and was open to all castes

241 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page 553-554.

242 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 261, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain

as well as to women, which identified it with the anti-orthodox movements. It originated in a conscious and deliberate opposition to the orthodox Hindu ritual and the brahmanical ordering of society, which is expressed by incorporating non-orthodox cults, such as the worship of *shakti,*[243] and by protesting against what were regarded as the established standards of social behaviour.

"Another contribution of Jainism, which is not often recognized, is its part in the growth of medieval mysticism. Though Jainism started as a simple faith free from the rules of priests and pandits, it gradually became more priest-ridden later. Even image-worship became a part of later Jainism. As a reaction to this, many movements were formed in the fourteenth and fifteen centuries with the aim or returning to the simple faith. The names of Tãran Swãmi and Kunkã Shãh may be mentioned in this connection. Rãmamuni's famous 'Pãhuḍa Dohã' is perhaps the first example of the simple mystic poetry of the Middle Ages."[244]

Brahman orthodoxy had to adjust itself to a wide variety of devotional expressions in order to maintain their position. It finally did it by making respectable a popular cult or sect, including it at same level in the orthodox hierarchy. Complications arose only when the new movement came into political or economic opposition to Brahmanism. In any case, acknowledgement created precedents and absorption entailed settling for irreversible changes.

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243 The feminine creative energy or power aspect of the Divine, which is fundamental to metaphysics and practice of Tantrism.

244 *Hinduism,* K.M.Sen, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1976, page 65.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and consequences

The *Bhakti* movement, flourishing as such in the Middle Ages but continuing until today, is one more example of the ecumenical view of Indian civilization. It is a rebellion against sectarianism, and discrimination on the grounds of creed, caste or sex. Once again in Indian culture, as it clearly happened before with Buddhism and Jainism, a rebellion was enacted against ritual consciousness and in favour of ethical concerns. It was a renewed struggle against caste discrimination, since the repression of the lower castes was very severe at that time. *Bhakti* leaders came from a diversity of backgrounds, many were artisans by origin or belonged to the class of less prosperous cultivators, but by and large its adherents were from the lower castes. It is magnanimous attempt to accommodate apparently irreconcilable faiths and cultures, building bridges of communication based on what is common to different positions. That is, what unites people, not what divides them. And this effort was not unilateral, e.g., from Hindus, but from Muslims as well, as we have seen above in the chapter on Sufism.

One frequent interpretation regarding the *Bhakti* movement is that it provided "an outlet for economic and social discontent," without opposing the underlying assumptions of society. That is, it stressed the unreality of social bonds without denouncing their injustice, providing "a way for channelling discontent and frustration in

directions acceptable to established social patterns."[245] In other terms, it explains away the *Bhakti* movement as "the opium of the masses." The argument is apparently backed by European examples in which, close to *Bhakti* movement in time and under "similar circumstances," the discontent with existing conditions gave rise to protest and social change. The argument naively ignores that, through their preaching, *Bhakti* leaders were directly hitting the class that monopolized power and preserved discrimination. *Bhakti* leaders went precisely against the grain of established social patterns, both in Hindu and Muslim societies.

This adds one more example of a diffused wrong assumption among historians, namely; that is, to assume that different peoples or cultures have to give similar or equal responses under those that are seen as similar circumstances. Usually the responses expected by those historians closely tally with their formation landscape; i.e., their cultural background in general or, in particular, their ideological framework sometimes portrayed as "scientific." The causal correlation "to such situation, such response" betrays an objectifying, "naturalistic" notion of man and consciousness, seeing them as passive mirrors (or inert objects) and their responses as a simple reflection of external circumstances. "For it is assumed that people's life is not the producing agent of events, but the passive receiver of macroeconomic, ethnic, religious or

245 *Sources of Indian Tradition*, second edition, edited and revised by Ainslie T. Embree, volume one, Penguin Books, 1992, page 345.

geographical forces."[246] Man is seen "from outside," thus making circumstances the actual agent of history that plays with human beings as though they were little more than puppets or bacteria.

In any case, it is very much arguable that Indian and European circumstances were similar, unless one chooses to narrow down the meaning of "circumstances" to a few political or economic factors, leaving aside many equally important others, belonging to the field of history, religion or culture in general. But then, the argument becomes weak, because by leaving aside so many factors, how can one expect similar responses?

The appropriateness or not of the response a people or a culture gives to a given situation should be seen in their own context. The response may seem inadequate or meaningless for the outsider, but no so for the people involved. After all, a similar degree of difficulty is faced while trying to judge the responses of individuals other than ourselves. The way people see the situation and the choice they make among various possible responses are important factors to be considered.

In the West, until the XVth century, the Christian Church and the State monopolised the dissemination of knowledge and, therefore, the official truths. They resorted, among others, to ruthless censorship and their own Latin versions (many a times biased or fraudulent) of ancient knowledge preserved in manuscript copies. Then, a two-pronged demono-

246 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, pages 202-203.

polising onslaught broke such monopoly. On one hand, the technical development of printing made texts available in very considerable quantities, and at prices well below even low-quality manuscript copies of similar length. On the other, the availability of a large number of ancient books, sacred and profane, in their original Greek or Hebrew version, enabled scholars to compare them critically with the received versions in Latin, biased in many cases and treated so far as sacrosanct for centuries. Thus, the humanist rebellion of developing knowledge beyond official truths proceeded in the West by turning back to a past wealth so far unexplored. In the *Bhakti* movement a similar effect was achieved by breaking apart with Sanskrit and directly writing and preaching in, and translating into, vernacular languages, thus bypassing monopolies and making knowledge available to all without discrimination. We already saw that this was also one of the main factors of Buddhist and Jain success.

> "The non-Sanskritic literature on *bhakti* is so vast that we cannot attempt to describe all of it even briefly. This literature is, however, extremely important for the history of the development of modern Indian languages. Just as Sanskrit begins with the Vedas, so all modern literature begin with devotional literature of exceptional literary value."[247]

> "Most of the modern languages of India begin from the 11th century, which coincides roughly with the beginning of the medieval bhakti movement, and as

247 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 52.

we shall see, most of the vernaculars were inspired either by the epics or some other religious texts."[248]

Bengali was used by Chaitanya and by the poet Chandidasa. Chaitanya also spent his last years at Puri and doubtless encouraged his followers to use Oriya in preference of Sanskrit. The development of Maithili, spoken in the region of modern Bihar, was also associated with *Vaishnava* and *Bhakti* literature. Shankaradeva popularized Assamese in the Brahmaputra valley in the fifteenth century. Jaina teachers used Gujarati in Western India. Mirabai wrote her songs in Rajasthani, but she was influenced by other *Bhakti* poets who wrote in Hindi. *Sufis*, in the region around Delhi and modern Uttar Pradesh, used Hindawi, as they called earlier Hindi. Later it was used by Kabir, Nanak, Surdas and Mirabai, a fact that gave it an improved status.

The *Bhakti* movement marks a definite change in the image of human beings. To approach the divine, devotion becomes more important than social conventions, rituals or intellectual speculation. It bypasses the monopolisation of religious practice in the hands of orthodox minorities. Spiritual life does not depend on compliance with the injunctions of dominant minorities. However, devotion is not a self-centred isolated feeling or endeavour. Devotion is understood in terms of rendering service to fellow human beings. Devotion is service, and service is devotion. This leads in turn to attitudes that stress equality and reject all

248 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 76.

forms of discrimination. Now God is brought closer to human beings. God dwells in the heart of believers and there is no other requisite than love to communicate with Him. But God also dwells in all fellow human beings, whom should be served as God himself. This humanist belief in the essential unity and equality of human beings was sang, written, preached and, above all, practiced.

Eminent historian Dr. R.C. Majumdar opines that "Though their direct influence upon India as a whole may not have been very considerable, their teachings have permeated the very texture of Indian life."[249] We will see that what they re-emerged continuously till present times, taking different forms and being further developed by different currents. "…. the traditional pattern of opposition to orthodoxy was to continue until the late nineteenth century, when, with the emergence of the Indian middle class as a result of various factors, a new social and political pattern began to evolve."[250]No humanist antecedent was ever lost; they built steps for the staircase of humanisation, for future humanists take them as inspiration for renewing the struggle. "As a matter of fact, the theistic humanistic outlook evolved through the efforts of the Hindu and

249 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols., General Editor R.C. Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988, Vol. VI, page xxvii.

250 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 320, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

Muslim saints during the medieval period became the foundation of contemporary humanists."[251]

With a 'half-empty glass' view, someone may say that the *Bhakti* movement failed to implement their ideals fully, or to convert the whole society to its values. However, which movement can boast such a high claim? In any case, the devotional movement started a new current that brought previous humanist struggle to new levels, and created precedents for further battles. In sum, it has influenced and it is still influencing what is today's Indian Culture. This is no mean achievement, and the story is in no way over.

Notwithstanding the above, it is also usually acknowledged that *Bhakti* movement was a protest against the oppression of priests and rulers. Bhaktas showed disregard for social conventions, including family life, religious rituals, and normal economic and political values. In the Indian context, especially in those times, this was no mean rebellion. Many a times the underlying identity of the otherwise multifarious Indian culture was attributed precisely to a common social behaviour (including caste-based social structure), more than metaphysical beliefs or other factors. So the Bhakti represented an attack to those foundations. In the author's view, whether the attack was expressed in terms of denying the reality of those social mores or denouncing their injustice, it amounted to the same both in practice and in the Indian context.

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251 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984.

On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that the *Bhakti* movement helped to bind together the many diverse elements of the Indian subcontinent. Considering the situation at that time, under Brahminical and Muslim oppression, perhaps this single achievement explains and amply justifies the movement. Interestingly enough, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the great patriot fighting against the British Empire chose, at the end of the nineteen century, started the festival of the Hindu god *Ganesh* with the aim of channelling the religious fervour of people for political ends, succeeding in rallying people and creating a new platform for political education. Mahatma Gandhi's dying words expressed the devotional-moral worldview of *bhakti*: "Hei [oh] Rãma." Thus, in Indian context (or elsewhere), devotional expressions should not be necessarily seen as a "deviation" from social change or the "opium of the peoples," -unless one sticks to the devotional dogma that change is only brought about through violent means. Besides, if a current in the field of literature triggered historical humanism in Europe, all the more reason to accept that religiousness brought about similar consequences in Indian culture

PART 5

RESPONSE TO COLONIALISM

Chapter 1: Indian Renaissance [252]

Indian Renaissance was often called 'Hindu revivalism' or 'Hindu Reformism').

Both as a response to the challenge posed by foreign domination[253], the future vistas opened by changes in all spheres with the advent of modern age, and the ever-present humanist resistance to antihumanist traits lingering in Indian society, were all important factors that prompted Indian culture to reshape itself during the nineteenth century. Humanism -particularly in its universal outlook- was the conducting thread of most social reformers of this time. Some of these reformers will be briefly introduced below, granting that it will not do full justice to the impact they made on society -in their own times and afterwards.

Indian Renaissance during the 19th century presented two main streams, two attitudes to respond to the challenge of times. Some individuals, currents and organisations took to religious and social reforms. Others dug trenches, resisting change in the name of old traditions. In between, there lied a host of intermediate positions. All sectors joined the fray and the whole country was in effervescence. However, it was a process of "soul-searching" through which all of them contributed to the national debate that asserted

253 When European colonial powers started their expansion, India became the target of British, French and Portuguese ambitions, to name a few. Eventually, the British empire got the upper hand.

the cultural identity and prepared the ground for independence movement. Actually, before the political manifestation of the independence struggle started, non-violent resistance was already going on in the religious, cultural and social fields. People sided with different expressions, sometimes opposing each other, but they were all part of the same wave.

In the first of the above-mentioned categories, i.e., reformists, R.C. Majumdar[254] groups the Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Wahabi and Ahmadiya movements, and the reform movement in the Parsi community.

254 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, VII. Minor Religious Movements.

Chapter 2: Reform Movements

As mentioned before, the *Bhakti* movement continued into the present times, combining mysticism with social reform. In Gujarãt and part of Rãjasthan, we see the influence of **Swãmi Nãrãyaṇa** (1781-1830), paradoxically born in a Brahmin family. "Swãmi Nãrãyaṇa followed the Viśishṭãdvaita school of philosophy with slight modifications. He laid very strong emphasis on ethics and favoured social reforms such as abolition of the *satî*, and infanticide, and the education of women, etc. His *bhakti* is not merely an emotional attachment for God, but is the doing of His will."[255]

The above also leads, in West Bengal, to the Brãhma Samãj and Raja Rãmmohan Roy, the great social reformer that inaugurated Indian Renaissance. .

Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833), was a Bengali and a Hindu Brahmin by birth, brought up in an orthodox household.

Wishing peace and happiness for the entire humanity, he worked for the unification of the existing religions of the world, recreating human brotherhood on a religious basis. He also found the Buddhist basic conception of "universal brotherhood" appealing. For this, he tried to point out and unite elements of Islam (particularly Sũfĩsm) and Christianity, finding support in the Upanishads. For pursuing this and read original

255 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 93.

sources, he learnt Hebrew, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit, with elementary knowledge of Latin and French. His knowledge of old Vedantic literature also embraced modern Tantric and Jain works. He wrote extensively in Bengali, English, Urdu and Hindustani.

He was a pioneer of comparative study of religion, then acknowledged by scholars Max Müller and Monier Williams. His non-sectarian and pluralistic outlook stands clear, leaving aside the ways he used and the results achieved. He always advocated that India acquire the best from all nations, East and West.

On the basis of a theistic humanism, he preached the equality of all regardless of sex, race, caste or creed, and against discrimination and divisions based on such issues. He thought that basic humanist values were at the root of Hinduism, but were at that time covered by dehumanising practices not actually sanctioned by scriptures. Thus he worked both for highlighting those values and against dehumanising practices such as burning of widows (*satî* or *suttee*)[256], selling of female children, child murder, polygamy, and any other form of sexual discrimination. He demanded that Hindu women should have rights in the properties of their fathers and husbands [257]. One of the means he used was to show that prevailing inhuman practices and various dogmatic stances did not have scriptural sanction. According to Rammohan, the progress of the

256 Ancient custom by which social pressure enforced 'self-immolation' of widows in their husbands' funeral pyre.

257 An issue that was at the root of *satî* since, without property rights, widowhood meant for women a future of slavery, prostitution or forced suicide.

country depended on the outlook of the educated classes. Thus, he addressed his efforts to those he saw as the lever for overall change. Obviously, his campaigns drew heavy criticism and opposition from the orthodox. dogmatic and fundamentalist quarters among Christian missionaries and Hindu Brahmins. Undaunted he went ahead in spite of being abused, ridiculed, threatened, ostracised. The Samaj initially attracted educated middle class people, but the "agitation gradually spread into the interior and the entire Hindu society was convulsed in a manner to which there was no parallel within living memory."[258]

"Rãmmohan believed that there is truth at the basis of every religion, but at the same time every religion was overgrown with false dogmas and superstitions which should be removed by rational thinking."[259] We may or may not endorse rational thinking as a panacea, which reflected either Western rationalism or Hindu Mimansa; but we certainly endorse the spirit behind. That is, his rejection of violence and discrimination, his acknowledgement of both personal and cultural diversity, upholding freedom of thought and belief, and his willingness to go beyond what was accepted as absolute truth.

To further his goals Raja Rammohan triggered countrywide arguments. His well-grounded criticisms spared neither Christian nor Hindu orthodoxy. One of the

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258 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Vol. X, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page100.

259 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 101.

hottest reformist issues centred on reviving monotheism on the basis of Vedanta, without images or pictures to worship. His treatises on Christianity and Vedanta reached America where Thoreau and the Transcendentalists were much impressed by his writings.[260] He wrote many books and started other publications, fighting for the freedom of the press. His social commitment also addressed the issue of education, both the educational system and its free availability for all. He saw this as an essential weapon to fight injustice. Certainly, this was not in the vested interests of British rule. He sought to combine the best of Indian and Western education, and in 1822 he started an Anglo-Hindu School, and the Vedanta College in 1825.

In 1828, he founded an organisation, the **BrãhmaSamãj** (the community of those who worship Brahman), also known as Brahma Sabhã (One God Society). Not without a bitter struggle, the Samaj succeeded in removing some harmful social customs carrying out philanthropic work and taking, among others, the issues of education, religious reforms, child-marriage and women discrimination. Encouraged by mounting public opinion, the British Governor-General banned widow-burning (*Suttee)* by legislation in 1829, for which Rammohan had started working since 1812.

Rammohan was also an advocate of the humanist Golden Rule expressed as 'Do unto other as ye would be

260 Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 31.

done by."[261] Mutual tolerance and respect were part of it. Hence his outlook was non-violent, but of the activist type, championing the cause of India's freedom:

"If mankind is brought into existence and by nature formed to enjoy the comforts of society and pleasures of an improved mind, they may be justified in opposing any system, religious, domestic, or political, which is inimical to the happiness of society, or calculated to debase the human intellect; bearing always in mind that we are children of one Father, 'who is above all and through all and in us all'".[262]

He was coherent with the above stance, being among those who started the anticolonialist agitation. The British had entered India and established their armed domination as the East India Company - a forerunner of multinational corporations. Playing with a divided people, the British rulers were exploiting the peasant cultivators with the vested connivance of Indian landowners (*zamindars*). "The salt monopoly of the East India Company was a notorious scandal. Nowhere in the world was such a massive scale of exploitation being practised by a civilized government."[263] And salt was just one case among many others.

261Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 24.

262 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984,page 11 (bold characters are mine).

263 Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 95-96.

Although being a fairly solvent landlord himself, Rammohan started an agitation, siding with the peasants for their demands. Supporting the rights of the peasants was then unprecedented, just as it was the solution he advanced: an extra tax on luxury goods. The agitation was successful and the monopoly broken.

> "Rammohan was the first among the natives to draw the attention of the Indian intelligentsia as well as the British officials to the fact that it was in the nature of tribute that huge sums of money were removed to Britain. While answering the questions with regard to the revenue system of India, Rammohun pointed out that Europeans carried colossal sums of money after retirement. Unaccounted money was removed by individuals as well as groups of foreign firms thus draining India's capital in cash and kind."[264]

After Rammohan's death in 1833, the work of the Samaj was given new impetus by **Devendra-nãth Tagore** (1817-1905). By 1843, the Samaj had become a distinct spiritual fraternity engaged in active dissemination of its message. From 1850 to 1856, younger members gave it a new drive "not only to broaden the basis of Brãhmaism [265] by advocating new social ideals but also to apply the dry light of reason even to the fundamental articles of religious belief. They advocated female education, supported widow-remarriage, cried down intemperance, denounced polygamy, tried to rationalise Brãhma doctrines and sought to conduct the affairs of

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264 Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 98-99.

265 Brahma Samaj doctrines; not to be confused with Brahmanism.

the church on strict constitutional principles."[266] **Keshab-chandra Sen** belonged to this group after he joined in 1857. Under his dynamic orientation, activism for social change reached higher levels by celebrating inter-caste marriages and various other unorthodox practices like widow-remarriage, removal of *purdah* for women, etc. The Samaj grew in strength and number. A clash with the older section oriented by Devandra-nãth led to a split. Keshab-chandra formed "The Brãhma Samãj of India" in 1866. While the older section, known as Ãdi Brãhma Samãj, equated Brãhmaism with Hinduism, the younger section maintained the "Brahmoism is catholic and universal" and that renunciation of caste was essential. However, Brãhmaism became a real force in Bengal, and was the first to form an all-India organisation of religious and social reforms.

Keshab-chandra Sen kept up the momentum of social reforms, forming the "Indian Reform Association" for improving women's conditions, educating the workers, for making literature inexpensive, etc. In 1878, the "Sãdhãran Brãhma Samãj" broke away from Keshab's organisation.

"While the orthodox Hindu society did not look favourably upon the Brãhma Samãj for discarding image worship, it imbibed, slowly but steadily, the spirit of social reform inaugurated by it, and almost all its items were gradually adopted by the Hindus. Regarding education of women and the raising of their marriageable age the progress achieved by the Hindus

266 Sastri, Sivanath, *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, page 99, as quoted by R.C.Mujumdar.

far exceeded the wildest dreams of the social reformers of the Brãhma Samãj. The remarriage of widows was accepted by the Hindu society as valid, though it was not much in vogue during the period under review. Polygamy also steadily declined.[267]"[268]

The Samaj also represented a continuation of the *Bhakti* movement, combining devotion with social transformation. "It is evident that the element of *bhakti* which was introduced into the Brãhma Samãj by Keshab really became the dominant theme of that church, and even Rabindranãth wrote years later that the Brahma faith was established on *bhakti*.[269] This is not surprising in the land of Chaitanya's birth. The Brãhma Samãj retained its identity mainly in its opposition to idol worship and its progressive attitude towards social reform, and it is in this latter sphere that the main contribution of the Brãhma Samãj lies, and as soon as the so called orthodox Hindu society accepted the social reforms, the Brahma movement came to an end."[270] Though today all three sections of the Brãhma Samãj still exist, the movement is now a spent force after having inspired many similar or parallel organisations throughout the country.

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267 B.C. Pal, *Memoirs of My Life and Times*, II, p.xiii.

268 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Vol. X, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page105.

269 R. N. Tagore: Ihã niras tattva-jñãn nahé, ihã bhakti-pratishñhita dharma. Brãhma-mantra, Manusher-dharma. Appendix, Rabindra rachanãvalî; Birth-centenary edition, Vol. XII, pp. 619, see also ibid, pp.113, 619.

270 A.K. Majumdar, *Bhakti Renaissance*, second edition, 1979, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, page 106.

Although the Samãj may have been the target of criticisms, nobody should ignore "the rich legacy which the Brãhma Samãj has bequeathed to the Hindus. Not only the rationalistic spirit and freedom of individual conscience on which the Brãhma Samãj was founded, but most of its social ideas and a great deal of its moral and religious precepts have been imbibed by the Hindus. Brãhmanism must ever remain an important episode in the history of India. Apart from specially emphasizing the social and personal freedom which was bound to evoke the sense and value of political freedom, Keshab-chandra Sen indirectly contributed to the growth of nationalism in several other ways. … A larger number of individual members of the Brãhma Samãj also made valuable contributions to India's struggle for political freedom."[271]

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Within the influential Parsi community, in 1851, a number of Parsi young men started the Rahnumai Mazdayasnan Sabha (Religious Reform Association).Its leading personalities were Dadabhai Naoroji and K.R. Cama. They promoted religious and social reforms within their community. Education of women was encouraged and made good progress: the *purdah* system was removed and Parsi women moved freely in public; and the age of marriage was gradually raised.

271 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Vol. X, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page105.

Chapter 3: Revivalist Movements

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in Bengal, there were many reactions to any revision or reinterpretation of Hinduism, as carried out by the reform movements. It may be called neo-Hinduism and "Its common characteristic was the glorification of Hindu religion and society in their current forms, and a spirited defence of these against hostile criticism both by Indian reformers and European missionaries."[272] There were currents like that led by Pandit Śaśadhar Tarka-chũḍamaṇi, who sought "to reconcile ancient Hindu ritualism and mediaeval faith with modern science." Others, like that represented by Kṛishṇa-prasanna Sen, were more popular. In his regard, R.C. Majumdar quotes the following, hinting at the feelings trampled on and aroused: "He was sentimental, vulgar and abusive, but this very sentimentality, vulgarity and abuse went down with a generation of half-educated Bengalees who had been wounded in their tenderest spots by the vulgarities of the Anglo-Indian politicals of the type of Branson and ignorant and unimaginative Christian propagandists."[273]

Other personalities like the intellectual Bakim-chandra Chatterji, the poet Nabīn-chandra Sen, and the essayist Bhũdev Mukhopãdhyãy, brought forward intellectual arguments in defence of their creed and

272 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Vol. X, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page115.

273 B.C. Pal, *Memoirs of My Life and Times*, page 439.

culture. The clumsy and insensitive British colonialism -which was also religious and cultural- triggered a strong reaction of all sorts and at all levels.

R.C. Majumdar also includes the **Ramakrishna Mission** and the **Theosophical Society** in the group of revivalist movements. However, the term 'revivalist' needs not mean in all cases a blind anti-historical defence of outdated or antihumanist stances. There were various shades among revivalists, some with interesting characteristics from the humanist point of view.

Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902). As a youth, Narendra-nãth Datta, an English-graduate Bengali, used to go into the slums to help the poor, the ignorant and the outcaste. That was before he was eighteen, when met his guru, Gadãdhar Chattopãdhyãya, already famous as the sage **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1834-1886). "Ramakrishna declared that all religions were leading to the same goal. All prophets and religious leaders taught love and respect of man, irrespective of apparent differences on the basis of faith, nationality and colour. He also exhibited highest respect for women and said that the soul of man and of woman could not differ… He began to advise all men not only to love humanity but serve man as a manifestation of God himself. He said that it was not for man to show compassion, he must serve God through man, in whose heart God resides. He looked upon the whole universe as a family and was a very broadminded Hindu and had appreciation for

Christianity and Islam."[274] He regarded all religions as equally valid for self-realisation provided their essence is properly pursued. "God is one, but His aspects are different: as one master of the house is father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by these different names by those different persons, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper. In a potter's shop there are vessels of different shapes and forms - pots, jars, dishes, plates &c.- but all are made of one clay. So God is one, but is worshipped in different ages and countries under different names and aspects."[275] This is a humanist acknowledgement of personal and cultural diversity, which rejects discrimination on the basis of creed. Although seemingly expressed in theistic terms, it anyway emphasizes that man is the maker of meaning while looking at reality from multifarious angles. Narrow and bitter arguments over theological matters lose face before the higher interest of humankind's unity in diversity.

After his guru's death, Vivekananda set up a fraternity of monks, i.e., the **Ramakrishna Order**, in 1887 to dedicate it to service. He addressed one of the main sources of conflict in India, i.e. religious divisions, trying to reconcile differences among faiths from the universal outlook of Vedanta. From his theistic humanism, he declared: "I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with

274 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984,page 33.

275 Max Müller, *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings*, page 100.

every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone."[276] He foresaw a new global civilisation and culture that would synthesize the best that both East and West have to offer.

"Our minds are like vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at the realisation of God. And God is like the water that fills the vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes a different form. Yet he is one; he is God in every case."[277]

Carrying this message, he addressed the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (USA) in 1893. The impact he made and the reputation he won made him a world figure and raised the prestige of India and Hinduism very high. He toured and lectured America, establishing many centres.

In 1897, Vivekananda returned to India receiving tremendous ovations everywhere he went. An ardent advocate of political, economic and social equality, he also condemned untouchability, caste-based and women discriminations in strong terms. In a letter on May 2,1985, to some Indian disciples, he wrote from USA: "Love makes no distinction between man and man,

276 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 372, 1962.

277 Vivekananda, *Idea of a Universal Religion*, (Selected Works, page 180).

between and Aryan and a *Mlechchha,*[278] between Brahmin and a Pariah, not even man and woman. Love makes the whole universe as one's own home."[279] Two papers were started, and his lectures and treatises were published. Monasteries grew rapidly all over India.

In his way of placing the human being as the central value, he wrote "If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the living God -the Man-God- every being that wears the human form, God in his universal as well as individual aspect."[280] "This human body is the greatest body in the universe, and a human being the greatest being. Man is higher than all animals, than all angels; none is greater than man."[281] "Mark it, my brothers, in the prevailing state of poverty in this country, the time is not opportune for preaching religion. I shall talk of religion if I ever succeeded in removing the poverty and misery of the country. That is why I am going to the land of Croesus, to try my luck to find some way out."[282] He left once again for America. After returning, in 1987 he formed a new organisation, called **Ramakrishna Mission**, to carry out organised social work that began with famine relief and plague relief, then in the fields on education and public health. Being an active militant himself, he taught that religion should not only teach people to refrain from wrong-doing, but must encourage

278 The term Melchchha is usually used by the Hindus for non-Aryans who eat beef. It connotes impurity. Vivekananda considered the term a most unfortunate one.

279 *Complete Works*, Vol. V. p. 79, 1964.

280 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 17-18, 1962.

281 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 142, 1962. (On Karma Yoga).

282 Swãmi Gambhãrãnanda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, page 109-110.

them to do good for others. In the spirit of karma-yoga, he also linked spiritual realisation to selfless service. "It is only by doing good to others that one attains to one's own good, and it is by leading others to Bhakti and Mukti that one attains them oneself."[283]

In 1989, Vivekananda went again to America. Then he toured Europe extensively, addressing the Congress of the History of Religions at Paris. He returned to India at the end of 1900, two years before his death.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission grew to become the greatest spiritual force in modern India. This, along with Swami Vivekananda's enduring inspiration, greatly contributed to make Indian people stand on their feet and gear up for the freedom struggle and social transformation.

"With his unerring foresight he predicted the great crisis which faces the world today. He realized that a very critical situation would arise in the West, threatening its total destruction, owing to the rapid growth of material power and scientific inventions, unaccompanied by a corresponding growth of spiritual insight. India suffered, as her spiritual attainment far outstripped the material power which alone could sustain it…Vivekananda also predicted the great change that was coming over the world...This upheaval, he asserted as far back as 1896, 'will come from Russia or from China'. 'Perhaps', said he, 'Russia will be the first Proletarian State in the world' -a prophecy that was fulfilled in twenty years time.[284]"[285]

283 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, p. 265-66, 1963.

284 Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, Swami Vivekananda Patriot-Prophet, pp. 13, 330.

The crises he rightly foresaw is now coming to a definitive turning point.

Swami Ram Tirtha (1873-1906) Born in a poor Brahmin family, Ram Tirtha was a professor of mathematics until the turning point in his life -- meeting Swami Vivekananda. Then onwards, in the short span of his life, he unrelentlessly preached his guru's Vedanta. "All countries are equally spiritual, equally noble, equally beautiful, equally divine."[286]

Like his guru, Swami Ram Tirtha was a Vedantist, believing in the unity of life. "Perfect democracy, equality, throwing off the load of external authority, casting aside the vain accumulative spirit, throwing overboard all prerogatives, the spurning of the airs of superiority and shaking off the embarrassment of inferiority, is Vedanta on the material plane."[287] According to him, the philosophy of Vedanta was socialistic in the true sense because it asserted equality of all with the faith in the supremacy of the individual against the world. "Under this socialism, no kings, no presidents, priests are wanted, no armies needed."[288] He saw possessiveness, the sense of personal property, at the root of all miseries. "It is a blemish on the face of civilised society that woman is made a mercantile commodity."[289]

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285 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Vol. X, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page 131.

286 Puran Singh, *The Story of Swami Ram*, page 134, 1935.

287 Puran Singh, *The Story of Swami Ram*, page 236, 1935.

288 In *Woods of God-Realisation*, Vol. VI, pages 173-174, 1942.

289 Puran Singh, *The Story of Swami Ram*, page 238, 1935

"True religion is not belief in God, but is a complete trust in the God in man."[290]

"Not the question about God, and not the origin and inquiry into the origin and purpose of the world is religious, but the question about Man."[291]

"Man is the master of his own destiny."[292]

Like Vivekananda, he travelled to other countries to spread his universal message.

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Many other revivalist groups sprouted throughout the country. The **Mãdhvas** of South India founded an association in 1877. Another Vaishnava sect, the **Śrī Vaishṇavas**, also founded a sect in 1902. The followers of **Chaitanya cult** also stirred up in Bengal with similar movements. The **Śaivas** too became active and several Śaiva *Sabhãs* were started in South India. The Liṅgãyats (already introduced above) formed an association in 1884 for the promotion of modern education within their community. The followers of the **Tantra cult** wrote books to contest allegations. The **Smãrtas**, followers of Śaṅkarãchãrya who are to be found in almost every province of India, started an organisation in 1895 to entrench in orthodox positions.

In spite of this, they all contributed to an active questioning and revision of the ethical foundation to cope with the changing times.

290 Ram Tirtha, *Note-Book*, Part I, page 31, 1932.

291 Ram Tirtha, *Note-Book*, Part II, page 5, 1932.

292 In *Woods of God-Realisation*, Vol. II, page 16, 1942.

Chapter 4: Others

Finally, R.C. Majumdar places **Swami Dayanand Saraswati** and the **Ãrya Samãj** among those that fell between radical reform and revivalism.

A Gujarati Brahmin named Mulashanker later known as ***Swami Dayanand Saraswati*** (1824-1883). He strongly advocated a return to the Vedic religion and what he understood as the eternal spirit of Hinduism, which was also intended as a response to a perceived threat posed by Islam and Christianity. However, he was of the view that only that creed that was acceptable to all men was worthy of belief. Religion consisted in justice, truth and benevolence, and that which went against the interest of all men could not be called religion.[293] He proposed to refrain from harming others as one of his five daily duties. He denounced the expenditure of building temples instead of feeding the poor and the needy. He tried in his way to reconcile and unite different creeds. "I believe in a religion based on universal and all-embracing principles which have always been accepted as true by mankind, and will continue to command the allegiance of mankind in the ages to come. Hence it is that the religion in question is called the primeval eternal religion, which means that it is above the hostilities of all human creeds

293 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984, page 19.

whatsoever."[294] Swami Dayanand saw all men as equal, thus rejecting caste discrimination. In particular, he was against untouchability, and inter-caste marriage was encouraged. Swami Dayanand did not recognise the authority or even superiority of the Brahmins merely on the grounds of birth, denounced the worship of various gods and goddesses and preached that only the Supreme Being should be worshipped. "Inspired by the teaching of Swami Dayanand, his disciple Swami Shradhanand and others organised the 'Dalitoddhar' (uplift of the depressed classes) and 'Achhut-Shuddhi' (reform of the untouchables) movements. The ground prepared by Swamiji and his disciples became the foundation of Gandhiji's movement for the uplift of Harijans."[295] To further his objectives, Swami Dayanand formed an organisation, the Ãrya Samãj in 1875,… in Bombay. Although itself a subject of controversy, the Samaj addressed the issues of uprooting social evils, illiteracy, child-marriage, impurity, polygamy, etc. Campaigns like famine-relief were carried out in the spirit of social service, and many schools and colleges were started, proclaiming the principle of equality regardless of caste, creed, community, race or sex. "The most characteristic feature of the Ãrya Samãj is the emphasis laid upon the work of *Śuddhi*, i.e., the reconversion of those Hindus -millions in number- who

294 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984,page 24.

295 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984,page 27.

had been willingly or forcibly converted into other religions like Islam or Christianity, but were now willing to come back to the fold of Hinduism. Orthodox Hinduism had always barred its door against them; the Ãrya Samãj threw it wide open."[296] In its own controversial way, the Ãrya Samãj cherished the religious, social and political unity of India and contributed its share to prepare the ground for the independence struggle. Ardently vocal and critical, Swami Dayanand suffered many personal attacks until he was murdered by poison in 1883.

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Śivanãrãyaṇ Paramahànsa, born about 1840 in Vãrãnasi, believed in one God, condemned idolatry and advocated social reforms, seeing women equal to men. Though sharing these views with Swami Dayanand, he differed regarding the infallibility of the Vedas and laid no emphasis on the doctrine of *karma* and transmigration. He condemned superstitions and superfluous rites and rituals, caste discrimination and untouchability; opposed child marriage, and advocated female education. Along with **Ramakrishna Paramahansa**, he stressed service to humanity (1834-1886).

The movement called ***Sãdhãran Dharma*** started in Madras in 1886, promoting unity of creeds in diversity and service to others.

296 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, page 111.

The ***Rãdhã Soãmi Satsang*** was founded in 1861 by one Tulsī Rãm, better known as Śiva Dayãl Sãheb. The sect does not recognise Hindu gods, temples or sacred places except their own. However, most of their conceptions are Hindu, particularly Vaishṇavite.

The **Deva Samãj** was founded by Śiva-nãrãyaṇ Agnihotrī in 1887, as a breakaway of Brãhma Samãj.

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"The history of the religious movements will not be complete without a reference to the bands of ascetic saints who were objects of veneration over large parts of India. Many of these gathered round them a number of devoted followers, and though they did not established a regular sect with a definite organization or constitution, they, or some of their principal followers, are still venerated as *guru* by large circles of householders, belonging chiefly to the educated middle class families. Special mention may be made of Bholãgiri, Trailaṅga Svãmī, Pãhãrī Bãbã, Bijoy-kṛishna Gosvãmī, Kãṭhiãbãbã, and his disciple Santadãs Bãbãji. Some of them were adherents of old sects.

"It should also be mentioned that apart from the well-known branches of orthodox Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains, many of the old religious sects still wielded considerable influence among sections of people. These included, among others, the Kabīr-panthīs, Dãdu-panthīs, Rãdhãballabhis, Daṇḍīs and Daśanãmis, Yogis, Aghoris, Avadhutas, Vãmãcharīs, Sauras, Gãṇapatyas, etc. A new Vãmãchãrī sect, known as Kartãbhajã, was founded in 1830 by Rãmsaran Pãl of Ghoshpãrã in Bengal. Its principal features were faith in the absolute divinity of the *guru* as being the

incarnation of Krishna and the tantrik ceremony of *'Chakra'* or the promiscuous gathering of male and female devotees indulging in licentious practices. There were numerous disciples belonging to all castes most of whom were women.[297"298]

Until today, this prolific multiplicity remains an integral feature of Indian religious life.

297 Wilson, H.H., *Religious Sects of the Hindus*.

298 *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, R.C. Mujumdar M.A., Ph.D. (General Editor), Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, Volume X, pages 139-140.

Chapter 5: Other personalities

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

A Bengali poet and writer, Tagore was the first Asian to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. Like Rammohan Roy and **Swami Vivekananda**, Tagore tried to bridge the gap between East and West with a universal outlook. His main sources of inspiration were the saints and poets of the Upanishads, Buddhism, the *Bhakti* movement. It was on this basis that he also appreciated the best humanist traits of the West. Being more a thinker than formally a philosopher, "He felt that it was only on the basis of humanism that the wide gulf between the East and the West could be bridged, a synthetic culture could be evolved."[299] He worked for the creation of the new synthetic civilisation he envisioned, both praising and criticizing various aspects of both East and West. For this purpose, he undertook twelve international tours, besides his written works. He put his ideal of international unity and interdependence in uncharacteristic terms for a poet: "It is best for the commerce of the spirit that people differently situated should bring their different products into the market of humanity each of which is complementary and necessary to the other."[300] And also: "From now onward any nation which takes an isolated view of its own country will run

299 Dev Raj Bali (M.A., Ph.D.), *Modern Indian Thought (Rammohun Roy to Jayaprakash Narayan)*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Second revised and enlarged edition, New Delhi, 1984, page 75.

300 Tagore, *Sadhana*, page 12, 1954.

counter to the spirit of the New Age, and know no peace. From now onward the anxiety that each country has for its own safety must embrace the welfare of the world."[301] (1862-1902).

While others perhaps started from God to stress man's dignity, Tagore's road was different. "The centre of his philosophy was man, not God. Even his concept of God was influenced by the humanism inherent in his outlook. God was only the symbol of human unity and the perfection of man's personality."[302] "Our God is also Man. If this is condemned as anthropomorphism, then man should be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his beloved as a person, and not as a principle of psychology."[303]

Always keeping his faith in humanity, he looked forward towards man's future when he would evolve into the universal man, into an All-Man (*Visvamanava*). And he kept that faith till the end of his life in the face of European colonialism and two world wars.

In all fields, he tried to achieve a synthesis: East and West, spiritual and material needs, the worldly and the eternal, to bring all creeds, nations and races together on a universal common ground. In the spirit of *Gita*'s karma yoga, religion for him meant love and service to human beings. He denounced all discriminations of sex, caste and creed, as well as various forms of violence. More as a pacifist than as a political militant, he led an

301 Quoted by W. Norman Brown, in *Some Ethical Concepts for the Modern World from Hindu and Indian Buddhist Tradition* (Article in Centenary Volume of Rabindranath Tagore, page 395, 1961).

302 K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought* - A Critical Survey, page 420.

303 Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, page 114, 1961.

agitation against the partition of Bengal, surrendered his knighthood in 1919 in protest over the massacre of Indian people in Amritsar (Jallianwalla Bagh), and condemned imperialism and fascism in strong terms. Education was also one of his biggest concerns, and founded a school and later an international university based on new teaching concepts. He worked for rural reconstruction, contributing a lot in reviving village industry, improving agriculture, organising cooperative societies and infusing a spirit of self-reliance among village people.

Shri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950)

With his particular blend of Darwinism and theism, Aurobindo saw a meaning in evolution and a dignity in man. "Evolution is nothing but progressive unfolding of spirit out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being."[304]

Religion of humanity would mean "that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man, and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of the human spirit. No other idol, neither the nation, the state, the family nor anything else ought to take its place; and they are only worth of respect so far as they are images of the human spirit and enshrine its presence and its self-manifestation."[305] In present-day humanist words, “nothing above the human being, and no human being below another.”

304 Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Evolution of Man*, page 31, 1963.

305 Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, page 733.

Chapter 6: Independence Movement (Swaraj)

The progress and triumph of the Indian Freedom movement was one of the most significant historical processes of the twentieth century. Given the nature of this book, and just as with other subjects, I will not give a historical account. The repercussions of the freedom movement extended far beyond its immediate political consequences. Within the country, it initiated a reshaping in all fields. In the international context, it sounded the death knell of British Imperialism and colonialism, and changed the political face of the globe. For the first, and perhaps the only time in history, the power of a mighty global empire 'on which the sun never set', had been challenged and overcome by the moral might of a people armed only with ideals and courage.

The Indian Independence movement has a special significance for humanists. It has a demonstration effect, showing in practice the ethical value and efficacy of non-violent struggle in this century. This has created a most important precedent for any people in the world that has inspired countless individuals and organisations the world over. While those who had the pretence of bringing 'civilization' to India were involved in two barbaric European civil wars, India was contributing a most important step towards the humanization of the world. Of course, those who glorify violence will not readily acknowledge this.

India's protracted non-violent struggle was a true humanist rebellion against all forms of violence, i.e. physical, racial, religious, economic, psychological, cultural etc. Even before terms such as "human rights" or "civil liberties" acquired a wide recognition and diffusion, India was already fighting for them in a dignified and civilised way.

Regarding civil disobedience, it has been written: "However, its success in India is probably not independent of the fact that the British were no longer convinced that the occupation of India was to their advantage. Non-violent resistance has been more or less completely ineffective when conducted against an occupying power that is determined to remain - as in Norway during the Second World War, and in Czechoslovakia since 1968."[306] The question is: At which point in time were the British no longer convinced that the occupation of India was to their advantage? They were after a resistance against the colonial oppression that had started roughly one century before they reluctantly granted Independence in 1947. 'Reluctantly' is a fact that is historically well documented for at least the last forty years of occupation. And non-violent struggle against occupation -Gandhian tactics included- contributed the most towards liberation.

On the other hand, how come occupation was no longer to Britishers' advantage? Because, British primary concern was always economic, and India's wealth could

306 Roger Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, Pan Books Ltd., London, 1983, page 326.

not have possibly vanished all of a sudden. Moreover, England was in dear need of resources after the Second World War. The simple explanation is that it was safer for the British to withdraw before paying the huge cost of clinging to occupation, a cost they could ill afford while rebuilding their own country.

The above also replies to the alleged ineffectiveness of non-violent struggle. The British were an occupying power that was determined to remain, until they were dissuaded. And they were dissuaded by a permanent and growing non-violent resistance, which was well timed to apply maximum pressure when the oppressor was at its weakest. Moreover, how could the British Empire cling to colonial oppression without losing face after having fought Fascism and denounced Stalinism?

On the other hand, there is a factor of historical context involved. Neither the Nazi nor the Communist regimes were bound to last forever. Neither Norway nor Czechoslovakia were freed thanks to their own isolated armed struggles.

India's example of non-violent struggle was effective and suited to existing circumstances. However, nobody claims it as a fix model to be mechanically applied at all times and under any circumstances. The methodology of non-violence can be further developed and adapted to the actual situation in which it may happen to be employed. For instance, present conditions may consider non-repayment of foreign debt, mass withdrawal of bank deposits or devolution of credit cards, as non-violent means.

In any case, the discussion is whether to go for violent struggle against a triumphant power, without any

assurance of success in spite of loss of lives, or to go for anon-violent struggle under the same conditions? This question may be posed either in ethical terms or in terms of practical success (uncertain in both cases). Is violence always legitimated as a resistance to violence? Should there be a proportion between violence suffered as oppression and violence exerted as resistance? And how is this gauged? These are all relevant questions that both propounders of violence and non-violence should reply. In the author's view, India's struggle for Independence was, on the whole, mostly non-violent and suitable for the times and circumstances in which it took place.

Chapter 7: A few significant facts of Independence struggle

The Indian people also tried, although unsuccessfully, armed uprising against the foreign oppressor that was the topmost world power and determined to remain. As some may wrongly assume, non-violent struggle was not the only alternative available to a meek people. Courage, determination and capacity to undergo heavy losses and suffering were always displayed for almost a century. The following will give just a few hints of the suffering of the Indian people and how they kept the course of a non-violent struggle in spite of unbearable provocation and barbarity.

The first national uprising in 1857.

Prof. G.P. Pradhan, himself a freedom fighter, wrote: "A rebellion when successful is described as a war of liberation. A war of liberation, when unsuccessful is dubbed as a rebellion. To Indians, the heroic effort of 1857, was the first War of Independence, though the British dubbed it as Sepoy Mutiny. The real heroes of this war were the two hundred thousand gallant sons of India, who died while fighting, who remained unhonoured and unsung for a long time, but whose supreme sacrifice kindled in the hearts of the millions

of Indians the flame of patriotism, which could never be extinguished."[307]

"The striking feature of the rebellion was the unity of Hindus and Muslims. Aitchison, a British officer admitted, 'In this instance, we could not play of the Muhammedan against the Hindu'."[308]

"Hindus and Muslims worked together, shed their blood together and all differences vanished during this great national upheaval."[309]

"The British army possessed superior arms and were trained in modern warfare. After mobilising their forces, the British Army officers unleashed terror which exceeded all bounds. Innocent men, women and children were ruthlessly massacred. In order to strike terror in the hearts of the people, the dead bodies were kept hanging on trees and parts of these bodies were mutilated in the most perverse and vulgar manner."[310]

"The British resorted to extreme methods of terror. In Delhi, the killing of a few Englishmen by sepoys, was avenged by shooting, killing and hanging over 26,000 Indians. Little boys who had waved the rebel flag were

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307 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 8.

308 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 4.

309 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 4.

310 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 6.

executed. In Allahabad, over 6000 persons were killed and in Jhansi more than 500 were slaughtered. In the first twelve months 30,000 sepoys were killed in battles and 10,000 civilians perished in encounters with the British. According to Trotter, 'the loss of life among the sepoys must have exceeded a hundred thousand in two years'."[311]

The failure of armed resistance

The armed resistance and sabotage against British regime, and a barbaric retaliation, continued until Independence.

"During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Indian revolutionaries made Herculean efforts to build up an armed struggle. Their sacrifice knew no bounds. They offered their lives at the altar of freedom and their martyrdom kindled the flame of patriotism in the hearts of thousands of youths all over India. But in spite of their valour and sacrifice, the might of the British Empire proved superior and the noble efforts were crushed under the gigantic wheels of repression."[312]

Therefore, active non-violence as an organised mass movement prevailed where armed struggle proved futile. It proved futile both for achieving its aim and for drawing mass support. Moreover, the loss of lives on

311 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 6.

312 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 71.

either sides was considerably lower through non-violence. Whichever arguments may be brought forward to diminish the achievement of non-violence, e.g., British yielded because in dear need of India's contribution to the Second World War effort, can also be turned against the point of violence and used to demonstrate the appropriateness of non-violent struggle.

Colonial looting

British colonialism was an uncivilised aggression carried out by military means, the end of which was economic exploitation. The forcible looting of India impoverished her and financed to a large extent the Industrial Revolution taking place in Europe.

As mentioned above, Raja Rammohan Roy was the first to denounce that "Europeans carried colossal sums of money after retirement. Unaccounted money was removed by individuals as well as groups of foreign firms thus draining India's capital in cash and kind."[313]

"Dadabhai Naoroji was the first leader who analysed the causes of India's poverty. He pointed out that the wealth of India was continuously drained and England was the beneficiary. In this context he made the following observation: 'England's present policy is only intended to take away India's wealth in a continuous drain.' Dadabhai Naoroji specifically pointed out the different ways in which India was exploited and with

313 Jamuna Nag, *Raja Rammohun Roy - India's Great Social Reformer*, Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, page 98-99.

facts and figures, proved that no less than 50 crore rupees were taken away from India by the British every year. He categorically declared that India was bled by an evil system of government."[314] [315]

The first non-violent mass-movement

The first non-violent mass-movement in India's struggle for freedom started in 1905. Pursuing their 'divide and rule' policy, the British partitioned the state of Bengal on October 16 to create enmity between Hindus and Muslims. The whole of Bengal, supported by the whole country, opposed the partition. Among others, patriots like Lokamanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai turned the issue into an anti-partition movement and, next year, a liberation one. They advanced a four point's programme of non-violent resistance to foreign rule consisting in: a) a Boycott movement against British goods to be later extended to British administration; b) *Swadeshi*, to start national industries, banks and factories; c) National Education, to start educational and cultural institutions leading to a rise of people's potential and awareness. The fourth point or goal was *Swaraj*, self-government. A wave of patriotism swept not merely Bengal but the whole of India, thus increasing the base of the non-violent struggle.[316]

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314 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 20.

315 One crore equals ten million.

316 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, pages 38-42.

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre

On April 11, 1919, in Amritsar (Punjab), Brigadier-General Dyer issued a proclamation prohibiting all meetings. However, "the proclamation was not properly conveyed to the population, and on the evening of 12 April it was announced that a public meeting would be held at Jallianwala Bagh (an enclosed public square). On 13 April at 4.30 p.m., Gen. Dyer did not issue any warning, nor did he prevent people from holding the meeting. After the meeting began, Dyer came with troops and armoured cars and placed the troops on a rising ground at the entrance of the Bagh. He then ordered his troops to open fire on the crowd of about 10,000 people. The merciless killings by Dyer have been described in the following words: 'As troops started firing, the meeting broke at once but for ten consecutive minutes he (Dyer) kept up a merciless fusillade - in all 1650 rounds - on that seething mass of humanity caught like rats in a trap, vainly rushing for the few narrow exits or lying flat on the ground to escape the rain of bullets which he personally directed to the points were the crowd was thickest'. More than a thousand people were killed and many more injured in this massacre of innocents, which has no parallel in the annals of history."[317] Martial Law was declared in Punjab, followed by a reign of terror and brutality unworthy of any civilised government. Among other protests against it, Nobel-Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood, and Gandhi also returned the Kaiser-I-Hind Medal given to

317 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, pages 92-93.

him for his humanitarian work during the Zulu War in South Africa.

Non-cooperation movement

From South Africa, M.K. Gandhi returned to India in 1915. In 1920 he launched the non-cooperation movement. It had two aspects, namely one combative and another constructive. The constructive part of the programme proposed *swadeshi*, removal of untouchability among Hindus, promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, and prohibition of alcoholic drinks. It also included self-sufficiency of villages, i.e., almost the whole country. They were aimed at making people responsible for their lives and country, boosting the morale and closing the ranks. The combative part of non-cooperation included the boycott of legislatures, courts, schools and colleges run or aided by the rulers. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, wrote: "What I admired was the moral and ethical side of our movement and of *Satyagraha*.[318] I did not give an absolute allegiance to the doctrine of non-violence, but it attracted me more and more, and the belief grew upon me that situated as we were in India, and with our background and traditions, it was the right policy for us. The spiritualisation of politics, using the word not in the narrow religious sense, seemed to me a fine idea. A worthy end should have

318 Sanskrit satya truth, ãgraha obstinacy. Gandhi's novel method of non-violent struggle. According to context, it may mean to demand, to vouch for, or to go for truth. Hence, Satyagrahis are Satyagraha activists.

worthy means leading to it."[319] Over forty thousand people courted arrest and were imprisoned. But in 1922, when the non-cooperation movement was gathering momentum, Gandhi suspended it. The perfect non-violent discipline of which he made a requisite for the movement had been broken by a violent incident in a village. Soon after, he was arrested, tried and imprisoned.

Though brief, the non-cooperation movement succeeded in creating a new political consciousness among the Indian masses, and had involved them in the effort of winning freedom. The non-violent creed and method had the full sympathy and open active support of people at large. The Indian National Congress - the political platform for freedom - for the first time became really a mass movement. For the first time, in the history of modern India, there was a cadre of whole-time freedom activists all over the country.

Civil disobedience movement

The Independence Day celebrations of 26 January 1930 -decided by the Indian National Congress- heralded a civil disobedience movement. Large rallies were held everywhere in India, during which the national flag was hoisted, people solemnly took a ready-made pledge to struggle for complete independence (*Purna Swaraj*). These meetings ended with the singing of *Vande Mataram*, the national anthem. As the next step, Gandhi thought to defy the salt production monopoly

319 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, pages 97-98.

law. He started with a symbolic action of breaking the law by picking (i.e., producing) salt on Dandi Beach (Gujarat). Cleverly Gandhi started a nearly two hundred miles march on foot on 12 March. Nearly 75,000 people assembled to give the "Dandi March" a warm send off. The news spread all over India and abroad, and the protest went on gathering support as Gandhi and his companions were marching. On 6 April, they broke the law, thus challenging the right of the rulers to impose their laws on India, and inviting people to do similarly everywhere. People gathered in thousands all over India and defied the salt law. Unarmed and peaceful thousands, in a disciplined way, allowed themselves to be charged and beaten by police forces armed with steel-shod lathis, thus getting fractured bones and skulls. Thousands courted arrest and did not defend themselves in court. People were fired at and mass arrested, being submitted to all sorts of tortures. Another significant aspect was that women responded to the call in thousands, coming out of their traditional seclusion and joining the struggle. This overwhelming response took both militants and rulers by surprise. Women not just joined in the background, but also led daring actions and took all hardships bravely along with their male counterparts.[320]

More than 75,000 activists were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. The jail conditions were brutal,

320 For instance, Gandhi being arrested after the Dandi March, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu directed the salt satyagraha at Dharasana (Surat District), in which over 2500 militants were systematically bludgeoned by the police. The scene was vividly reported by Webb Miller, of the United Press, and represented in Attenborough's film "Gandhi."

including solitary confinement and dungeon-like cells. But activists all over turned their stay into an opportunity to strengthen their bonds by studying and discussing several issues, thus preparing themselves and boosting the morale for future battles. "The impact and the significance of this movement has been aptly described by Louis Fischer, the American journalist who had a deep understanding of the nature of Indian's freedom struggle. He wrote, 'Gandhi did two things in 1930; he made the British people aware that they were cruelly subjugating India and he gave the Indians the conviction that they would by lifting their heads and strengthening their spines, lift the yoke of slavery. The Indians neither cringed, nor complained nor retreated. This made England powerless and India invincible'."[321]

The civil disobedience movement marked a point of no return in the non-violent struggle for freedom. Activists and cadres multiplied, people in general became politically conscious, particularly in the rural areas, and redoubled their determination to pay the price for independence.

Quit India Movement

On 14 July 1942, the Congress Working Committee passed the Quit India resolution. Gandhi declared that there was no room for a compromise and that the British must "Quit India." And then came the historic session of the All India Congress Committee on 7 and 8 August 1942 at Bombay. Tens of thousands came to

321 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, page 137.

attend the session. People were eager to get from the leaders the clarion call of the final freedom struggle, and Gandhi blew the trumpet call of "Quit India." Huge crowds of people had come to listen to Gandhi's speech and told them, "Every one of you, from this moment, consider yourself a free man or woman and act as if you are free… I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. We shall do or die… We shall either free India or die in the attempt."

On 9 August, Gandhi and other members of the Committee were arrested and detained. The last message that Gandhi scribbled before his arrest was, "Every man is free to go, to the fullest length under 'Ahimsa' by complete deadlock, strikes and other non-violent means. Satyagrahis should go out to die and not live. It is only when individuals go out to seek and face death that the nation will survive. *Karenge ya marenge* (We shall do or die)".

People reacted all over the country immediately and sharply, in urban and rural areas. For almost one and a half months huge crowds assembled, processions and strikes (*hartals*) were carried out in major towns. One of the remarkable features of these *morchas* (marches) was that there was no hooliganism, no looting and arson. The leadership went underground to coordinate actions through secret meetings, bulletins, etc. Underground radios broadcasted revolutionary news and instructions. People of all ages, sex, creed and social condition took part in the uprising and enthusiastically braved the retaliations.

However, a section of the militants believed in action directed at paralysing the government by taking over offices and preventing communications through destruction of property. Thus, some post offices, railway stations and other government offices were attacked. There was widespread cutting of telegraph wires[322] and blowing up of bridges, removal of fishplates on the rails, etc. In some cases people captured police stations and run away with guns. After September 1942, guerrilla tactics continued. Sabotaging activities were carried out systematically all over the country. Parallel governments were set up wherever possible. In some of these cases, the activists also fought against armed robber bands (*dacoits*), set up people's courts and settled many disputes amicably. Liquor shops were closed down. In the Satara District (Maharashtra State), the parallel government restored land to the farmers that had been grabbed from them by money-lenders, and in some cases imposed heavy fines on the latter.

The Quit India movement marked the beginning of the liquidation of the British Empire. It was a nationwide civil revolt and had a massive backing. According to activists, during this phase of the Quit India movement, no less than 10,000 were killed in police firing only, while more than 300,000 were imprisoned during that period up to the end of 1943. As usual, official figures were lower.

322 For instance, "The first anniversary of the Quit India movement on 9 August 1943, was celebrated by the underground workers in satara and Kolhapur Districts by destroying two thousand telegraph poles on that day." G.P. Pradhan, page 175.

The subcontinent had finally achieved the unity of purpose that lacked in earlier opportunities. "The British government, the leaders of British public opinion, realized that it was very difficult, nay well-nigh impossible, to continue to hold India in bondage."[323]

While Europe was struggling against Fascism and Nazism, India was both fighting along with the British and its allies on foreign lands,[324] and, at home, facing just what Europeans were suffering under Nazi occupation. Also in India a "master race" used arbitrary partition of territories, curfew, arrest and trial without normal legal procedures, imprisonment under dehumanising conditions, solitary confinement and deportation. There were also inhuman atrocities committed by the army on family members of activists. Police and army were used for barbarous charges and torture (both outside and inside their barracks), and callous shootings of unarmed civilians of any age and sex[325]. Villagers were submitted to terror raids, heavy collective fines, confiscation of property, and expulsion from their lands. The press was also imposed heavy fines and compelled to furnish bonds of huge sums of money as security, while publications were banned and censored. Civil liberties were curtailed and many Machiavellian policies were conceived to play off people

323 G.P. Pradhan, *India's Freedom Struggle: An Epic of Sacrifice and Suffering*, Sangam Books Ltd., Noida, 1990, pages 181.

324 Indian soldiers fought on British side during the First and the Second World Wars.

325 For instance, at Nandurbar (West Khandesh, Maharashtra), five school children were shot dead by police, because they were taking a procession, raising the national flag and singing the anthem.

against each other. All this to restore "law and order" during a nationwide liberation movement that was termed "mutiny" by the rulers.

For two centuries the British did everything to inflame Indian feelings in all fronts. Colonial aggression was military, political, economic, religious, racial, cultural, etc. On the whole, theirs was a violent domination, later softened by some efforts of good-willingness by individual Britishers. Conversely, India national freedom movement was, on the whole, a non-violent resistance to colonialism, blotched by some violent happenings. But, then, how can one reasonably expect a heterogeneous subcontinent to behave all the time as a compact block, even under provocation?[326] Even then, virtually all the violent actions fell within what underground resistance movements where doing elsewhere under foreign occupation. In any case, if at all, justification for actions should not come from patriots, but rather from colonialists. The massacre that ensued the partition of India was the final bloody fruit borne by decades of 'divide and rule' colonial policy.

> "1. When methodology of action is spoken of with reference to political and social struggle, frequently the theme of violence is referred to. But there are previous questions to which this theme is not alien.
>
> "2. Until the human being does not accomplish wholly a human society, that is, a society where power is in the social whole and not in a part of it (subjecting and objectifying the whole), violence will

326 Population was approximately 380 million.

be the sign under which all social activity is carried out. Because of that, when talking about violence it is necessary to mention that instituted world and if that world is opposed by a non-violent struggle one must stress in the first place that a non-violent attitude is such because it does not tolerate violence. Thus, the point is not to justify a certain kind of struggle but rather to define the conditions of violence imposed by this inhuman system."[327].

327 *To Humanize The Earth*, p. 157, Silo, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991.

Chapter 8: Personalities

Since this short essay imposes a limitation of extension, and we only meant to offer pointers, we have to leave aside many important personalities like, e.g. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Ghadharda Lokamaya Ghokale, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, Annie Besant, Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, etc. I hope readers will compensate for this lack by taking an interest in their interesting lives and times. We will now focus on the most prominent among them -and perhaps the most controversial as well.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948).

Much has been written on this towering figure of Indian Independence and non-violence as a political tool. So, not even in this case shall we go beyond some broad strokes.

> As Albert Einstein wrote, M. K. Gandhi was "A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority; a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior.

> Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."[328]

As regards to the exaggerated influence of Leo Nikolaievich Tolstoy some saw on Gandhi, we should again apply the principle of reducing assumptions to the absolute minimum. Gandhi's formation was very much Indian and, in particular, Hindu. In his own autobiography,[329] he tells how he was raised in the Vaishnava faith, repeating *Ramnama*, learning *Rama Raksha*, listening to the reading of *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavat*. He gives us hints of his early formation in respecting and appreciating plurality:

> "In Rajkot, however, I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. For my father and mother would visit the *Haveli* as also Shiva's and Rama's temples, and would take or send us youngsters there. Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us - non-Jains. They would have talks with my father on subjects religious and mundane.
>
> "He had, besides, Musalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faith, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to

328 Albert Einstein in *Essays in Humanism*, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950, page 94.

329 M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Penguin Books, London, 1982.

inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths."[330]

Later on, with the same humanist spirit, when Gandhi goes to England, he gets exposed to further Hindu sources as well as Buddhist, Islamic, Zoroastrian and Christian texts. He learns about the *Bhagavad Gita* from British friends[331]. Through them, he also gets acquainted with Teosophy, meeting Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Annie Besant. His ties with Teosophy will also continue in South Africa. He also read, among others, Sir Edwin Arnold, Carlyle, Bradlaugh, Tolstoy[332], Max Müller, Edward Maitland and John Ruskin. It was Ruskin's *Unto This Last* that triggered his decision to start the South-African Phoenix Settlement in 1904.[333]

Thus, as befits a true humanist that appreciates cultural diversity, his exposure to ideas was wide and unprejudiced, avidly drawing knowledge and inspiration from all. However, the influence books had in his inner quest was at least equalled by the impact of his relation with people like Rajchandrabhai or Ghokale.

> "The *ahimsa* is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is vain unless it is founded on *ahimsa* as its basis. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the

330 ibid, 10. *Glimpses of Religion*, page 46.

331 ibid,20. *Acquaintance with Religion*, page 76.

332 The Kingdom of God is Within You.

333 M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (18. The Magic Spell of a Book), Penguin Books, London, 1982, page 273.

same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world."[334]

"A superior being does not render evil for evil, this is a maxim one should observe... One should never harm the wicked or the good or even criminals meriting death. A noble soul will ever exercise compassion even towards those who enjoy injuring others or those of cruel deeds..."[335]

"Gandhi's idea of *ahiṃsã* was not based on the Vedic concept of *ahiṃsã*. He ruled out all exceptions in the application of *ahiṃsã*. He derived his *ahiṃsã* from the ascetic sources, and it was this ascetic or *śramaṇic* concept which he applied, for the first time, to politics and economics."[336]

Gandhi's non-violence was not just a proposal for personal ethics but also for all spheres of practical social life, including national and international politics and economics. He was also concerned with economic violence. "*Ahiṃsã* means the abstention from causing suffering out of evil purpose.[337] 'Evil purpose' may include the amassing or hoarding of wealth above and beyond one's

334 M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Penguin Books, London, 1982, page 254.

335 Rãmãyana, VI, 115.

336 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 121.

337 *Young India* 4-11-1926.

legitimate requirements.[338] We are not always aware of our real needs and may improperly multiply our wants, which according to Gandhi is theft.[339"340]

"Of special importance is the application of non-violence in economics. 'True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics.' By 'true economics' Gandhi refers to social justice, to the promotion of the good of all including the weakest in society.[341] The extension of non violence to the domain of economics implies the introduction of moral values as a regulating factor in international commerce.[342"343]

Gandhi's non-violence was neither weak nor it scorned the use of force. It was not a passive pacifism that was innocuous to the establishment. "A genuinely non-violent man must transform his society. He cannot tolerate inequality, exploitation or tyranny in his environment.[344"345] This is the definition of non-

338 M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War*, II, pp. 125-126.

339 M.K. Gandhi, *Sarvodaya*, page 21.

340 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 119.

341 M.K. Gandhi, *Selected Works*, VI, page 321.

342 Ibid, 322.

343 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 123.

344 B. Kumarappa's editorial note in M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, II, p.VI.

345 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 123.

violence that is dearest to humanism -militant and committed to struggle against all forms of violence, both social and personal.

One should serve one's 'immediate neighbours'[346] as active non-violence. This is a focalisation of work that, in Gandhi's thought, did not exclude a wider coordination of efforts for a global goal.

346 M.K. Gandhi, *Sarvodaya*, page 21.

PART 6

AFTER INDEPENDENCE

M.N.Roy and Radical Humanism

Manabendra Nath Roy (better known as M.N. Roy) (1887-1954), was a prominent Communist leader and revolutionary born in West Bengal. He was the founder-secretary of the Mexican Communist Party (1911), the first Communist Party outside Russia, and the founder of Communist Party of India (1920). He was closely associated with, and respected by, Communist figures such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Trotsky. For instance, Lenin invited Roy to the Second Comintern Congress in 1920. As desired by Lenin, Roy formulated his own ideas, as a supplement to Lenin's *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions*. By adopting Roy's Thesis, alternative to Lenin's, the Party consolidated Roy's position among the orthodox communists. Then he was commissioned by Lenin to prepare the East – especially India – for revolution. Roy joined Third World Congress of C.I. in August 1921. In 1927, he also led a Comintern delegation appointed by Stalin to develop agrarian revolution in China. During Lenin's lifetime, Roy attained all the top positions of the C.I.

In India, the British arrested him in 1931; he was tried for several conspiracy and sedition cases, and served six years' imprisonment. On his release in 1936, Roy joined the Indian National Congress and organised the league of Radical Congressman. Differences on war policy made him and his followers resign from Congress and form the Radical Democratic Party (1940). He supported the Allied Powers in World War II and vigorously supported war efforts because he considered declining imperialism a lesser evil to Fascism, which to him was a menace to humankind.

M.K.Gandhi proceeded to foment "Quit India" in 1942, and Roy's line was clearly different from that of the mainstream of the national liberation movement.
In 1948, he abolished the Radical Democratic Party and founded the Radical Humanist Association. He founded Indian Renaissance Institute and edited the quarterly journal *The Humanist Way* (originally named as *The Marxian Way*). Disillusioned with both formal democracy and communism, he dedicated the final years of his life to the formulation of a philosophy that he called Radical Humanism, which he expounded in "Reason, Romanticism and Revolution." Roy aspired at a social order by which human beings could express their best. He elaborated his theses into a manifesto, "New Humanism"[347] in 1947. Throughout his life, he was a prolific writer with his books and articles, including a 10-year Plan, and drafting a Constitution of Free India (1944). In spite of his personal achievements, Roy's Radical Humanism itself did not have a significant impact on people; more so if we compare with, e.g., Gandhian Socialism

After Independence, the whole country launched a large-scale transformation. Some organisations took to constructive work within the given set up. In the new atmosphere of freedom in which people took charge of their country's destiny, unselfish humanitarian work multiplied like never before.[348] On the other hand,

347 *New Humanism – A Manifesto*, M.N.Roy, Ajanta Publications (India), Delhi, 1981.

348 "Humanitarianism. Practical activity that attempts to solve specific problems of individuals or human groups. Humanitarianism does not claim to modify the structures of power, but has very frequently led to the formation of lifestyles which are very worth while from the point of view of their commitment to meeting the immediate needs of human beings.

without denying the value of this type of work, other organisations wanted to make the transformation more radical or systemic.

Vinoba and Sarvodaya

Following Independence and Gandhi's murder, only a few true followers continued the Gandhian path. Vinoba Bhave led the reorganization of the Gandhian movement or *Sarvodaya* (welfare for all), further developing the ideology according to post-independence circumstances. *Sarvodaya* works for a non-violent "complete revolution" which is neither Socialist nor Marxist. It aims at changing not only the social institutions but also life values and norms. "A true revolution has to aim at changing both the attitudes of the individual and the structure of society."[349] It means to transform the whole of daily life, with new values and norms.[350] A real revolution can come about only by non-violent means; whereas a violent revolution leads to a counter-revolution.[351] It is wrong and dangerous to conceive non-violence as a gradual process, since it would reduce non-violence to a conservative force.[352] Individual ownership of land is identified as the main root of social violence. Thus *Sarvodaya* has promoted

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All actions of solidarity are, to a greater or less extent, cases of humanitarianism. (see Altruism and Philanthropy)." Dictionary of Humanism, edited by the World Centre of Humanist Studies (Moscow), Foundation for Humanisation, Bombay, 1996.

349 N. Desai, *Towards a Non-Violent Revolution*, page 128.

350 Vinoba Bhave, *Gramdan for Gramswaraj*, page 49.

351 Ibid, pages 21 and 49.

352 Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values*, pages 149-151.

voluntary donation of land property (*bhàdan-yajña* or 'land-gift') to the village assembly, and total donation of the village to *Sarvodaya* (*Gramdan* or 'village-gift'), to be eventually made complete by legislation.[353] Besides violence and individual land ownership, *Sarvodaya* decries party politics and discrimination based on caste and creed.[354] Vinoba advocated health care for all without any discrimination whatsoever.[355] *Sarvodaya*'s aim is welfare for all, not for a minority or even a majority.[356] Selfless service for all people, and giving one's whole time and whatever best qualities one may have to non-violent revolution, is made a Peace Army Article of Faith.[357] Many village industries and other constructive programmes were started by *Sarvodaya*'s desire to serve, without asking for anybody's consent. "*Sarvodaya* does not have much faith in the efficiency of institutions. All religions proclaim their faith in non-violence, peace and love; but none of the religious institutions are exercising any tangible influence for the establishment of peace.

If a country attacks another, it does not ask for the Pope's permission; it feels accomplish wholly a human society, that the Pope's authority belongs to an entirely different sphere.[358]"[359]

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353 Vinobha Bhave, *Third Power*, page 33.

354 Vinobha Bhave, *Shanti Sena*, pages 72-73.

355 Vinobha Bhave, *Shanti Sena*, page 64.

356 Vinobha Bhave, *Third Power*, page 77.

357 Vinobha Bhave, *Shanti Sena*, page 150.

358 Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values*, page 177.

Vinoba called for decentralisation of power in all spheres. The greater the number of functions taken over by the people from the government, the more will non-violence flourish and lead gradually to the withering away of the State authority (*Rãj-nãti*) as opposed to rule of the people (*Lok-nãti*).[360] However, decentralization should be accompanied by an integrated and comprehensive plan.[361]

The resurgence of Buddhism in India

Buddhism began in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, and it carried India through more than 1000 years of prosperity, then gradually declined. Then in the 13th century, an Islamic rule came to be in India, and Buddhism almost disappeared from the Indian Subcontinent, with pockets of Buddhist people living the mountainous Himalayan and other regions. In the minds of the majority of Hindus, Buddha became just an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

During the English Colonial Rule, even though it was a short moment in the history of India, there was a small resurgence of Buddhism in India. In the 1890's, for example, Dammapara of Sri Lanka founded the Mahaboddhi Society, and Ayoti Daas founded the Buddhist Society of South India, as well as other unrelated Buddhist activities in Bengal and other

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359 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 127.

360 Vinobha Bhave, *Gramdan for Gramswaraj*, page 36.

361 Vinobha Bhave, *Third Power*, page 13.

places in India. The effects of these activities, a society where localized, never spreading widely.

Most Indians are Hindu, and to them Buddhism is a old, brilliant, dead branch of Hinduism. It does not seem to them as a separate, independent religion. The resurgence of Buddhism in India did not go to its next stage until the arrival of Dr. Ambedkar upon the scene.

Joining a non-caste sect has been for centuries a means that low castes have used for opting out of their caste. We have seen this pattern in the times of the Buddha and during the *Bhakti* Movement. In 1951, there was a total of 2,487 Buddhists in India. The 1961 census reports a total of 3,250,227 Buddhists. The number of Buddhists in India in 1981 (according to the government of India) was 4.65 million people, and in 1991, became 6.32 million people. About 80% of this population live in the state of Maharashtra (mostly rural), and in the city of Nagpur. But in actuality, the exact number of Buddhists in India is unknown. In the last few years, the number of "untouchables," or Scheduled Castes as they have been called in recent years, converting to Buddhism seem to be increasing. Along with this, the political power of the Buddhists is increasing in India.

According to the writer Motoo Yamagiwa, an authority on Indian Buddhism, in 1996, the Buddhist population of India has broken 50 million people. Sasai Shurei, one of the leaders of the Indian Buddhist resurgence movement said, "Recently, some Brahmins (the highest caste) have been converting to Buddhism. It seems that the way people look at Buddhism is changing"- which is

very much in harmony with the last wishes of Dr. Ambedkar.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), lived at the same time as Mahatma Ghandi and Nair. He was a leader of the oppressed peoples of India. He tried his best to liberate the Untouchables from the oppression of the caste system. He fought enormous gaps in political expression, law, social activity, economic ability, labour opportunity, education, etc.

He was the Minister of Law for the government of Independent India, and wrote the Indian Constitution, trying to outlaw the caste system. When he was on his deathbed, he was very depressed by the continued prejudice of the Hindus against the untouchables.

About two months before he died in 1956, he underwent a conversion ceremony to convert from Hinduism to Buddhism. He did this along with about 500,000 untouchables during a ceremony in the city of Nagpur in the heart of India. From that point on, there has been a great resurgence of Buddhism in India, in the state of Maharashtra, in the city of Nagpur,

Ambedkar was born an untouchable, the lowest caste in the Indian caste system. In the long history of India, it has always been seen as impure to touch, or even look at, untouchables. This illogical prejudice effected Ambedkar ever since he was a young boy. And he devoted his life to the betterment of the lot of the untouchables. In the days of the beginning of Indian Independence Ambedkar fought with Gandhi over the

priorities of the government because Gandhi could not see the world from the eyes of the untouchables. Almost all of the Buddhists now practicing in India are Untouchables, and almost all follow the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar.

CONCLUSIONS

All throughout, we have seen some conducting threads, some recurrent themes in Indian civilisation - caste among them. Many authors affirm that caste is almost a synonym of Indian culture, implying that discrimination is its intrinsic nature. Caste system is associated with the identity and cohesiveness of social groups, since it encompasses occupation, creed, language, location, folklore, etc. and as such, it is an integral part of the culture. However, caste need not necessarily imply discrimination, just as chauvinism need not follow nationality or racism follow race group. In any case, it should equally be stressed that caste-based discrimination has been repeatedly denounced and resisted in various ways throughout Indian history. We have seen a line of continuous humanist struggle coming down from the Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti Movement, Indian Renaissance, up to several contemporary examples. Therefore, the view that caste-based system is intrinsic of Indian social fabric should be qualified. The humanist struggle against discrimination, though slow and still unfinished, has certainly changed concrete situations and created a diffused social awareness against caste discrimination. Besides, in the whole, it has been a bloodless, non-violent struggle, that banked more on generating awareness, creating alternatives, and civil disobedience.

Another conducting thread is the role played by mysticism or religion as a dynamic and integral factor of social transformation. Many writers, mostly Western,

tend to ignore this aspect, maybe because their present ideological framework prevents them to "see" it," for a historian is frequently far more representative of his age than he is aware."[362]. The role a certain religion played in some cultures need not necessarily apply to other cultures. Similarly, science in itself is not necessarily more liberating than religion, unless there is a human intention behind it. History provides plenty of examples of both humanist and antihumanist utilisation of science, reason or technology. Recently, one of these illicit associations causally equates affluence to freedom.

Just as humanist sensitivity may be expressed both by theists and atheists or non-theists, humanist struggle against violence and discrimination, can be carried out in a non-secular context. There is no compelling correlation between secularism and humanism, just as there is also none between religiousness and antihumanism (in terms of obscurantism, backward-ness, oppression, etc.). Perhaps none of the struggles against discrimination and injustice that we have seen in Indian history used the term "human rights" or "civil liberties" to fight for people's rights and freedom; but that was certainly a definite role played by those movements.

Antihumanist attitudes in India received "religious" sanction by an orthodox minority. These stances were not at all unrelated to the preservation of power and privilege. “There was little or no attempt to recognize, let alone come to terms with, a powerful group which

362 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 22, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

did not fit into a caste hierarchy."[363] Thus, popular struggle against discrimination and violence was fought at the source, i.e., in the battlefront of religious ideas and practices. This is why most religious reformers ignored or disowned the strongholds of orthodoxy (for example, sacrificial rites, caste and sex discrimination, some scriptures, temple worship, sectarism, etc.). Some reformers went back to and reinterpreted the original scriptures in a humanist way, while others broke apart completely from the fold. We should bear in mind that, in India, "one of the methods of escaping caste was by joining a non-caste group in which one's caste would be eliminated, as had happened in the past with certain sects and cults."[364]

On the other hand, unlike the West, in India there seem to have been no serious limitations to scientific research placed by religious orthodoxy. Therefore, liberation was not fought on the grounds of freeing scientific research from obscurantism, thus disproving scriptures or orthodoxy. If we rather see religious feelings -related to a deeper meaning of life but unrelated to dogmas and rituals- as the driving force behind humanist battles, we may be closer to acknowledge the liberating function they fulfilled.

Therefore, from a Western point of view that may be used to recognise social matters if dressed with the garb of its own cultural setup, maybe Indian records on

363 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 304, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

364 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 311, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain

human rights look like a blank slate. This is why a new reading of Indian culture should be tried with unprejudiced eyes, searching for the essential characteristics that draw cultures close to each other.

Having gone through these historical processes, one cannot but draw some conclusions. In every historical period, there are those who pursued the monopolisation of the whole and those who reacted against plurality, perceiving it as a threat. They all made futile attempts at throwing spanners in the inexorable works of cultural merge. On the other hand, those who - in any epoch- saw antihumanist traits and struggled against them in a non-violent way, furthered the millenary cause of humanisation, Today the same process of cultural interaction is configuring a global civilisation for the first time in history, and new actors play the same old roles. .

"Events are positively contributing to make us revise globally everything we have believed till today; to appreciate History from another viewpoint; to aim our projects at another image of the future; to make us look at ourselves with a new piety and tolerance. Then, a new humanism will open its way through this labyrinth of History in which so many times the human being was thought to be nullified."[365]

In very broad strokes, Indian history 'shows three distinct moments in which humanist values flourished. These three moments are linked to respective rebellions against antihumanist issues while different cultures came into

365 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 205.

contact. There was always an ascendant one, clashing with, the rest, and an ultimate convergence and merge. The first was during Aryan ascendancy, i.e., marked by the Sramanic resistance led by Buddhism and Jainism. The second was during Islamic ascendancy, 'against Hindu and Muslim orthodoxies, i.e., marked by the Bhakti movement led by Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Buddhists. The third was during British ascendancy, against colonialism, i.e., Renaissance and Independence .movements, which everybody joined. As part and parcel of those processes, Indian civilisation merged different currents and incorporated whatever was progressive from those cultural inputs. The merging parties were transformed in the interaction process, evolving a new identity that cannot be explained away just by intrinsic factors. The resistance was not against coexistence, but against antihumanist issues, against a minority monopolising the whole, imposing uniformity and curtailing plurality. Traditional military clashes took place, but considering society as a whole, the three moments were rather 'non-violent. All the three moments peaked in certain centuries, but their repercussions overlapped and continued in present times. All the three moments led to an outburst of creativity and development of knowledge in all fields.' Every time, culture was enriched 'and made available to 1arger sectors of people. Every time, India opened up herself to the rest of the world through cultural commercial, religious and political links that were, on the whole, non-aggressive. In spite of all the difficulties involved in cultural merges, acknowledgment of diversity never diminished, but rather increased.

It is the view of this author that, in all likelihood, a fourth humanist moment is approaching with the turn of the millennium. This will be linked to the forcible so-called globalisation taking place throughout the-world, reaching Indian shores and. disregarding India's diversity. This will, nay is, reawakening humanist values throughout the country. It will not be long until it becomes a national movement. Along with Silo, I believe that "Hardly any favour would one do to this moment of change who felt destined to hegemonise and to make a given leaning universal, precisely in the moment of decentralisation and the clamour of real particularities for recognition."[366] As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru saw it, these are times for unity in diversity.

On the other hand, as India did during her Independence struggle, she will surely realise that her destiny links her to the humanisation of the whole world. That is, her problems are also the problems of all the oppressed, and vice versa. As Pandit Nehru rightly saw in his Autobiography: "The reaction to the Spanish Civil War on me indicates, how in my mind, the problem of India was tied up with other world problems. More and more, I came to think that these separate problems, political or economic, in China, Abyssinia, Spain, Central Europe, India or elsewhere, were facets of one and the same world problem. There could be no final solution of any of them till this basic problem was solved. And in all probability, there would be upheaval and disaster, before the final solution was reached. As peace

366 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 207.

is said to be indivisible in the present day world, so also freedom was indivisible, and the world could not continue for long, part free, part unfree."

May she show us again a civilised way of struggling for reinstating human dignity. May she choose again the humanist path. The world civilisation, that is under way today, cannot do without the contributions of India's people and culture. For the future of us all depends on the solutions India finds to her problems, considering that we all are participants of the same world civilisation.

"The current clash between the West and all the surviving non-Western societies may produce a more varied and perhaps still more fruitful 'culture compost' after the West's no doubt ephemeral dominance has subsided in its turn. In this present case, it looks as if the synthesis is likely to present itself in an economic and cultural form - though the fundamental form of any human drama usually proves to be spiritual when we analise the parties' actions in depth."[367] This synthesis at which Toynbee is hinting will mark the birth of a global civilization towards which all cultures are contributing. A universal humanism will thus be a must to produce a fruitful convergence of diversities. "Finally, I also believe that humanism is presently in a condition to become a philosophy, a moral, an instrument for action and a lifestyle."[368]

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367 Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press and Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1972. Page 442.

368 *Silo, Silo Speaks (Compilation of opinions, comments and lectures, 1969-1995)*, Spanish edition by Virtual Ediciones, Chile, 1996, page 253.

Finally, I see that most –if not all- of the people and currents we have reviewed were showing just a part of all that humanism can offer. This happened because of several factors. Among them, in some cases we wee that their struggle was aimed at improving their own lot, without further aims beyond that. Others stressed on certain aspects of the humanist agenda, but left other area untouched out of lack of awareness or just due to limitations in their resources or aspirations. Indeed, in some other cases, time and possibility imposed constraints to make positive examples reach and influence wider areas or longer periods. However, and above all, those expressions of humanism were fitting for times in which cultures, peoples, and even issues and concerns were confined to rather isolated boxes. Our present times are apt for realizing that everything is interconnected and interrelated. The world is becoming one single whole, and thinking is more holistic, interdisciplinary, systemic, synergic, structural, and global.

This unprecedented situation calls for an updated and unprecedented proposal of humanism. It should be a humanism for all and with all -a universal humanism. It should be a humanism that encompasses all areas of human endeavour. And that sees them a whole within a new humanism meant for shaping the universal human nation that is in the making.

In my view, such **New Humanism,** or **Universal Humanism,** has already been born, is alive and developing in India as well as throughout the world. And it is not just a vision on paper, but also a growing movement acting strongly in all fields. I refer to the

Humanist Movement[369] inspired by **Silo**. As I write these words, the *Humanist Movement* is spreading throughout India –urban and rural. In it lie the answers that India deserves for shaping its future within a global civilization. The *Humanist Movement* originates from no faction and serves no biased interest. Because of this, among other reasons, is that Universal Humanism has all the necessary features to be the highest expression of humanism befitting a civilization like India and, equally so, for humanity. May India and its people keep on embracing the noble task of humanizing the Earth!

369 See Appendix - *Statement of the Humanist Movement*.

APPENDIX

STATEMENT OF THE HUMANIST MOVEMENT [370]

Humanists are women and men of this century, of this time. They recognize the achievements of humanism throughout history, and find inspiration in the contributions of many cultures, not only those that today occupy center stage. They are also men and women who recognize that this century and this millennium are drawing to a close, and their project is a new world. Humanists feel that their history is very long and that their future will be even longer. As optimists who believe in freedom and social progress, they fix their gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the general crisis of today.

Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a *universal human nation*. While understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate surroundings. Humanists seek not a uniform world but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and in creativity.

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370 *Silo, Collected Works, Vol. 1, Letters To My Friends, Sixth Letter To My Friends.* First published in English as *Letters to My Friends: On Social and Personal Crisis in Today's World* in the New Humanism Series, Latitude Press, 1994.

Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its place. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

But a wall has arisen between humanist aspirations and the realities of today's world. The time has come to tear down that wall. To do this, all humanists of the world must unite.

I. Global Capital

This is the great universal truth: Money is everything. Money is government, money is law, money is power. Money is basically sustenance, but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion. Nothing is done without money, nothing is possible without money. There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money. Even peaceful solitude depends on money.

But our relationship with this "universal truth" is contradictory. Most people do not like this state of affairs. And so we find ourselves subject to the tyranny of money—a tyranny that is not abstract, for it has a name, representatives, agents, and well-established procedures.

Today, we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how the surviving economic forms will accommodate to the new dictates of international finance capital. Nothing escapes, as capital worldwide continues to concentrate in ever fewer hands—until even the nation

state depends for its survival on credit and loans. All must beg for investment and provide guarantees that give the banking system the ultimate say in decisions. The time is fast approaching when even companies themselves, when every rural area as well as every city, will all be the undisputed property of the banking system. The time of the parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity that once joined people together are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of isolated human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to each other despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity, through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity, through its control of the means of communication and information.

Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our human resources. They deplete irreplaceable natural resources and act with growing disregard for the human being. And just as they have drained everything from companies, industries, and whole governments, so have they deprived even science of its meaning—reducing it to technologies used to generate poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

Humanists do not overstate their case when they contend that the world is now technologically capable of swiftly resolving the problems in employment, food, health care, housing, and education that exist today across vast regions of the planet. If this possibility is

not being realized, it is simply because it is prevented by the monstrous speculation of big capital.

By now big capital has exhausted the stage of market economies, and has begun to discipline society to accept the chaos it has itself produced. Yet in the presence of this growing irrationality, it is not the voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition. Rather, it is the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism that are on the rise. And if groups and whole regions are increasingly guided by this new irrationalism, then the space for constructive action by progressive forces will diminish day by day.

On the other hand, millions of working people have already come to recognize that the centralized state is as much a sham as capitalist democracy. And just as working people are standing up against corrupt union bosses, more than ever citizens are questioning their governments and political parties. But it is necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise stagnate and remain nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. For something new to happen, a dialogue about the fundamental factors of our economy must begin in the heart of the community.

For humanists, labor and capital are the principal factors in economic production, while speculation and usury are extraneous. In the present economic circumstances, humanists struggle to totally transform the absurd relationship that has existed between these factors. Until now we have been told that capital receives the profits while workers receive wages, an inequity that has always been justified by the "risk"

that capital assumes in investing—as though working people do not risk both their present and their future amid the uncertainties of unemployment and economic crisis.

Another factor in play is management and decision-making in the operation of each company. Earnings not set aside for reinvestment in the enterprise, not used for expansion or diversification, are increasingly diverted into financial speculation, as are profits not used to create new sources of work.

The struggle of working people must therefore be to require maximum productive return from capital. But this cannot happen unless management and directorships are cooperatively shared. How else will it be possible to avoid massive layoffs, business closures, and even the loss of entire industries? For the greatest harm comes from under-investment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced acquisition of debt, and capital flight—not from profits realized through increased productivity. And if some persist in calling for workers to take possession of the means of production following nineteenth-century teachings, they will have to seriously consider the recent failures of real socialism.

As for the argument that treating capital the same way work is treated will only speed its flight to more advantageous areas, it must be pointed out that this cannot go on much longer because the irrationality of the present economic system is leading to saturation and crisis worldwide. Moreover, this argument, apart from embracing a radical immorality, ignores the historical process in which capital is steadily being transferred to the banking system. As a result, employers and business

people are being reduced to the status of employees, stripped of decision-making power in a lengthening chain of command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the recession continues to deepen, these same business people will begin to consider these points more seriously.

Humanists feel the need to act not only on employment issues, but also politically to prevent the State from being solely an instrument of international capital, to ensure a just relationship among the factors of production, and to restore to society its stolen autonomy.

II. Real Democracy Versus Formal Democracy

The edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its foundations—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have been eroded.

The theoretical separation of powers has become nonsense. Even a cursory examination of the practices surrounding the origin and composition of the different powers reveals the intimate relationships that link them to each other. And things could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of one same system. In nation after nation we see one branch gaining supremacy over the others, functions being usurped, corruption and irregularities surfacing—all corresponding to the changing global economic and political situation of each country.

As for representative government, since the extension of universal suffrage people have believed that only a single act is involved when they elect their

representative and their representative carries out the mandate received. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first in which the many elect the few, and a second in which those few betray the many, representing interests foreign to the mandate they received. And this corruption is fed within the political parties, now reduced to little more than a handful of leaders who are totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, powerful interests finance candidates and then dictate the policies they must follow. This state of affairs reveals a profound crisis in the contemporary conception and implementation of representative democracy.

Humanists struggle to transform the practice of representative government, giving the highest priority to consulting the people directly through referenda, plebiscites, and direct election of candidates. However, in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, or rather to political maneuvering and financial restrictions that prevent them from even reaching the ballot and the free expression of the will of the people.

Every constitution or law that prevents the full possibility of every citizen to elect and to be elected makes a mockery of real democracy, which is above all such legal restrictions. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, during elections the news media must be placed at the service of the people, providing all candidates with exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the people.

To address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, there is also a need to enact *laws of political responsibility* that will subject such officials to censure, revocation of powers, recall from office, and loss of immunity. The current alternative, under which parties or individuals who do not fulfill their campaign promises risk defeat in future elections, in practice does not hinder in the least the politicians' second act—betraying the people they represent.

As for directly consulting the people on the most urgent issues, every day the possibilities to do so increase through the use of technology. This does not mean simply giving greater importance to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys. What it does mean is to facilitate real participation and direct voting by means of today's advanced computational and communications technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must be provided with the protections that correspond to their right to representation, as well as all measures needed to advance in practice their full inclusion, participation, and development.

Today, minorities the world over who are the targets of xenophobia and discrimination make anguished pleas for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, leading the struggle to overcome such neo-fascism, whether overt or covert. In short, to struggle for the rights of minorities is to struggle for the rights of all human beings.

Under the coercion of centralized states—today no more than the unfeeling instruments of big capital—

many countries with diverse populations subject entire provinces, regions, or autonomous groups to this same kind of discrimination. This must end through the adoption of federal forms of organization, through which real political power will return to the hands of these historical and cultural entities.

In sum, to give highest priority to the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and decentralization of the apparatus of the State, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new kind of society—a flexible society constantly changing in harmony with the changing needs of the people, who are now suffocated more each day by their dependence on an inhuman system.

III. The Humanist Position

Humanist action does not draw its inspiration from imaginative theories about God, nature, society, or history. Rather, it begins with life's necessities, which consist most elementally of avoiding pain and moving toward pleasure. Yet human life entails the additional need to foresee future necessities, based on past experience and the intention to improve the present situation.

Human experience is not simply the product of natural physiological accumulation or selection, as happens in all species. It is social experience and personal experience directed toward overcoming pain in the present and avoiding it in the future. Human work, accumulated in the productions of society, is passed on and transformed from one generation to the next in a continuous struggle to improve the existing or natural conditions, even those of the human body itself. Human

beings must therefore be defined as historical beings whose mode of social behavior is capable of transforming both the world and their own nature.

Each time that individuals or human groups violently impose themselves on others, they succeed in detaining history, turning their victims into "natural" objects. Nature does not have intentions, and thus to negate the freedom and intentions of others is to convert them into natural objects without intentions, objects to be used.

Human progress in its slow ascent now needs to transform both nature and society, eliminating the violent animal appropriation of some human beings by others. When this happens, we will pass from pre-history into a fully human history. In the meantime, we can begin with no other central value than the human being, fully realized and completely free. Humanists therefore declare, "Nothing above the human being, and no human being beneath any other."

If God, the State, money, or any other entity is placed as the central value, this subordinates the human being and creates the condition for the subsequent control or sacrifice of other human beings. Humanists have this point very clear. Whether atheists or religious, humanists do not start with their atheism or their faith as the basis for their view of the world and their actions. They start with the human being and the immediate needs of human beings. And if, in their struggle for a better world, they believe they discover an intention that moves history in a progressive direction, they place this faith or this discovery at the service of the human being.

Humanists address the fundamental problem: to know if one wants to live, and to decide on the conditions in which to do so.

All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists. For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced.

Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence. Humanists connect their personal lives with the life of society. They do not pose such false dichotomies as viewing their own lives as separate from the lives of those around them, and in this lies their coherence.

These issues, then, mark a clear dividing line between humanism and anti-humanism: humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd. Because humanism is based on freedom of choice, it offers the only valid ethic of the present time. And because humanism believes in intention and freedom, it distinguishes between error and bad faith, between one who is mistaken and one who is a traitor.

IV. From Naive Humanism to Conscious Humanism

It is at the base of society, in the places where people work and where they live, that humanism must convert what are now only simple isolated protests into a

conscious force oriented toward transforming the economic structures.

The struggles of spirited activists in labor unions and progressive political parties will become more coherent as they transform the leadership of these entities, giving their organizations a new orientation that, above short-range grievances, gives the highest priority to the basic proposals advocated by humanism.

Vast numbers of students and teachers, already sensitive to injustice, are becoming conscious of their will to change as the general crisis touches them. And certainly, members of the press in contact with so much daily tragedy are today in favorable positions to act in a humanist direction, as are those intellectuals whose creations are at odds with the standards promoted by this inhuman system.

In the face of so much human suffering, many positions and organizations today encourage people to unselfishly help the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. Associations, volunteer groups, and large numbers of individuals are on occasion moved to make positive contributions. Without doubt, one of their contributions is to generate denunciations of these wrongs. However, such groups do not focus their actions on transforming the underlying structures that give rise to the problems. Their approaches are more closely related to humanitarianism than to conscious humanism, although among these efforts are many conscientious protests and actions that can be extended and deepened.

V. The Anti-Humanist Camp

As the people continue to be suffocated by the forces of big capital, incoherent proposals arise that gain strength by exploiting people's discontent, focusing it on various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascism is a profound negation of human values. Similarly, there are certain deviant environmental currents that view nature as more important than human beings. No longer do they preach that an environmental catastrophe is a disaster because it endangers humanity—instead to them the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature.

According to certain of these theories, the human being is somehow contaminated, and thus contaminates nature. It would have been better, they contend, had medicine never succeeded in its fight against disease or in prolonging human life. "Earth first!" some cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from this position to begin discriminating against cultures seen to contaminate or against "impure" foreigners. These currents of thought may be considered anti-humanist because at bottom they hold the human being in contempt, and in keeping with the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so fashionable today, their mentors reflect this self-hatred.

There is, however, a significant segment of society made up of perceptive people who consider themselves environmentalists because they understand the gravity of the abuses that environmentalism exposes and condemns. And if this environmentalism attains the humanist character that corresponds, it will direct the struggle against those who are actually generating the

catastrophes—big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely intertwined with the military-industrial complex.

Before worrying about seals, they will concern themselves with overcoming hunger, overcrowding, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal standards of housing and sanitation in many parts of the world. They will focus on the unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in a world that is so technologically advanced, yet still generates serious environmental imbalances in the name of ever more irrational growth.

One need not look far to see how the right wing functions as a political instrument of anti-humanism. Dishonesty and bad faith reach such extremes that some exponents periodically present themselves as representatives of "humanism." Take, for example, those cunning clerics who claim to theorize on the basis of a ridiculous "theocentric humanism." These people, who invented religious wars and inquisitions, who put to death the very founders of western humanism, are now attempting to appropriate the virtues of their victims. They have recently gone so far as to "forgive the errors" of those historical humanists, and so shameless is their semantic banditry that these representatives of anti-humanism even try to cloak themselves with the term "humanist."

It would of course be impossible to list the full range of resources, tools, instruments, forms, and expressions that anti-humanism has at its disposal. But having shed light on some of their more deceptive practices should help unsuspecting humanists and those newly

realizing they are humanists as they re-think their ideas and the significance of their social practice.

VI. Humanist Action Fronts

With the intention of becoming a broad-based social movement, the vital force of humanism is organizing action fronts in the workplace, neighborhoods, unions, and among social action, political, environmental, and cultural organizations. Such collective action makes it possible for varied progressive forces, groups, and individuals to have greater presence and influence, without losing their own identities or special characteristics. The objective of this movement is to promote a union of forces increasingly able to influence broad strata of the population, orienting the current social transformation.

Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organization in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

A NOTE ON INDIAN TRADITION OF NON-VIOLENCE (AHIṂSÃ)

No other civilisation has conceived, elaborated on, and applied non-violence as the Indian civilization has. And none began the non-violent tradition as early as India did.

As mentioned above, in Ancient India there existed two cultural traditions, one was strictly Ãryan or so-called 'orthodox',[371] the other, on the fringe of their society, was a struggling culture of non-Brãhmaṇic sages (*munis*) and ascetics (*śramaṇas* and *yati*), going back to pre-Vedic and pre-Ãryan origins. From the latter arose the so-called 'heterodox' sects, i.e., Jainism, Buddhism, Ajivikas, etc. Brãhmaṇism had its stronghold in the North or North-West, whereas Jainism and Buddhism arose in the Eastern parts.

"We should clearly differentiate between these two formulations of the concept of *ahiṃsã*. On the one hand there is the Vedic concept, and on the other hand there is the ascetic idea of *ahiṃsã* which does not seem to have the Vedas as its source; it was championed by the 'heterodox' schools of thought and even the yogins were not supporters of the brãhmaṇic social order of the *varṇa-ãśrama-dharma*, nor did they support sacrifices.

"If the ascetic idea of *ahiṃsã* is of pre-Ãryan origin, as it appears to be, then *ahiṃsã* in this specific sense most probably originated around 3000-2000 B.C. The Vedic concept of *ahiṃsã* is not so old as the ascetic idea. It is vaguely used in a moral sense before the

371 In scholarly usage, though such terminology does not help the cause of plurality.

earliest *Upaniśads*. The date may be around the tenth to seventh centuries B.C."

It is assumed that in the older Upaniśads we find a partial fusion of both the currents, of ritual thought and moral thought.[372] "*Ahiṃsã* is mentioned several times in the Upanishads but is not given any great importance before the advent of the heterodox schools of the Jainas and the Buddhists."[373] "The leading idea of the ascetic schools is that one has to be non-violent even among violence, and in this respect they differ from the legalist or social tradition."[374]

Regarding universality in applying non-violence, the Vedic concept allows justified exceptions to the rule, i.e. is casuistical or relative in its application. The Vedic conception of non-violence is brought forward in the Vedas, is prevalent in the early *Upaniśads*, in legal literature, very frequently also in the other *Dharmaśãstras Purãṇas*, as a matter of commonplace, few references in the *Mīmãṃsã* school of thought and even in Śaṃkara's writings[375].The references to non-violence in the *sãṃkhya* and yoga schools, although important, are extremely few in number. Its political trend is expounded by Manu and the *Dharmaśãstras*. "Thus the Vedic conception of *ahiṃsã* is universal in

372 L.M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism*, pp. 14-15. - A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, page 244. - G.C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, page 309.

373 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 44.

374 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 51.

375 Śaṃkara on *Vedãnta-Sūtra* 3.1.25 and 2.4.28.

the sense of extending *ahiṃsã* to non-violent beings; it is not applicable to enemies in war, to criminals, wicked people, offending beasts and animals to be sacrificed or killed for one's livelihood. Even when the phrase 'all living beings' occurs, this exclusion is implied."[376] Thus, non-violence does not apply to actions perceived as self-defence or self-preservation. However, even with exceptions, *ahiṃsã* is highly praised in some of the *Dharmaśãstras*. In the *Anuśãsana-Parva* appears the well-known statement 'non-violence is the highest religion' (*ahiṃsã paramo dharmaḥ*), quoted by some authors as showing the intrinsic value of non-violence.

On the other hand, the ascetic concept is universal or absolute, admitting virtually no exceptions. "Thus the ascetic *ahiṃsã* is extended to every living being without exception. This implies that injury to an enemy, harm done to a criminal or to an attacking beast are to be termed as violence. It is this ascetic concept of non-violence which is applied universally."[377] Besides Jain and Buddhist sources, also the *Kural* advocates absolute non-injury as an ideal virtue that is not casuistical. This Tamil text is claimed as their own by the Jainas, Buddhists, Brahmanists and Saivists.

This two-fold approach to non-violence have baffled those who, with a shallow knowledge of Indian culture, saw a contradiction between Mahatma Gandhi's non-

376 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 52.

377 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 53.

violent struggle (representing the ascetic conception) and India's post-independence wars and armament (examples of the Vedic admitted exceptions to non-violence). For Manu and Kautilya, the two ancient legal authorities, war is a permanent institution, fully accepted and in certain cases even a duty.

"Non-violence probably gained its superiority by a slow gradual process. It was evidently incorporated into the Hindu social philosophy by virtue of the pressure exerted by the ascetic traditions. Yet it has been reinterpreted in social thought."[378]

Non-violence has been dealt with in its intrinsic value and its instrumental value (mostly for spiritual progress). The value of non-violence has been seen in the light of the two main trends into which Indian ethical tradition is divided, that is, for the maintenance of the social good and for the furtherance of personal spiritual development. It was elaborated in its 'negative' (i.e., abstention, the don'ts) and its 'positive' (i.e., the do's) sides. In some cases the stress was laid on its physical aspect, whereas in others the mental aspect was paramount. It was equally treated as a common duty, as a general value for everybody, and as a specific duty, in particular cases or for particular sectors. Indeed, plenty of value has been ascribed to non-violence, attributing countless merits and benefits for its upholders, whether in this life or after.

Physical and religious non-violence has been amply dealt with by both Brahmanic and ascetic concepts of

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378 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 90.

non-violence, and has been referred to in the above chapters.

Racial non-violence, expressed in terms of universal brotherhood and non-discrimination, is prevalent in Jain and Buddhist thought and, later, in the *Bhakti* movement (in both Hindu and Sufi currents). The same applies to non-discrimination based on sex; although, like everywhere in the world, women went on gaining parity slowly.

Psychological non-violence was also abundantly propounded within overall statements, as a value in itself and as a means to overcome one's own suffering, to make spiritual progress, and to promote general welfare. This is quite clear in the ascetic traditions. The Jainas have five rules, called *samitis*, to observe non-violence. One of them is careful speech (*bhãśã*) or vocal non-violence.[379] Control of speech is one the three to be observed.[380] Carefulness of speech, *bhãśã samiti*, is explained to consist of abstention from backbiting, ridicule, talking ill of others, self-praise and harsh words and speaking what is good for oneself and for others.[381] Similarly, Pali Buddhism offers many examples: "Watch for anger of words: let your words be self-controlled. Hurt not with words, but use your words well."[382] Of course, these are just some examples in the personal field, and do not deal with mass psychological violence. Nevertheless, there is in Jain culture a broader

379 *Puruśãrtha-Siddhyupãya* 3.203.

380 *Puruśãrtha-Siddhyupãya* 3.202.

381 *Niyamasãra* 4.62 by Kunda Kunda ãcãrya.

382 *Dhammapada* 232.

perspective in condemning as disagreeable (*apriya*) all that which causes uneasiness, fear, pain hostility, grief, quarrel or anguish of mind.[383]

Economic violence as stealing is found in one of the later *Upaniśads*.[384] It is also taken into account in the *Dharmaśãstras* and *Purãṇas*. That is, accumulation of property may include violence and thus become a demerit.[385] Taking away others' means of sustenance (*jãvita-artha*) is also seen as violence.[386] Besides *ahiṃsã*, among the five Jain vows (*Vratas*), there is *Asteya*, i.e. not to steal, and is clear that stealing knows many ways. Even speech that induces others to stealing is sinful (*sãvadya*).[387] Non-stealing (along with *ahiṃsã*) is made a duty to all castes in the *Bhãgavata-Purãṇa*.[388] Yãjñavalkya mentions non-stealing (along with *ahiṃsã*) as a means of merit for all and praised as moral restraint, while taking what is not offered is counted among the most evil acts.[389] Manu considers *ahiṃsã* and non-stealing as duties applicable to all the four castes (*catur-varṇa*).[390] *Ahiṃsã*, non-stealing and non-accumulation of property are three of the five

383 *Puruśãrtha-Siddhyupãya* 3.98.

384 *Śãṇḍilya-Upaniśad* 1.1, and *Jãbãladarśana-Upaniśad* 1.6.

385 *Bhãgavata- Purãṇa* 11.23.18.

386 *Śãnti-Parva* 114.3.

387 *Puruśãrtha-Siddhyupãya* 3.97.

388 *Bhãgavata- Purãṇa* 11.17.21.

389 *Yãjñavalkya-Smriti* 1.122, 3.312 and 3.136, respectively.

390 *Manusmriti* 10.63.

yamas[391] suggested for purification of mind and heart.[392]

In the ascetic tradition, Jain and yogins, non-hoarding (*aparigraha*) is valued. Seizing others' property (*artha*) entails depriving them of life-support (*bahiścara-praṇã*), thus constituting violence (*hiṃsã*).[393] In the Yoga school, accumulation (*parigraha*) of property involves sin in earning (*arjana*), and violence.[394] A Buddhist Pali text mentions loss (*jãni*) of property as a cause of suffering.[395] Non-stealing is among the five precepts applicable to all.[396] According to Gandhi, non-violent activity involves no exploitation.[397] An exploiter commits violence by his carelessness in fulfilling his unjustified desires.

Moral violence and its positive counterpart, moral non-violence, is present in Gandhi's thought. " ... harmlessness includes a positive, or rather, dynamic notion, namely that of actively resisting wrongness.[398] Resistance implies dissociating oneself from evil

391 "Restraints." The first 'limb' of Patanjali's eightfold Yoga, comprising five moral precepts of universal validity.

392 *Kàrma-Purãṇa* 2.11.13.

393 *Puruśãrtha-Siddhyupãya* 3.117.

394 *Yoga-S$_{ū}$tra* and *Vyãsa-Bhãsya* 2.30.

395 *Aṅguttara-Nikãya* I. page 186.

396 *Dīgha* I, 63.

397 M.K. Gandhi, *Rebuilding Our Villages*, page 47.

398 N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, page 25.

activities, it will cut the root of structural violence and isolate evil for sheer lack of cooperation."[399]

A correlation has been established between internal violence and its behavioural expression. The examples are many: According to the Jaina sources a violent man who is motivated by passion (*kaśãya*), first injures himself (*ãtmahanana*), irrespective of the fact whether another being is injured or not.[400]A Sanskrit Buddhist text mentions that violence (*vadha*) creates disturbances (*vibandha*) in the welfare *(śreyas*) of the acting person himself.[401] One who has enmity (*vaira*) towards beings cannot obtain mental peace (*manas-śãnti*).[402] Action done with *hiṃsã* kills faith (*śraddha*) and faith being destroyed, it ruins the man.[403] Certainly in Buddhism, in which mind is the forerunner of behaviour, the correlation is stressed the most. In any case, all ascetic groups attach importance to and provide their means for overcoming personal violence.

The so-called 'positive' or active non-violence has been stressed in Vedic and ascetic currents, mostly associated to social duty or to spiritual advancement. The active aspect is given prominence particularly in Buddhism: "The Buddha urged the monks to go out for the good of many people (*bahu-jana-hita*), for the happiness (*sukha*) of many people, out of compassion to

399 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 119.

400 *Puruṣãrtha-Siddhyupãya* III. 47.

401 *Abhidharma-Dīpã*, page 417.

402 *Bhãgavata-Purãṇa* 3.29.23.

403 *Śãnti-Parva* 264.6.

the world (*loka-anukampã*), for the gain, good and happiness of both gods and men.[404]"[405] One increases merit by progressively embracing with *Maitri* (true friendliness) one's immediate environment of beloved beings (*priya-sattva*), then proceeding to one's neighbours, the village, other villages and, virtually, the world.[406] Universal friendliness (*Mettã*) is of central ethical importance in Pali Buddhism, whereas compassion (*karuṇã*) is the equivalent in Sanskrit Buddhism.

It has been well recognized that non-violence has recorded one of the earliest triumphs in humanity. The non-violent opposition to Vedic sacrifices led by the Jains and Buddhists eradicated from India one of the main foundations of Brahmanical monopolisation and economic violence. However, it is with Mahatma Gandhi that non-violence becomes a more systematic methodology for struggle against violence and social transformation.

404 Vinaya, *Mahãvagga*, page 23.

405 *Ahimsa, Non-Violence in Indian Tradition*, Unto Tähtinen, Rider and Company, Great Britain, 1976, page 64.

406 *Śikṣã-Samuccaya*, pages 119-120.

A NOTE ON DECENTRALISATION OF POWER

New humanism attaches particular importance to the decentralisation of power. Concentration of power and any form of monopolisation is seen as the root of social contradiction and violence. Therefore, we should give some antecedents of decentralisation of power in India.

"The concentration on dynastic histories in the early studies was also due to the assumption that in 'Oriental' societies the power of the ruler was supreme even in the day-to-day functioning of the government. Yet authority for routine functions was rarely concentrated at the centre in the Indian political system. The unique feature of Indian society - the caste system - integrated as it was both politics and professional activity, localized many of the functions which should normally be associated with a truly 'oriental despotism'. The understanding of the functioning of power in India lies in analyses of the caste and sub-caste relationships and of institutions such as the guilds and village councils, and not merely in the survey of dynastic power."[407]

During the Chola dynasty in Tamil Nadu (900-1300 CE), "The degree of autonomy at village level was something quite remarkable for the times. Chola officials participated at village affairs more as advisers and

407 *A History of India,* Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, page 19, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain.

observers than as administrators... The basic assumption in the type of village autonomy emerging at this period was that each village should be administered by the villagers themselves. To this purpose a village assembly was formed, and authority was vested in this assembly… A village could be divided into wards and each ward could call an assembly of its members… The general assemblies included most of the local residents… The working of these assemblies differed according to local conditions… some of them forming a small executive body for routine matters… had the power to constitute smaller committees of any size from amongst its members for specialized work… most of the work was done on a voluntary basis in the smaller villages… The degree of autonomy at village level was such that shifting relations in the upper levels of the administrative and political structure did not interfere with he routine life of the village. That this was possible is due to the considerable degree of economic and political self-sufficiency of the village and both social institutions and economic activity were organized within this framework."[408]

408 *A History of India*, Romila Thapar, Vol. 1, pages 200-204, Pelikan Books Ltd., Great Britain

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While in the 21st century, still misconception and mystification shroud India in the Western mind. Though Indian civilization is the cradle of martial arts, yoga, vegetarianism, the decimal numeral system, and non-violence –to name but few- still a mist envelops one of the oldest civilizations on Earth.

This book does neither try to dispel that mist nor provide basic information that readers can find elsewhere. Rather, it takes us beyond, on a guided tour to pinpoint for us specific instances that made India earn its reputation as the land of wisdom. The author focuses on lesser known aspects of India's religion, culture, history, society and personalities. As a scout would, he identifies tracks of people and facts that contributed to humanize India, placing freedom and happiness of human beings as paramount.

As today's world goes on getting integrated towards a universal human nation, cultures need to reshape themselves according to higher ethical and spiritual standards. Those standards may not just lie in an unknown future, but also in the best of their past. This book may well be a valid pointer for this crucial turning point of humanity.