
RELIGION

AND

LIBERATION

Editor

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

RELIGION AND LIBERATION

Preface

For this issue of *Islamic Perspective* we have chosen "Religion and Liberation" as the theme. Though liberation theology has yet not struck its roots in India it is being appreciated more and more by Indian theologians too. It must be said that in India too, it is Christians who took lead in this field. However, it is catching on. It is often said that it is rather difficult to develop liberation theology in Hinduism, the major Indian religion. However, some attempts are being made in Hinduism too, in this direction. However, literature on this subject is still very scanty.

Some Buddhist monks and scholars have made pioneering attempt for developing liberation theology specially in Sri Lanka and Thailand though, in Buddhism too, there is yet no strong tradition of liberative theology. However, it must be said, Buddhism is most amenable to development of such a theology. It originated as a religion of protest.

Like Buddhism Islam too is quite amenable to liberation theology as there is strong emphasis on equality both social as well as economic. 'Adl' (justice) has central place in Islam. However, Islam got so feudalised over period of time that it nearly lost its liberative thrust. However, in their struggle against Shah, the theologians of Iran and some Islamic scholars against began to emphasise its liberative elements. Khomeini, though a conservative theologian, was also compelled to emphasise liberation in Islamic theology. Such was the pressure of events. However, soon after the revolution Islamic conservatism began to assert itself.

Sikhism too, like Islam and Buddhism, is strong on liberative elements. It also originated as a protest movement and

circumstances compelled it to remain anti-establishment throughout the Mughal period in India. But thereafter it began to coalesce with establishment and its strong liberative thrust came to be gradually eroded.

However, most of these religions are faced with great challenges today and among them is the challenge of exploitative capitalism. Capitalist consumerism, on one hand and its naked exploitation on the other, have had corrupting influences on religions too. And, therefore, now a few young Indian theologians and scholars too are rethinking their respective theologies. This volume is an attempt to project new liberative theological thinking among the theologians and scholars of major Indian and Asian religions. We have tried to cover all major Asian religions namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikkism.

It is by no means a pioneering attempt but it does try to put new theological thinking among these major religions from liberative angle in one volume. Though it has its own flaws for various reasons it is hoped, it would be appreciated as there is growing need for such literature today.

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

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Religion and Liberation

Asghar Ali Engineer

Recently I attended two seminars on religion and liberation, one in Thailand and the other in Dehradun (India). Both the seminars which had drawn participants from South East and South Asian countries like Korea, Japan, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan were quite interesting and promoted sharing of ideas and experiences. The first seminar in Thailand (from 19 to 21 September, 1988) was organised by Liberation, Religion and Culture (LRC) committee of Asian Cultural Forum for Development (ACFOD) and the other in Dehradun (from 5th to 8th October, 1988) was held by CCA & URM (Christian Conference of Asia and Urban & Rural Mission).

The most fundamental question arises what is the relationship between religion and liberation? Is there any? Or none. The traditional left has been taking a view that that there is no relationship between the two. Not only this but it maintains that there is inverse relationship between religiosity and liberation. More religious a person less liberated he is. This applies much more to the society, according to the traditional left. Greater the hold of religion over a society, much more difficult it would be to liberate it as religion is a powerful tool for vested interests and also religion tend to be a conservative ideology politically, socially as well as economically.

While one must concede there is some truth in this view of religion it must be said that it is not the whole truth. The traditional left view of religion is being subjected to criticism. In the post-colonial and post-industrial society new factors have emerged which require reassessment of the role religion can play in social transformation. Firstly, religion has been found to be much more tenacious than what it was thought to be. It showed no signs of withering away with the advancement of science and technology. It is, on the other hand, getting stronger and stronger not only in the backward countries of the third world but also in the advanced countries of the first world.

Secondly, religion is intricately connected with culture and culture does not involve merely an ideological point of view as religion does but also the whole way of life. It is very difficult to relate the whole way of life mechanically to the rapid changes of science and technology. In fact in this rapidly changing scenario culture and religion provide stabilising element. These (i.e. religion and culture) become, in other words, a sort of shock absorbers. Also, science and technology are supposedly value-neutral and religion and culture are value-oriented. These values help control the monstro-city of modern technology and its destructive power. It is true human values in general (devoid of any religious affiliation) play the same role. But while religion appeals to a great mass of people, atheistic or rationalist humanism appeals to only a few people among the educated elite. Even Stalin had to use religious appeal during the second world war in order to involve all sections of Russian society.

Thirdly, the vast urban conglomerations generated by modern industrial civilization produce intense feelings of alienation and meaninglessness. The upper classes in these societies indulge in hedonistic pleasures facilitated by consumerist capitalist culture, the lower classes toil for the pittance and get marginalised. Life for these sections of society become not only drudgery but also meaningless. However, none, neither the rich nor the poor, develop any organic roots in these vast urban conglomerations. Most of them live mercenary life. Such life inevitably leads to boredom and acute sense of

alienation. Socialist societies though somewhat qualitatively different, do not radically depart from this course. The sociological study of the Soviet society indicates that there is boredom and sense of anomie among the people. Religion, not only gives a set of values but also a meaning and sense of direction to the people. Today's Russia is even deriving a sense of identity from its religious history. It is celebrating 1000 years of Orthodox Christianity.

This is not to say that religion cannot be or has not been exploited by status quoist interests. It can undoubtedly be made an opiate for the people. Our whole history is full of such instances. It was not for nothing that Marx, a great social analyst with keen insight into human history, called religion, in one sense "opium of the people". More often than not religion has sided with vested interests and opposed any revolutionary change.

However, this is not the whole history of religion. Religion has also been associated with protest. In fact some religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism originated as protest movements. These religions had strong subversive elements in them until rendered harmless by the powerful establishments which sprung around them in due course of time. In fact all the semitic prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam had strong subversive elements and started as protest movements. Judaism originated as protest against slavery of Israeli nation at the hands of Pharaoh, Christianity's main concern at the time of its origin was with the Palestinian serfs under the political domination of Byzantine empire and Islam began as a movement for justice, equality and brotherhood. All the three religions were subversive of the prevailing status quo. Talking of Indian religious tradition Buddhism and Jainism were protest against Vedic ritualism and Brahmin domination. In no way these religions, as premordial experience of their founders indicate, were supportive of repressive and exploitative structures of their time. In fact, they were strong protest movements against them. They brought about fundamental shift in the power structures and brought the weaker sections (*mustad'ifun*) in the Quranic theology to the fore and made them the masters.

Thomas Munzer of medieval Germany whom Engels describes as 'communist pries' and 'priest of future' led the peasant struggle and his sermons were full of references to the Bible, specially the concept of 'Kingdom of God' which he set out to establish here on this earth. The Qaramitas in Islamic history established communes and common kitchens and did away with private property except in weapons. True, both the experiments did not last longer but that was because of the power of vested interests rather than ideology of religion. All these religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) were rendered harmless by ritualising them, thanks to the controllers of new establishments which came into existence around these religions. All that remained of these revolutionary protest movements which seriously concerned themselves with the oppressed were a set of rituals to be dutifully performed to achieve 'salvation'.

Religion thus has to be seen in proper perspective. Mechanical approach would not do. What is required is a serious analysis of the situation. One has to raise a serious question whether religion can inspire those waging people's struggles in the countries of the third world? And if so, how? Christianity has undoubtedly been an inspiring source for fighters for liberation in Latin American countries, specially in Nicaragua. It was to grapple with this question that consultations were held both in Thailand as well as in Dehradun in India. Those who participated were not only believers but also social activists in different fields.

The consultation in Thailand brought social activists from Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, Newzealand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh together to share their experiences and exchange ideas. They enriched each others insights gained through their struggles for the oppressed. The participants, it was clear, drew inspirations from their faith.

Opening the consultation Shri Siddartha of Bangalore (India) threw light on the activities of LRC (Liberation, Religion and Culture) Committee. Its main aim, according to him, was to bring together from Asia-Pacific region all those who are struggling for justice while drawing inspiration from their respective faiths. He also catalogued the activities so far conducted.

Mr. M.A. Sabur of Bangladesh and secretary of ACFOD (Asian Cultural Forum for Development) said that liberation means different things to different people. A bonded labourer wants to become free labourer, an indebted person wants to be free of obligation, a prisoner wants to come out of jail and a hungry person wants to be liberated of his hunger. Also, among those who have something but not enough desire to have something more. A vendor would like to be a small shopkeeper, a small farmer would like to possess some implements and a tenant would like to have a small house. This would have liberating effect on them. So it is deprived sections, in one sense or the other, who like to be liberated from their present position, Mr. Sabur said.

Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer, on his presentation on Islam said that Islam strongly denounces concentration and accumulation of wealth. Others are deprived because some accumulate. Islam, he said, does not approve of wealth being circulated among the rich. It is the Quranic principle. Wealth, if accumulated, turns into hell fire. Then it destroys everything. Social order cannot remain stable if, as the holy Quran says, the small needs (*ma'un*) are not fulfilled. One who comes in the way of fulfilling these needs is believer of religion. Islam encourages spending in the way of God but discourages purposeless, reckless spending (*israf*). In other words while Islam encourages spending for fulfilling basic needs of oneself and others it disapproves consumerism. Consumerism is great curse. It is modern form of hedonism which is enjoyment for enjoyment's sake and without caring for others needs. It promotes possessiveness without any improvement in quality of life.

Also, Islam strongly denounces oppression. The oppressed have been given right to fight against oppressors (*jihad*). Those who are oppressed are permitted to fight because they are being wronged and Allah is capable of helping them (i.e. the oppressed). Also, Allah replaces one set of people by another so that there is no oppression in the world. Had He not done that the world would have been full of oppression and the mosques, churches, synagogues and temples would have been demolished

wherein God's name is remembered God who is just and against oppression.

Mr. Muzaffar Chandra, a human rights activist from Malaysia, endorsed Mr. Engineer's views and added that Islam stands for creation of humane society and is against racialism. Unfortunately some who are either narrow minded or have vested interests misuse Islam and even perpetrate racialism in its name. They emphasise only ritual aspects and propagate their (rituals') revival. Fundamentalism, for example, does not set out to revive spirit of justice and equality so fundamental to Islam. It emphasises only the rituals and reinforces the hegemony of ruling classes thus perpetrating injustices. He also pointed out the specificity of Malaysian revivalist movement and analysed the interplay of various forces unleashed by the process of development. Analysing the dynamics of revivalism he said that the rural youth is attracted to the cities and finds itself alienated both psychologically and physically. He proves to be ready recruit for fundamentalism whereby he tries to establish his position in society.

But for a humane society one will have to emphasise the spirit of justice and equality so integral to Islam. Also, in a pluralist society, exclusiveness should be replaced by inclusiveness failing which communal and racial conflict would result. No wonder there are racial and communal tensions in Malaysia. Islam, on the other hand encourages tolerance and mutual respect.

Swami Agnivesh, noted social activist from India maintained that in Vedas God is one and formless. God is just, merciful and compassionate and true worship is to be God-like i.e. to be just, merciful and compassionate. Also, according to Swami, true liberation is to achieve inner liberation. It is interaction between *Yam* and *niyam*. *Yam* implies non-violence and non-stealing. Also, non-violence does not mean meek submission; on the contrary it means compassion towards other fellow-human beings and being non-oppressive towards others. Also, non-stealing means to be non-exploitative because stealing means stealing the just share of others.

Also *moksha* is not only personal liberation but liberation of oneself through liberation of society. Also in Vedas there

is no private ownership of property; it is to be owned by the community as a whole. Also Vedic society had the concept of three missions. Brahman's mission was to fight against ignorance; kshatriya's mission was to fight against injustice and that of Vaishya's was to fight against scarcity. And the rest i.e. the Shudras have to be apprentice in any of the above category and to join one of them on completion of apprenticeship.

Also, he said *yajna* did not mean any fire-burning ritual but it essentially meant fire of revolution, fire to fight against injustices in the society. He said when recently we led a march against *sati* (widow burning practice in India) though we could not enter Deorala, the village where the widow was burnt we performed a *nari-moksha maha yajna* (i.e. we lit fire to liberate women from social oppression). The real *yajna* was that our hearts were burning with desire to liberate women and through this symbolic act we wanted to lit fire of liberation in every heart.

Next Sulak Sivaraksa, a leading Buddhist intellectual from Thailand and a spirit behind ACFOD consultation took the floor. He spoke from Buddhist perspective. He said Buddha was primarily concerned with *dukkha* (suffering humanity). He wanted liberation from suffering which is fundamental for any liberation. But modern capitalism has increased our suffering by promoting consumerism and competitiveness. Both consumerism and competitiveness are great curse. In order to liberate a person he should be made to liberate himself herself from greed. Greed and social justice are inversely proportional. Capitalism ignites fire of greed. Also, one has to distinguish between need and greed. A humane alternative to modern capitalism could be searched through Buddhist ethics which gives primacy to removal of *dukkha*.

But what is most painful is that Buddhist monks themselves are being drawn into consumerist greed. They are even invited to inaugurate massage parlours which are promoted by those who thrive by capitalist profit-making. It is a tourist attraction and tourists are invited so that big departmental stores can thrive. Ultimately it is capitalist greed which is at the root of the evil.

Also, the Buddhist monks are identifying themselves with

Thai or Sinhala nationalism. This is again antithesis of Buddhist ethics. Chauvinism cannot ensure liberation. Things must be seen in proper Buddhist perspective. Buddhism today seem to have lost itself in capitalist avalanche. It must be redeemed from this.

Mrs. Kahu, a Mari tribal from Newzealand said that there are 300,000 Maries in Newzealand. The colonialism destroyed their language, their culture and thereby wholeness of their life. Mauris, she said acknowledge wholeness of life, physical and spiritual. The spirituality of our struggle lay in preservation of our tradition orally. Loss of our culture meant for us loss of our dignity. Our cultural values were raped, as if, by the colonists and our dignity insulted and destroyed. We are struggling to maintain our culture which is our spirituality. However, the capitalist greed would not spare us. Despite heavy odds we shall continue to fight to maintain our identity and dignity.

Mr. L.F. Habito from Japan while presenting his views said that common people work hard and their work is their inspiration. It is middle class activist who needs spirituality and spiritual inspiration. He also said that capitalist efficiency is nothing but greed for more profit and this efficiency is sought to be imposed on people which disturbs their very rythm of life. Japan is 'prospering' on one hand and there are increasing number of cases of suicide on the other. Families have not only been atomised but splitting further. Many school children are known to be either committing suicide or killing their parents. What good is this society? What is needed is integrity and wholeness, to be oneself. Capitalist society only produces alienation on one hand and gross injustices, on the other. We have to search for better and more humane alternative.

In Japanese context he said Zen Buddhism's emphasis on meditation is of some value for us. Zen Buddhism uses method of breathing in and breathing out which essentially means breathing out all that is harmful to the society and oppressive for common people and breathing in implies ingesting all that is positive in life and all that promotes justice and compassion.

Pracha, a Thai Buddhist activist also felt meditation helps those activists who, in their middle age, become somewhat security conscious and despair of results of their struggle. Meditation not only refreshes them but also gives them a new determination to continue their struggle. Meditation does not mean withdrawal from activism but energising activism while also reflecting on our shortcomings. Encounter with self should not be avoided. It may prove fruitful.

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The consultation held in Dehradun from 5 to 8 October was on similar lines. Mr. Devsundaram of Bangalore was its convenor on behalf of CCA (Christian Conference of Asia). Mr. Sahay from Bombay who has worked with tribals of Bihar introduced the subject. He critically examined the role of religion in people's struggles. He felt religion has and can play positive role in inspiring people to fight for social justice. Religion should not be dismissed as a negative force. It has been and will continue to inspire many people to carry on their struggles against great difficulties. Struggle is God. However, one should also understand that religion, as Marx said, is voice of voiceless and sigh of the oppressed. Once oppression is abolished and voiceless get their voice religion would wither away and God would cease to be relevant.

Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer said in his response that religion would not wither away or God would not cease to be relevant but it would acquire new significance. In conditions of oppression religion is struggle-oriented (or acts merely as a solace in many cases) but once a just society is established religion would acquire a cosmic dimension. Human alienation has two dimensions : social and cosmic. Social alienation can be overcome by establishing a just and humane society but cosmic alienation does not end thereby. Cosmic alienation has to be overcome through search for meaning. Once existence is taken care of essence becomes important. Religion thus is transformed from struggle for justice to a struggle for meaning and essence of life. No wonder that religion remains relevant in socialist societies. Religion provides a transcendent

dimension to human existence and its significance should not be underrated, Mr. Engineer said.

The Vietnamese delegate who was catholic Christian working on history of Christianity in Vietnam said that Buddhism is the religion of Vietnamese people who are basically quite religious. He said the Vietnamese people drew inspiration from Buddhist values in their struggle against imperialism. The Catholics, on the other, sided with the imperialists and isolated themselves from the people. Even after the people's victory in their struggle against imperialism Catholics remained loyal to America and isolated themselves. Only a few Catholics have come forward to take sides with the Vietnamese people.

In the process of unification of North and South Vietnam and in the process of political change Buddhism played very positive role, But the Catholics feel uncomfortable in the present socialist regime. However, a small group of Christians are making efforts to draw the Christian masses into people's struggle and they are doing away with the duality of this and other world. He said that Vietnamese people are still struggling against scarcity. They are trying hard to build their economy which was destroyed during the imperialist war. The people of Vietnam draw inspiration from Buddhism in their struggle. Religion remains very much relevant even after liberation from imperialism.

South Korean delegates were three, two Buddhists and one Christian. The Buddhist monk from South Korea said that there are 30 per cent Buddhists in South Korea and 25 per cent Christians and rest are Confusians, Shamanists and others. Rapid urbanization and industrialisation took place in South Korea in last few decades. But it only increased exploitation, especially of urban workers. Urban slums have multiplied as rapidly as industrialization itself. It was argued that dictatorship was necessary for rapid economic growth and of course there was collaboration between military dictatorship, multi-nationals and American imperialism.

Thus the structures of oppression strengthened themselves. But workers of different religions as well as non-believers came together. The workers' solidarity became a powerful

force. They now talked of national self reliance though at one time Americans were seen as saviours. Now the slogan raised was 'Yankees go home'. It was result of this unification movement. Buddhists, Christians, Confusians and others all came together. Working class solidarity proved formidable as in South Korea today 70 per cent people live in urban areas and only 30 per cent in rural areas.

The traditional Buddhists were legitimising status quo but the young Buddhists no longer accept this. They want to overthrow the status quo and are getting more and more radicalised. They are no longer enamoured of beautiful temples. We organised the young Buddhists for renewal of true Buddhist faith which is liberative, not repressive. Our slogan was religion for people, not people for religion. Also, if we are working for people we should not ask which religion they belong to. We should work for the people whichever religion they belong to.

Prof. Arun Kamble, a Dalit activist from Bombay spoke on the plight of Dalits in India. He quoted profusely from Hindu scriptures to show that they were treated in these scripture with utter contempt. Their social status was worse than those of animals. There was no scope for improvement of their fate within Hinduism and hence following Ambedkar, a Messiah of Dalits, they embraced Buddhism. It was Buddhism which liberated them from bondage. However, their agony is not over. They are still discriminated and treated as untouchables by the caste Hindus. They are struggling and shall continue to struggle against the caste-ridden Hindu society which has also penetrated Islam and Sikhism, unless their status improves.

Mr. Engineer also threw detailed light on the plight of the Bohras who are struggling against the absolute dictatorship of the Bohra high priest and his highly oppressive religious establishment. The plight of reformist Bohras, Mr. Engineer said, is worst than those of untouchables in one sense. No one can even talk to them, once social boycott is declared against them by the high priest. We are, however, determined to struggle for our human and democratic rights. We are

inspired by our faith in doing so. Liberation of the oppressed is our motto, he said.

Prof. A.S. Narang of Delhi University, threw light on Sikhism and the problems of Sikhs in contemporary India. Guru Nanak, he said, was against all religious hypocracies. He taught that all human beings have been created by God and there should be no distinction between them. All worship Him and sing His glory. Why then these differences between them. Guru Nanak's teachings are full of humanism and want to establish a humane order. However, terrorists and Sikh fundamentalists are exploiting Sikhism for their own ends. Our attempt is to emphasise the liberative elements of Sikhism. Guru Gobind Singh fought against the Mughal tyranny and wanted to establish a just and humane order. This was true concept of Khalsa (i.e. pure).

Thus all participants were agreed that faith and inter-faith solidarity is necessary to fight against injustices of the capitalist system. Struggling people of all faiths, while drawing inspiration from their respective faiths, should come together to carry forward their struggles. Religion, if interpreted in the light of premodial experience of its founder, can become a source of inspiration for liberation struggles. Also, true liberation struggle would bring about inter-faith solidarity. It was felt even atheists have conviction and spirituality of their own and they should also join the common struggle. Dr. G. Vijayam of Atheist Centre, Vijaywada, emphasised this in his clear exposition. He spoke with missionary zeal and brought to bear his deep conviction on the subject.

It was enriching and ennobling experience and one came convinced that religious values can be rich source of strength to combat capitalist greed and its unjust structures and to establish a just society based on humanity and compassion.

Religion and the Left: An Introduction

Cornel West

Notwithstanding the secular sensibilities of most leftist intellectuals and activists, religion permeates and pervades the lives of the majority of people in the capitalist world. And all signs indicate that the prevailing crisis in the capitalist world is not solely an economic or political one. Recent inquiries into the specificity of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, state repression, bureaucratic domination, ecological subjugation, and nuclear exterminism suggest that we need to understand this crisis as that of capitalist civilization. To extend leftist discourses about political economy and the state to a discourse about capitalist civilization is to accent a sphere rarely scrutinized by Marxist thinkers : *the sphere of culture and everyday life*. And any serious scrutiny of this sphere sooner or later must come to terms with religious ways of life and religious ways of struggle.

In this introductory essay, I shall pose three crucial questions to contemporary Marxism regarding religion. First, how are we to understand the character and content of religious beliefs and practices? Second, how are we to account for the recent religious upsurges in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the United States? And third, in which ways can these upsurges enrich and enhance—or delimit and deter—the international struggle for human

freedom and democracy? In the present historical moment, these queries strike me as inescapable and important.

Religion and Marxist Theory

The classical Marxist understanding of religion is more subtle than is generally acknowledged. Crude Marxist formulations of religion as the opium of the people in which the religious masses are viewed as passive and ignorant objects upon which monolithic religious institutions impose fantasies of other-worldly fulfilment reveal more about Enlightenment prejudices and arrogant self-images of petty bourgeois intellectuals than the nature of religion. Contrary to such widespread crypto-Marxist myths about religion, Marx and Engels understood religion as a profound human response to, and protest against, intolerable conditions. For Marx and Engels, religion constituted alienated forms of human cultural practice under circumstances not of people's own choosing. On this view, religion as an opium of the people is not a mere political pacification imposed from above but rather a historically circumscribed existential and experiential assertion of being (or somebodiness) by dehumanized historical agents under unexamined socioeconomic conditions. Marx and Engels characterized religion as alienation not primarily because it is "unscientific" or "pre-modern," but rather because it often overlooks the socioeconomic conditions which shape and mould its expression and thereby delimits human powers and efforts to transform these conditions. In short, the classical Marxist critique of religion is not an *a priori* philosophical rejection of religion; rather it is a social analysis of and historical judgment upon religious practices.

For Marx and Engels, religion often overlooks the socioeconomic circumstances which condition its expression, principally because the religious preoccupation with cosmic vision, ontological pronouncements on human nature, and personal morality hold at arm's length social and historical analysis. Hence religion at its worst serves as an ideological means of preserving and perpetuating prevailing social and historical realities and at its best yields moralistic condemnations of and utopian visions beyond present social and historical realities—

with few insights regarding what these realities are and how to change them. The Marxist point here is not simply that religion alone is an impotent and inadequate form of protest, but also that without a probing and illuminating social and historical analysis of the present even the best-intentioned religionists and moralists will impede fundamental social and historical transformation. In stark contrast to crude Marxists, Marx and Engels do not claim that only a substitution of a rigid Marxist science of society and history for false religion and glib moralism can liberate humankind, but rather that a Marxist social and historical analysis can more effectively guide transformative human praxis motivated, in part, by moral and/or religious norms of human freedom and democracy.

This more nuanced understanding of religion has rarely surfaced in the Marxist tradition, primarily owing to the early Eurocentric development of Marxism. In Europe—where the Enlightenment ethos remained (and still remains) hegemonic among intellectuals and the literate middle classes—secular sensibilities were nearly prerequisite for progressive outlooks, and religious beliefs usually a sign of political reaction. The peculiar expression of critical consciousness in Europe focused on a corrupt and oppressive feudal order which the institutional church participated in, firmly supported, and buttressed. And through the advent of Marxism itself bears traces of this Enlightenment legacy, the deep sense of historical consciousness nurtured and promoted by Marx and Engels led them to understand religious beliefs as first and foremost cultural practices generated from conflictual and contradictory socioeconomic condition, rather than as a historical sets of philosophical arguments. Of course, Kant, Fichte, and especially Hegel and Feuerbach contributed to such an understanding.

The Marxism of the Second International—with its diverse forms of economic determinism, Kantian moralism, and even left social Darwinism—viewed cultural and religious issues in a crude and reductionist manner. Karl Kautsky's monumental work *The Foundations of Christianity* (1908), is an exemplary text in this regard. The major anti-reductionist voices in this deterministic wilderness were those of the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola and the Irish Marxist James Connolly. Lenin

and Trotsky indeed undermined the crudity and reductionism of the Second International, but they confined their efforts to the realms of politics and the arts. Neither provided serious and sustained anti-reductionist formulations in regard to ethics and religion. In fact, the Third International remained quite reductionist on such matters.

The centrality of morality and religion loom large in the works of Antonio Gramsci. For the first time, a major European Marxist took with utter seriousness the cultural life-worlds of the oppressed. Though still tied to a rationalist psychology which neglected unconscious impulses, and a revolutionary teleology which uncritically privileged industrial working-class agency, Gramsci highlighted the heterogeneous elements which comprise the cultural ways of life of oppressed people and the fragile, ever-changing character of these elements in response to contradictory socioeconomic circumstances.

Gramsci understood culture as a crucial component of class capacity. Like James Connolly before him and Raymond Williams in our own time, Gramsci examined the ways in which cultural resources enabled (and disabled) political struggle among the exploited and excluded in capitalist societies. While Lukacs disclosed the reified character of contemporary capitalist culture—the way in which processes of commodification and thingification permeate bourgeois thought, art, and perception—Gramsci focused on the cultural means by which workers and peasants resisted such reification. While Karl Korsch enunciated his principle of historical specificity—the need to acknowledge the materiality of ideology and the diversity of conflicting social forces in a particular historical moment—Gramsci applied this principle and specified the nature of these conflicting social forces with his complex notions of hegemony and historical blocs.

Ironically, the major figures of so-called Western Marxism were preoccupied with culture—but none was materialist enough to take religion seriously. Whether it was Adorno and Marcuse on the subversive character of highbrow music and poetry, Sartre and Althusser on the progressive possibilities of avantgarde prose and theater, or Benjamin and Bakhtin on the revolutionary potential of film and the novel—all rightly

viewed the cultural sphere as a domain of ideological contestation. Yet none highlighted religion as a crucial component of this cultural sphere.

It is important to note that it has been primarily third world Marxists—for whom issues of praxis and strategy loom large—who have confronted the religious component of culture in a serious way. Peru's Jose Carlos Mariategui, China's Mao Tse-tung, and Guinea-Bissau's Amilcar Cabral were trail-blazers on such matters. All three shunned the reductionism of the Second International, eschewed the excessive hostility toward religion of the Third International, and transcended the Enlightenment prejudices of the Western Marxists. Mariategui, Mao, and Cabral—whose cultural concerns inspire black Marxists, feminist Marxists, gay and lesbian Marxists in the first world—recovered and refined the classical Marxist insights regarding the materiality and ambiguity, the relative autonomy and empowering possibilities of cultural and religious practices by grasping the existential and experiential content of such practices under capitalist conditions. In our own time, such Marxist historians as Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson in England, W.E.B. Du Bois and Eugene Genovese in the United States, Marc Bloch and Henri Lefebvre in France, Manning Clarke in Australia, and Enrique Dussel in Mexico have begun to come to terms with the complex relation of religious practices to political struggle. In other words, the age of crude Marxist reductionist treatments of religion—along with the European secular condescending attitudes which undergird them—is passing. Concrete social and detailed historical analyses of the relation of religion to revolutionary praxis is now a major issue on the agenda for contemporary Marxism.

Religion and Marxist Politics

The fundamental challenge of religion for Marxist politics is how we should understand religious practices as specific forms of popular opposition and/or subordination in capitalist societies. Recent religious upsurges around the world—in post-industrial, industrial, and pre-industrial capitalist countries—call into question bourgeois theories of secularization and

crude Marxist theories of modernization. The world-historical social processes of rationalization, commodification, and bureaucratization have generated neither a widespread "disenchantment with the world," a "polar night of icy hardness and darkness," nor a revolutionary class consciousness among industrial workers. Instead, we have witnessed intense revivals of nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Modern capitalist processes indeed have transformed traditional religious worldviews, intimate *Gemeinschaft*-like arrangements, and customary social bonds; but these processes have not eliminated the need and yearning for such worldviews, arrangements, and bonds. Recent nationalist, ethnic, and religious revivals constitute new forms of these worldviews, arrangements, and bonds, with existential intensity and ideological fervor.

There are three basic reasons for this. First, the culture of capitalist societies has, for the most part, failed to give existential moorings and emotional assurance to their inhabitants. The capitalist culture of consumption—with its atomistic individualism, spectatorial passivity, and outlooks of therapeutic release—does not provide meaningful sustenance for large numbers of people. So in first world countries, religious responses—often in nostalgic forms but also in utopian ones—are widespread. Given the relative lack of long-standing ties or traditional links to a religious past, these responses are intertwined with the prevailing myths of European modernity: nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, anti-Orientalism, and homophobia. This is why religious (as well as nationalist and ethnic) revivals are usually dangerous—though they also can be occasions of progressive opportunity. Such opportunity is significant in that religious impulses are one of the few resources for a moral and political commitment beyond the self in the capitalist culture of consumption. These impulses often require commitments to neighbor, community, and unknown others—though such commitments are ideologically circumscribed.

The second reason religious revivals emerge is that they constitute popular responses to intense capitalist domination of more traditional societies. This is especially so in third world countries in which the cultural forms are either indigenous or

colonial and the capital is primarily external or international. The boom-town character of industrialization, urbanization, and proletarianization demands that cultural ways of life, usually religious, provide strategies for new personal meaning, social adjustment, and political struggle.

The emergence of the most important third world development in religious practices—the liberation theology movement—consists of such strategies of new personal meaning, social adjustment, and political struggle. This movement began in Latin America primarily in response to rapid capitalist penetration, quick yet painful industrial class formation, rampant state repression, and bloated urbanization. This response was not only rooted in Christian thought and practice, it also flowed from the major “free” space in these repressive regimes, the church. And given the overwhelming Roman Catholic character of this movement—with the monumental reforming impetus of Vatican II (1962-65) and the groundbreaking counter-hegemonic posture of the Medellin Latin American Bishops’ meeting (1968)—these new strategies became more open to personal meanings, social adjustments, and political struggles informed by prophetic elements in the Scriptures and ecclesiastical tradition as well as progressive social and historical analyses.

Liberation theology in Latin America—embodied in the works of Gustavo Gutierrez, Reubem Alves, Hugo Assmann, Jose Miguez-Bonino, Victorio Araya, Ernesto Cardenal, Paulo Freire, Elsa Tamez, Jose Miranda, Pablo Richard, Juan Luis Segundo, Enrique Dussel, Beatrice Couch, and others—is generated and sustained by popular religious opposition to the consolidation of capitalist social processes in Latin America. It is, in part, an anti-imperialist Christian mode of thought and action. Similar liberation theology outlooks—with their own contextual colorings—are found in Africa (especially South Africa), Asia (especially the Philippines and South Korea), the Caribbean (especially Jamaica), and the United States (especially among blacks and feminists). Yet in terms of widespread concrete praxis, none yet rivals that of Latin America.

The last reason such religious revivals emerge is that they constitute anti-Western forms of popular resistance to capitalist

domination. This is especially so in those third world countries (or pockets in the first world, as with indigenous peoples) in which a distinct cultural and religious way of life still has potency and vitality compared to Western modes of religion. For example, in the Middle East and parts of Asia and Africa, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or traditional religions still have substance and life. Hence these religions serve as cultural sources against not simply Western imperialism but also much of Western civilization—especially Western self-images, values, and sensibilities. Such resistance, like all forms of resistance, can be restorative and reactionary (as in Iran) or progressive and prophetic (as among many Palestinians).

In short the religious revivals, along with nationalistic and ethnic ones, fundamentally result from the inability of capitalist civilization to provide contexts and communities wherein meaning and value can be found to sustain people through the traumas of life. And since there can be no potent morality without such contexts and communities, these religious revivals represent an ethical challenge to Marxism. Instead of the promised autonomy and progress of the European Enlightenment, the modern West has bequeathed to the world—besides ingenious technological innovations, personal liberties for some, and comfortable living for the few—mere fragments and ruins of a decaying and declining civilization. This decay and decline owes much to the captivity of its ways of life to class exploitation, patriarchy, racism, homophobia, technocratic rationality, and the quest for military might. Of course, many of these remarks—and even more so in the realm of personal liberties—can be made of “actually existing socialist” civilization. But our focus here is the capitalist world. And as this capitalist world continues its deterioration, religious revivals will more than likely persist. The great question is: Will such revivals enable or disable the left in its struggle for human freedom and democracy?

Religion and Marxist Strategy

Religious upsurges in the third world (and second world, as in Poland) may quite clearly contribute to the building of a

left movement. As we have seen in Latin America—where over 200,000 base Christian communities exist as concrete praxis-centers for social change, communal support, and personal sustenance—and parts of Africa and Asia, religion plays an important role in liberation struggles. The prophetic church in Nicaragua, with its tensions (both healthy and unhealthy) with the state, is the best recent example of this crucial role.

The major contribution religious revivals can make to left strategy is to demand that Marxist thinkers and activists take seriously the culture of the oppressed. The fundamental shift in the sensibilities and attitudes of Marxists requires a kind of de-secularizing and de-Europeanizing of Marxists praxis, a kind of laying bare and discarding of the deep-seeded Enlightenment prejudices that shape and mold the perspectives and perceptions of most Marxists. This shift does not demand a softening of critical consciousness but rather a deepening of it. It does not result in an anti-science stance but rather in anti-scientism (the idolizing of science). It does not yield an anti-technology view-point but rather an anti-technologism. Nor does it produce a rejection of reason but rather a specifying of liberating forms of rationality.

Such a shift is necessary because after over a century of heralding the cause of the liberation of oppressed peoples, Marxists have little understanding and appreciation of the culture of these people. This means that though Marxists have sometimes viewed oppressed people as political or economic agents, they have rarely viewed them as *cultural* agents. Yet without such a view there can be no adequate conception of the capacity of oppressed people—the capacity to change the world and sustain the change in an emancipatory manner. And without a conception of such capacity, it is impossible to envision, let alone create, a socialist society of freedom and democracy. It is, in part, the European Enlightenment legacy—the inability to believe in the capacities of oppressed people to create cultural products of value and oppositional groups of value—which stands between contemporary Marxism and oppressed people. And it is the arrogance of this legacy, the snobbery of this tradition, which precludes Marxists from

taking seriously religion, a crucial element of the culture of the oppressed.

Needless to say, shedding the worst of the Enlightenment legacy does not entail neglecting the best of this European tradition. Relentless criticism and historical consciousness remain the crucial ingredients of any acceptable emancipatory vision—just as protracted class struggle and an allegiance to socialist democracy remain indispensable features of any recognizable Marxism. So the call for an overcoming of European bourgeois attitudes of paternalism toward religion does not mean adopting religious viewpoints. Religious affiliation is neither the mark of ignorance nor intelligence. Yet it is the mark of wisdom to understand the conditions under which people do or do not have religious affiliation. In this sense, science neither solves nor dissolves the issue of religious beliefs. Instead history provides us with tradition against which we must struggle yet in which we must critically abide. The grand quest for truth is a thoroughly historical one which takes the form of practical judgments inseparable from value judgments upon, and social analytical understandings of, prevailing socioeconomic realities. There indeed are standards of adjudication, but such historically constituted standards include multiple viewpoints worthy of adoption. Hence, the quest for truth continues with only human practice providing provisional closure.

If Marxists are to go beyond European bourgeois attitudes toward the culture of the oppressed, without idealising or romanticizing these cultures, it is necessary to transcend a hermeneutics of suspicion and engage in hermeneutical combat.* In other words, Marxists must not simply enact *negative* forms of subversive demystification (and, God forbid, more bourgeois forms of deconstruction !), but also *positive* forms of popular revolutionary construction of new personal meanings, social adjustments, and political struggles for human freedom and democracy. These new forms can emerge only after traversing, transforming, and building upon the crucial spheres in society

*Hermeneutics is a branch of theology dealing with the explanation and interpretation of biblical texts—Eds,

—religion, family, labor process, state apparatuses—in order to consolidate and unite multiple organizational groupings for fundamental social change.

So to take seriously the culture of the oppressed is not to privilege religion, but to enhance and enrich the faltering and neglected utopian dimension of left theory and praxis. It is to believe not simply in the potential of oppressed peoples but also to believe that oppressed people have already expressed some of this potential in their actual products, their actual practices. To be a person of the left is not only to envision and fight for a radically free and democratic society; it is also to see this society-in-the-making as manifest in the abilities and capacities of flesh-and-blood people in their struggles under conflictual and contradictory socioeconomic conditions not of their own choosing. This is the fundamental message regarding the relation of religious practices to a revolutionary praxis beyond capitalist civilization. And this special double issue of MONTHLY REVIEW—initiated by its wise and courageous editors—is an effort at such an audacious yet propitious undertaking.

Courtsey *Monthly Review*.

Liberative Undercurrents in Hindu Thought—A Preliminary Inquiry

by M.C. Dinakaran

It has been remarked often as incredible the survival of India as a nation state four decades after the end of colonial rule. Cassandras cited the multiplicity of religions, castes, subnationalities and languages present in a land-mass of continental dimensions as factors contributing towards the eventual breakdown of administration and the balkanization of the country. This was proved wrong: today India has her place in the sun and the concept of a sovereign Republic has gained acceptance among the near billion strong population of the truncated subcontinent.

While accepting this one need not feel complacent about the real, live threats which are still prevalent in the country. It is the biggest tragedy of our contemporary history that decades of adult franchise, democratic experiments and industrialisation could not succeed in eradicating the twin evils of fundamentalism and sectarianism. It can even be observed that the politicization of the population without adequate growth in economic and ecological welfare has contributed to the growth of forces and apparatuses of religious reaction.

While a host of factors had jointly contributed to the growth of communal and sectarian forces, one major cause was the failure of the Left to tackle the growth of various fundamentalisms. This was partly due to the erroneous and self-defeating approaches leaders of the communist and socialist parties took while grappling with the deep religiosities of the Indian people. The usual strategy of the Left was to consider religion as the opiate of the people and debunk religiosity as the natural product of the false consciousness of people. As a consequence matters pertaining to religion were given very little emphasis and this has (arguably) contributed to the stunted growth of the organized Left in the heartland of India.

The damage such an approach wrecked became obvious as the disgruntled masses sought refuge under the umbrella of right reactionaries and religious fundamentalists. These parties strived to consolidate masses under their respective symbolisms, ethos and platforms and thus succeeded in offering attractive and simplistic solutions to problems of enormous complexity. The net effect of this is seen in the tragic happenings of Punjab, the horrible massacres of U.P. and the precarious communal situations in many towns all over the country.

The inadequacy of orthodox Marxist and Socialist ideologies to grapple with problems of culture and tradition had been deeply felt by non-dogmatic intellectuals and activists all over the world. It is from such a concern that various liberation theologies sprung up in Latin America and Philippines to catch the imagination of the oppressed millions. The parallel efforts in Islam to go to the roots and historically renew the prophet's philosophy was also seen in countries like Iran. What this has achieved is of tremendous import to contemporary world history. By reading the texts within a liberative matrix the theologians attempted to conscientise the oppressed as a first step towards breaking the chains of ignorance, misery and heartless exploitation. The victory of the Sandinist's forces at the beginning of this decade in Nicaragua was the direct outcome of efforts put in by hundreds of theologians, over decades, to conscientise the oppressed there.

The success of the Sandinist revolution which has underscored the congruence of true religion with revolution has helped the orthodox Left in reappraising the role of religion in neo-colonial societies. Simultaneously the orthodox churches have also begun to accept the reality as it exists, and have grudgingly given a little room for the radical priests to operate within the rigid structures of official religion.

While the dialogue between the Marxists and the priests have begun to take place within the Semitic religions, in India such a discourse seems to have never taken off. The reasons for this are manifold ; the most important being the total absence of an official church and a network of clerics in Hinduism, which cannot be called a religion in the Semitic sense. Hinduism is a label of convenience which can include God-denying Charvakas and world-denying Vedantins. In the plethora of cosmologies and theologies which abound, it is very difficult for any orthodox Marxist to delineate any single particular stream of thought as the dominant one and intelligently respond to it.

At the same time the all inclusive spirit that the seers had shown while accommodating dissenting tendencies have always encouraged serious practitioners of the religion to accept the Marxist world-view as a heterodox perspective. The natural consequence was an absence of intelligent dialogue at the best and rank indifference at the worst.

Lately however, the trend seems to be getting reversed. The Indian State has consciously tried to build up over the last four decades the Brahmanic Darsanas which accept the sanctity of Vedas as the legitimate Hinduism. As a corollary the modern Hindu accepts the Upanishads and Brahma Sutras and the theology of Advaita Vedanta as synonymous with Hinduism. The heterodox sects and popular movements which were essentially avaidic and anti-Brahminical gets little mention in officially prepared textbooks.

Such a revival of State-sponsored religion has, however, made it easier for potential liberation theologians of Hinduism to offer an alternate and 'radical' (in the etymological sense: going to the roots) interpretation of classical Hinduism. In fact, from Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda to

Justice Ranade and Mahatma Gandhi attempts were made for such a revaluation but it is only in the eighties that a serious rereading of the ancient scriptures were undertaken in right earnest. Swami Agnivesh and his dedicated band of Sanyasis are the most visible manifestation of this trend, but it would be possible, as time passes, to discover new and refreshing theologies emerging in order to offer a democratic and liberating alternative to the stifling ethos of classical theology.

It is in this background that this article is written. It tries to gauge the power of liberating tendencies in ancient Hindu texts. It also tries to recount the efforts of modern thinkers like Vivekananda and Gandhi who drew a lot of inspiration from the religious texts in their attempts to mobilise and rally the masses against colonial tyranny.

II

The Vedas are the most ancient and the most misunderstood of all the scriptures. Critics of Hinduism have traced to the Vedas the source of all social ills that plague religion nowadays. Terms such as Varanashrama, Yajna and Arya have all along attracted special criticism from the Left and Liberal thinkers as the fountainhead of caste, ritualism and xenophobia prevalent among the Hindus. However a close reading of the Vedas would reveal that the original meanings inherent in the Vedas are radically different from the meanings they acquired as time progressed and society grew complex.

The truths were heard by the inner ear and seen by the inner eye of the Rishis ; hence the Vedas are called *apaureshaya* (not written by man), or Sruti : that which is heard. The Vedas normally deal with four subjects : Vijnana (Scientific Knowledge) ; Karma (Common activity) ; Upasana (behaviour towards liberation and Jnana (Spiritual Knowledge). Vedic Sages did not deny the world : no world weariness is in evidence in the Vedas. The sages are positive in their acceptance of life and death. They embraced the value of truth, goodness, beauty and of Eternal Law, Rita.

The Rishis felt the living presence of the Divine in the entire physical universe. They loved life as well as God, and, placing themselves under the discipline of Satya. Rita and Tapas (Truth, the Eternal law and Penance) they led a life of utter dedication and consecration to the divine.

Rita was the period of classical primitive communism of the Indo-Aryan tribes. It was pre-vedic and we find many nostalgic references to it in Vedic literature as a bygone age in which justice, truth and brotherhood ruled supreme. In Rita society the tribe worked together, labour was collective and the produce of labour was shared more or less equally by all.

According to this outlook, everything in the world behaved according to its nature, called Rita. The collectivist, egalitarian, fraternal life of that society was its nature, its Rita. Varuna, the protector of Rita was the personification of virtue, justice and morality.

Rita in its cosmic sense stands for the Law of Nature which imposes order and symmetry on chaos and creates aesthetic form or beauty.

Rita in its social sense is the fundamental Moral law which imposes order and symmetry on the life and character of man and produces goodness. Rita demands championship of good against evil—the battle of Dharma.¹

Satya has two aspects : first, it is integrity ; secondly it is Sat, or the ultimate reality to be realised through inner vision. Behaviour was found to conform or not to conform to the Vedic values. Hence it falls into two conflicting categories: Satya and Asatya (truth and untruth) and Rita and Anrita (justic and injustice).²

The Vedas claim there is one Supreme Reality and many ways to approach it. The Divine can be realized not only through an expansion of consciousness but can be met by each individual soul in itself, for the individual and the universal are essentially the same.

It is by self-giving or sacrifice (yajna) that the Supreme Purusha made the creation of this world. By self-giving man can also participate and earn the help of Gods to recreate himself in the life of the supreme spirit. This is the true inner sacrifice of which the outer is only a symbol. The self-offering

of the aspirant makes it possible for the gods to be born in him and increase their own substance in him, thereby helping man to reach his own inner heights. This inner sacrifice is thus the way to realize the supreme ideal of manifesting the divine in man.

There was a theory in Puranic times that the Sudra could not be permitted to hear the Vedas. But in the Vedas it is made only clear that the Veda was preached to one and all.³ The working class was not to be denigrated because the people of Vedic times worked; they sowed and reaped. But all this was done in a spirit of reverence. To them cultivation was an act of worship. Labour did not render the earth sterile, much less bring ruin upon her. Labour let the earth be earth in the fullest sense of the word. In the process humans became ever more human. To relate them to nature meant adhering to Rita. In and through humans the cosmic Rita becomes ethical behaviour.⁴

The Vedic life anticipated Marx in that nature is man's material and spiritual inorganic body. Nature is not what humans *have* but what they are. What, in the case of Marx, was but an abstract philosophical truth was for the Vedic people something lived and experienced.

III

Swami Agnivesh has given a signal contribution in unearthing the true liberative message of the Vedas. In a paper entitled, 'Religion and Social Liberation: An Indian Perspective', Swami Agnivesh underlines the revolutionary impulses of religion in its "pristine pure and formative stages".⁵ The early religious teachers were far from offering mental opium to the common people but "roused them from their long stupor and state of downright immorality, fear and lasciviousness--into that of spiritual wakefulness, making them respond in a more positive way to higher values of life".

Swami Agnivesh draws a clear line between true religion and blind faith, superstition and ritualism which pose as true religion. He regrets to find that many well-meaning Marxists cannot as yet understand this distinction. He says, "to open

up possibilities of real revolutionary advance in society, bridges of understanding and cooperation have to be built between Marxism and Religion". The exploiting classes take cover under religion only to oppose Religion. Hence the conflict between Marxism and Religion, the resultant of "the machinations of the exploiting classes and intellectuals serving them who in the name of religion oppose revolution and revolutionary transformation of society."⁶

It is not possible to attain truth within, without simultaneously fighting the forces of untruth outside. "Therefore", affirms Swami Agnivesh, "the fight against Untruth, Unfreedom and Unjust Social Order become part and parcel of one's spiritual pursuit." The Vedas do not depend on each individual's goodness for the creation of a Just, Truthful, Non-violent society. They emphasize the need for structural changes and a perpetual class struggle to stamp out the evil of accumulation and iniquity.

Swami Agnivesh enumerates the following as cardinal principles of a Vaidic society:

- (a) *No Birth Right* : No individual can claim any special right or privilege in society because of his/her birth in a certain family. Right of inheritance (of means of production and distribution etc...) is therefore ruled out; similarly caste distinctions based on birth are anathema to the Vaidic social order.⁷
- (b) *Varna Ashram*: The society will regulate an individual's life through four varnas (chosen path of a mission) and four Ashramas (division of life into stages leading to sublimation of an individual self into universal family). The entire educational system is geared to the task of producing missionaries as opposed to mercenaries. Every child has to choose one of the three missions viz., mission to fight against forces of ignorance, Ajnan: Brahman; mission to fight against the forces of injustice, Anyaya: Kshatriya; mission to fight against the forces of inadequacy, abhava: Vaishya. Only a person failing to qualify for any of these missions is

designated Shudra and is called upon to serve one of these like an apprentice. (There is nothing menial or derogatory in the word Shudra: Janmana Jayate Shudra, Karman Dwija Uchyate, by birth everyone is born a Shudra; it is only after qualifying for a certain discipline that one becomes Brahmin etc...) Even this classification was not rigid promotion to higher varna as an incentive and demotion to lower varna as punishment keeps the society in ferment. Thus we see that varna means a mission and has nothing to do with colour or caste or racial superiority.

Private ownership of means of production and distribution is incompatible with the Vaidic Varna Ashrama system. A person entitled to a status based on his/her Action, Talent and Aptitude (Guna, Karma, Swabhava). Instead of private ownership the vedas prescribe a collective form of living and sharing. The social system cannot depend on an individual's sense of charity and piety. It has to be so structured that equality of opportunity and common ownership of means of production and distribution become hallmarks of an egalitarian society. There is constant exhortions to toiling masses, the Aryans, to unite and fight against the Dasyus (Akarmah Dasyu: one who does not labour is a robber),

The true Vedic message is quite different from what is purveyed by the religious and political establishments. Vedas are world affirming and revolutionary and take clear cut positions on socio-political matters: supporting the working class against the leisure class; railing against the concept of private property: and highlighting the imperative of organized action in favour of a just order, the Rita. It is this emphasis of Vedas, on Truth (Satya) and Justice (Rita), which makes them potentially revolutionary texts in our dishonest and unjust social structures.

IV

As stated in I the ruling classes have succeeded in installing a vulgarised form of Vedanta as the mainstream philosophy of

Hinduism. The officially sponsored view endorsed the European understanding of Indian philosophies: it equates Brahminism with Hinduism. Under such a perception Hinduism boils down to a world-denying, mystical bunch of thoughts which strives to rationalise all iniquities and exploitations here and now under the pretext that the world being an illusion (Maya) whatever going on here also are illusions.

That those who man the modern Indian State finds it eminently desirable to revive a mystical and reified doctrine to act as the base of a homegenised Hindu religion is no secret. However, Vedanta is not unambiguous in endorsing the ruling class positions. It becomes evident while going through the texts of Vedanta, particularly the more popular Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads that along with discourses which may point towards such a world denying hypotheses, there also lie messages which logically point towards the opposite direction.

The perception that action now needs greater knowledge of both the world and the self will be authentic only if the world and the existence in it are real. World affirmation and world denial depend respectively on the acceptance or the rejection of Becoming as an authentic mode of Reality. Therefore, as Krishna Chaitanya explains in his monumental study of the Mahabharata, neither simple polytheism nor simple transcendentalism can explain God functioning as the ground of both essence and existence.⁹

Gita says: Action is born from Brahman, Brahman from the Imperishable; therefore Brahman resides in altruistic action.¹⁰ Vyasa brings God to here and now by introducing the concept of Supreme Person (Purushottama). He quietly eases out the old Brahman (of the other world, para) by making the new Brahman the source of action on the one hand, and the derivative of the Supreme Person on the other hand. Brahman is derived from the Supreme Person. The new intermediary Brahman is not allowed to enjoy even this pointless intermediate role for long; the concept is made to become further blurred and to get lost. "Great nature is my womb. I seed it with the germ and from it are born all things."¹¹ The old Brahman which blocked the world from appearing has been ejected from

the scene completely and we now only have the divine intentionality, the Supreme Person, and Nature, his instrumentality.

While official Hinduism projects the world-denying side of Vedanta, it also strives to distort the original meanings of texts. The most distorted concept is Yajna, which is assumed to be ritual sacrifice. Vyasa, the author of Gita, has unequivocally made it clear that Yajna means altruistic action.

Yoga Vasishtam, another treatise of Vedanta occupying as an honored position as Gita in scholarly circles, says: "individuality and action are not two things. The individual is action and action is individuality." This is in marked contrast to the missionaries of Hindu revivalism who attempt to tie down a population struggling against all odds in a maze of superstition, fatalism and defeatism.

Yajna means sacrifice in the higher sense, the self giving of itself, or even itself for purposes vaster than its own. The concept of Karma is purified of its association with fundamentalist magic to make it as the action of man and to escalate it as yajna, sacrificial action in the higher sense.

When man undertakes work as sacrifice with concern for others, and the gods help the fruition of such work there is a reciprocity which is auspicious not only for man but also for the gods. "The world cannot survive if every man is predatory, it flourishes if everyone becomes altruistic".¹²

In the movement from artha to kama to dharma we move from lack of concern to concern and from more attachment to less. The emancipated and the evolved individual considers the whole world as himself. The Gita defines him as *sarva-bhukahiterarata*--concerned in the well-being of all creatures. And Krishna enjoins on all that they should work for the weal of the world (*loka samgraha*).¹³

The man who has attained illumination and is not attached to the fruits of action must work for the weal of the world, with no less enthusiasm than that shown by people in their work for personal advantage. In the (intense) manner he unenlightened act from attachment to their work (for personal ends) so should the enlightened also act, but without attachment, for *loka-samgraha* --welfare of the world".

Gita also exhorts man to work towards *Rajyam Samrudham* which means the Opulent Realm. This is akin to the Kingdom of God found in Semitic religions and is aimed at enabling men to work towards a finer order of human society while having a change of state within themselves.

Upanishads also convey the same message. The first verse of Isavasya Upanishad states : "By the Lord pervaded must all this be - whatever moving there is, is the moving world." A life which accepts the world as Brahman's self-expression will be one of sacrifice. In it there is no room for greed, delusion or conflict. That is why the Upanishad says: with that renounced thou mayest enjoy—covet not the wealth of anyone at all". Kathopanishad also warns against hankering after wealth.¹⁴ The Brihadaranyaka is even more emphatic on this point when it says : "Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth".¹⁵

Vedanta tries to raise the human self to the pinnacle of divine glory. It does not attempt to, as the critics allege, debase the divine by bringing it to the human level. In the medieval literature of the Bhakti School this notion was used to justify social equality.

The Bhakti movement was deeply humanist and was rooted in Vedanta. Renowned saints were inspired by it, they denounced the cruel and heartless orthodoxy of the Brahmin priesthood; they were persecuted and ostracized for freely mixing with Shudras and untouchables and preaching that they should be given a humane treatment.

The Bhakti saints accepted the theory of the four varnas emanating from four different limbs of Brahma. They utilised this concept to prove that all of them had the same atma and were children of the same Supreme Creator.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal taught that because men are united in love to God and therefore to each other, there should be no distinction between them. Thus Chaitanya became an opponent of caste and would not allow it among his followers. Kabir would accept only his inner vision and experiences. Neither Vedas nor Koran would he permit to compel him. God is to be seen and experienced directly and immediately. Through love and joy one experiences the

ultimate who is everywhere. Disputation, theorizing and argumentation will neither save nor lead one to God. Instead "...he who has seen the radiance of love, he is saved." Kabir found all rituals hollow in content: "One only needs to look within to discover him. Hari is in the East: Allah is in the West. Look with your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram".

Kabir, like Chaitanya, recognized no caste distinctions among his followers, for all are divine and cannot be reduced to a caste. "All the men and women of the world are his living forms".

Bhakti movement worked within the perimeter of conventional theology to bring dignity to the oppressed masses who were all along subjugated by many layers of exploitative apparatuses. One leading stream of this movement, that of Guru Nanak, gave birth to the dynamic religion of the Sikhs; an attempt to synthesize the best of Hinduism with the best of Islam.

V

The colonial rule provoked many different responses in the Hindu mind. The most visible of these were the great reformist movements initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand Saraswati. While the aim of both these movements was to rediscover the lost religiosity of the old religion in terms of categories brought into the subcontinent by the practitioners of Islamic and Protestant civilizations, it was Swami Vivekananda who went deep into the scriptures to come up with the liberative message of Hindu texts. This last section is devoted to understand the role played by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in rousing a population by guiding them to draw inspiration from their own well-springs of traditions.

Swami Vivekananda characterised the rule of capitalists as the rule of Vaishyas, the third Varna. Before this, society had passed through rule by priests (Brahmin), and the military (Kshatriya). "When the priest rules" Swami Vivekananda says, "there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds; . . . none but they have the right to impart that

knowledge". The Kshatriya rule is tyrannical and cruel. The rule by the commercial class is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. Culture begins to decay during this period.

"Yet a time will come" prophesies Swami Vivekananda, "when there will be the rising of the Shudra clan, with their Shudrahood, that is to say, not like that as at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the Shudras of every country will gain absolute supremacy in every society".

Swami Vivekananda cites the distribution of physical comforts as the main advantage of the Shudra (labourer) rule. He was exposed to the merciless nature of corporate capitalism during his trips to the West. Under capitalism, he noted, "machines are making things cheap, making for progress and evolution, but millions are crushed, that one may become rich; while one becomes rich, thousands at the same time become poorer and poorer and whole masses of human beings are made slaves". He comes to the conclusion: "The present mercantile civilization must die, with all its pretensions and humbug."

With astonishing precision Swami Vivekananda could predict, "the next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which, but it will be either Russia or China".

Vivekananda endorses socialism at a time when the first socialists were just being noticed in Europe. "I am a socialist", he said, "not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread." He appreciated the positive features of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya rajns.

But he is sceptical of the feasibility of a system where the knowledge of the priest period, the culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial and the equality of the last could be combined. "But is it possible?" he asks, "yet the first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last—they must have it—none can resist it".

Though Swami Vivekananda preached Advaita akin to Shankara's concept of monism he was devastating in his

in the movement. Sarvodaya as an ideology was still effectively anti-bourgeois. It gave a dream to India's multitudes: a new heaven and new earth free of injustice.

Gandhi did not stop at the restriction of accumulating private property nor at the equitable distribution of surpluses. He unequivocally opposed private property and pointed towards the inevitability of socialization of wealth. Sarvodaya is a homegrown variant of peasant socialisms once popular in Europe. Hence it is confusing for anyone to observe a new variety of Gandhism being synthetically raised by the government which aims to mix up the goals of agrarian socialism with the imperatives of a welfare state. Sarvodaya aims at the eradication of all exploitation, caste and class, and would not stop before wealth is socialized and property nationalized. To achieve this Gandhi offered these means: the establishment of a non-violent state, a legally run trusteeship and facilities given to the masses to employ struggles incorporating non-cooperation, disobedience of laws, militant non-violent struggle etc.,. It is a pity that those people who see in Gandhism the most evolved form of bourgeois liberalism direct their criticisms against these eminently realistic attempts to place power right at the grassroots level.

Gandhi subjugated his faith to the demands of reason. He would accept no idea, however well-established and sacred, unless it appealed to his reason. He did it by rephrasing his faith in rational terms. He turned faith into what he called a workable assumption.¹⁶ In this manner he thought faith would help to correct the faults of reason and reason would help to correct the faults of faith. "I exercise my judgement about every scripture, including the Gita," said Gandhi, "I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason." He also viewed the received texts with caution: they "suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly they come through a human prophet and then through the commentaries of interpreters."

To Gandhi not only did colonial capitalism represent a 'grand regression' in Indian history, but he also rejected the notion that the next stage of development in India must be capitalist modernization (westernization). He was asserting that it was possible, through human praxis, to evolve a path of

development which would sidestep capitalism, in spite of the introduction of capitalist institutions into India during the colonial period.

The Gandhian vision of a 'new society' may be described as a decentralized system of village communes—self-governing, self-sustaining-interlinked with each other but autonomous, and with a weak central state apparatus whose functions would be residual. The governing norms in these villages Gandhi envisaged as love and co-operation, and not competitive acquisitiveness. The Gandhian conception, is not based on the multiplicity of wants and their satiation but a conception of 'self-transcendence' in which perfected individuals have only basic needs. For Gandhi societies do not have to pass through the tunnel of capitalism—a system which energizes avarice and competitiveness in each of us, so that each is set against everyone else.

On economic life, Gandhi argued that 'if India is to attain true freedom . . . then sooner or later the fact must be recognized that people will have to live in villages, not in towns.'¹⁷ But Gandhi did not want to accept today's villages which though alienated regimes, stand stagnant, depraved, corrupted and emaciated. He had a different village in mind beneath the outer encrustations, which hid the indomitable spirit and goodness of the peasantry. In his own words, "the ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor small-pox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour . . . It is possible to envisage railways, posts and telegraph . . . and the like . . ."¹⁸

To Gandhi not only was external colonialism the enemy of the rural poor, but also the internal colonialism of a market system which set cities against the villages—a point quite inevitably grasped by Mao, too, in China, which is the only other mass society comparable with India. Gandhi said on this internal colonialism: 'the cities with their insolent torts are constant menace to the life and liberty of the villages . . .

villages are being exploited and drained by the cities.¹⁹ Visionary and philosophic is his famous description of the overall organization of society:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majority of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it . . . No one will be first, and none the last.²⁰

Madan Handa describes the Gandhian outlook in relation to the dichotomy between the ideal and the material as follows: With the notable exception of Gandhi's own idealized version of India's past the Gandhian perspective might perhaps be described as dialectical human realism.²¹ Philosophically Gandhi maintained he was within the Indian Vedantic tradition, a monistic system of thought which holds "transcendent reality"—transcendent beyond mind and matter—as the prime cause.²² Vedantic thought accepts the dialectics of mind and matter more precisely of the manifest and non-manifest—in all forms of life, and holds that this dialectic is resolved only through transcendence: that is by going beyond the present determined and determining existence. This transcendence is held to lead to continuous evolution. It is agreeable that Hegelian idealism may itself be interpreted as a particular variant of vedantic thought.

Both Marxists and Vedantists recognize that the principle of equality, or unity, of mankind is not realized in the world as it exists. Both define a final state, a "human state" (Marx) or a 'divine state' (Vedantist); and both suggest a path of development through 'praxis', which can transcend the present limits of existence and bring us to a higher state of life. Marx sees the process of transcendence being carried through a class,

as a social process. Vedantic thought views transcendence as a process of individual perfection. Gandhi was in the mainstream of Vedantic philosophy, but with a primary difference. Gandhi was not just a speculative philosopher, a meditative saint seeking individual perfection. He was an activist, a man of action, a Karma Yogi who sought individual perfection through service to mankind, accepted society as his field of action and sought a new social organization for a new India.

That the goal of Gandhi differed markedly from the practice of Gandhians was another irony of our contemporary society. The developmental policies initiated by Gandhi's favourite Congressman, Jawaharlal Nehru had little to do with Gandhian praxis. On the political plane the ideal of 'gram swaraj' never was given a good try by successive governments, the possible exception being the devolution of state power attempted by the Karnataka government and the West Bengal government.

The breathtaking pace at which industrial capitalism is growing on the fourth decade of independence has thrown up serious challenges for the sustenance and furthering of individual freedom. The mercenary philosophy which guides monopoly capitalism has percolated down to all realms of social behaviour and everything including culture is getting converted into commodities for unequal exchange. The acquisitive drive of the middle classes has generated a development policy aimed at directing investment towards the production and marketing of luxury goods at the expense of wage goods which are desperately needed by the masses. The planning process itself has turned its emphasis from Public Sector to privatization and the country today witnesses the phenomena of a dual society where an affluent top decile of the population lords over the wretched rest.

The tensions such a scenario throws up includes both sporadic resistance offered by the rural landless to continuing oppression as well as the mobilization of the urban poor on communal lines by vested interests. In a social set up where uncertainties loom large on each day of one's existence religion offers a tempting detraction as well as a means for recovering one's lost self-esteem. The proliferation of Bhajan Mandalis and Sat Sangs, financed often by local traders and run by

hoodlums, in our suburban milieus is due to the yearning the rootless migrant has for some symbols of cultural support.

The classic left formulation that there is an ontological incompatibility between Religion and socialism has led the progressive movements to disregard and ignore the role religion plays in moulding the consciousness of people and to reinforce the imperialist campaign that there does exist such an incompatibility. The objective for any democratic movement should be to include believers in the process of building a society of justice and fraternity. The poor turn to religion to remain organized, articulate, conscious and active. If one were to ask a farmer, a worker, or a domestic servant what concept he had of the world, he would surely couch his reply in religious terms. The most elementary concept that the oppressed people have of the world is a religious one. The traditions that we have inherited contain enough resources to enable the oppressed break their shackles. Religion is too important a subject to be left solely in the hands of the reactionaries. Hinduism has to take a qualitative leap to an ethical religiosity that can generate universal love and commitment while preserving on a higher level what is genuinely humanizing in cosmic religiosity.

Notes

1. Atharva Veda XII 1.1.
2. Rg Veda VI 50.2
3. Yajur Veda 26.2 says:
 "So may I speak the sacred word to the masses of people—to the Brahmana and the Rajasya (Kshatriya), to the Shudra and the Vaisya, to our men and to the stranger". Also, as against the later devaluation of Sudras as a caste Vedas speak of the field labourer as 'kavi', creative worker (Rg Veda X 90.12) the term for the Vedic poet. Similarly, the chariot-maker has been described as 'manishin' wise man (Atharva Veda III 5-6), another term for the Vedic seer.
4. Fr. S. Kappen, "The Vedic World view and the Challenge of Ecological Liberation., PIPAL TREE, Bangalore, 1987.
5. Swami Agnivesh, "Religion and Social Liberation: An Indian Perspective, PIPAL TREE, Bangalore, 1987.
6. *ibid.*,
7. Yajur Veda, Ch. 40

8. Rg Veda 10-22-8.
9. Krishna Chaitanya, Mahabhartā, a literary study, Chapter X. Clarion Books, Delhi, 1985.
10. Gita III. 15
11. Gita XIV-3
12. Krishna Chaitanya, Mahabharata, Ch. XI
13. Gita III. 20
14. Kathopanishad (1-27)
15. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4-53
16. T.K. Mahadevan, Gandhi, "A Modernist Heresy", in "Indian Thought—an Introduction" (Ed. Donald H. Bishop, Wiley Eastern, Delhi)
17. Pyare Lal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1958 p. 544
18. Ibid., p. 545
19. Ibid., p. 550
20. Ibid., p. 580
21. Madan Handa, 'The Elements of a Gandhian Social Theory', essay from 'In Theory and Practice: Essays on the politics of Jayaprakash Narayan', Ed David Selbourn.
22. See S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore (ed.), 'A Source Book of Indian Philosophy', Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957.

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5. Swami Agnivesh, *Religion, Revolution and Marxism* Pamphlet.

Role of Hinduism in Modern Indian Society

Uday Mehta

India has witnessed a massive upsurge of traditional as well as modern religio-mystical cults of God-Men, Swamis, Gurus, Shastris, Bapus and Bhagats particularly during the last three decades. Some of these cults operate at local, district or regional level, while some have established an extensive network at national as well as international levels. Along with the new cults, the hold of various traditional religious sects has acquired new dimension in recent years. Increasing politicization of religion in last few years has posed a serious dilemma with regard to role of religion in modern Indian Society.

It is not only in India but even in Western Countries particularly even in industrially advanced nations like the U.S.A. the new along with traditional religious movements have gained an unprecedented momentum in recent years. The growing influence of religion in U.S.S.R. and China has been also widely reported. The powerful influence of the church in Polish Solidarity movement and Buddhist impact on Vietnamese liberation struggle has been also widely acknowledged. The dominant role of the church in overthrow of the authoritarian regime in Philippines and the Buddhist monks' hold in recent reactionary political upheaval in Ceylon could not be

overstressed. Decisive influence of Islamic fundamentalism in Iranian revolution and several other Muslim countries has been sufficiently highlighted. While the emergence and significance of the liberation theology in Latin America would call for an independent appraisal.

The persistence and extension of religious influence in advanced Western Countries, in colonial and post-colonial nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and even in so called socialist societies have raised some basic questions with regard to the significance of religion in human society. Large number of sociologists and anthropologists on the basis of their survey of primitive as well as modern societies have come to the firm conclusion that it is impossible to visualise any present or even future society devoid of presence of religion in some form or the other. They feel that the need for religion would be felt in all human societies, irrespective of their cultural or technological levels, or socio-economic systems as religion fulfills some basic urges, emotional needs and provides sense of security to individuals. Several critics in this context have also pointed out the hollowness of the Marxist dictum of reducing the significance of religion as an opiate for the oppressed and exploited strata.

Marxist View

It is true that Vulgar Marxist appraisals have focused exclusively on the role of religion as opium for the poor and highlighting its reactionary significance for the toiling people. Nevertheless such dogmatic assertions should not be confused with the historical, dynamic and objective approach evolved by Marx and Engels in their critique of religion.

A close perusal of the views expressed by Marx and Engels on religion as reflected in their various works, as their observations on the radical significance of the early Christianity, its peculiar origin and Jesus as messiah of the oppressed and in their writings on present war in Germany, highlighting Munzer's effective use of images of early Christianity for raising the morale of the poor peasants. Their works on Hegel's philosophy of Right, the Holy Family, Jewish question and others reveal

their deep concern for all relevant facts, their dynamic approach, examination and modification of their interpretations in the light of fresh appraisals and exposure to new situations, and the least dogmatic assertions, as the dominant features of their perspective on religion.

Marx and Engels in all probability were influenced by Tylor's view in tracing the origin of religion in the primitive man's sense of awe and fear, in the face of an inexplicable nature, religion emerging as fantastic reflection in man's mind of those external forces that control their daily life. It was however Engels who first pointed out that "while both magic and religion have their origin in humanity's lack of control over the forces of nature, religion however also reflects humanity's lack of control over the social forces that resulted from class domination."¹ Marx and Engels in their concrete appraisal of the role of religion through the ages highlighted its contradictory functions, its positive as well as negative significance. While indicating that historically the primary function of religion world over had been to sanctify repressive institutions, they have also brought out the fact that rebellious movements, among the oppressed in pre-bourgeois periods and even subsequently, the aims and aspirations of social agitations have also found expression through traditional religious ideas adopted to the needs and expectations of the insurgent masses.

Such observations also throw new light on Marx's dictum that religion is the opium of the masses, which is generally presumed to mean that religion is a drug which enables the toiling strata to bear their miseries by losing themselves in dreams that deprive them of the capacity to revolt. This is the conception of the Enlightenment philosophers and it is undoubtedly a good deal of what Marx meant, but it is not all that he meant. Immediately preceding his famous sentence is the sentence 'Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress'. Opium dream could rouse to protest and struggle, could stimulate as well as stupefy. Nevertheless, opium is never conducive to realistic perception and it is precisely because communism could not be achieved at that time, as the struggle for

it could only be an anticipation of the future, that the urge for it assumed the form of fantasy.²

However, it should be pointed out that Engels thought that since the French revolution, religion has become incapable of serving any progressive class as the ideological vehicle of its aspirations. This has not come true as borne out by the heroic contribution of the liberation theology particularly in several Latin American Countries in strengthening and extending the struggles of the oppressed and exploited against the ruling oligarchy. Similarly the role of Catholic Church in Polish liberation struggle and recent Solidarity movement of independent trade unions could not be brushed aside as reactionary by any stretch of imagination. It has been also reported that Buddhist theology made significant contribution in heroic Vietnamese liberation war against American imperialism.

In this context, it should also be noted that the persistence and spread of religious influence in so called socialist countries as well as advanced capitalist nations do not disprove the validity of the Marxist observations on religion. As indicated earlier it was Engels who first suggested that till men acquire control over social forces (which would not be possible in all class societies) religion in some or the other form would persist. In this sense it is neither in U.S.A. nor U.S.S.R. or for that matter even in China or in other so called working class states, toiling people have acquired command over social forces nor exploitation and oppression of man by man has come to an end. This generates a climate of uncertainty and increasing insecurity leaving enough space for flourishing of religious influences.

Religion in Modern Indian Society

As indicated earlier India is experiencing a new wave of religious revivalism especially since last three decades. What is being projected as Hinduism in recent years is a novel concept based on crude amalgam of various contradictory set of beliefs, rituals and practices.

As pointed out by Romila Thaper, "The New Hinduism which is being currently propagated by the Sanghs, Parishads

and Samajs is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic, uniform religion rather paralleling some of the features of semitic religion. "Further" Hindu sects unlike Buddhism or Islam are characterised by distinct and independent origin connecting them to particular founder or text. Only at a later stage attempts were made to assimilate some of these sects into dominant sects. What has survived over the centuries is not a single, monolithic religion but a diversity of religious sects which today have been put together under a uniform name."³

Frequent reiteration by upper caste elites these days that Hinduism for last thousand years has passed through very severe persecution conveniently ignore the fact that in the history of last thousand years "Hinduism has witnessed the establishment of the powerful Shankaracharya Maths, ashramas and similar institutions attempting to provide all ecclesiastical structure to strengthen conservatism, the powerful Dashnamis and Bairagi religious orders, the popular cults of Nathpanthis, the extremely significant sects of the major Bhakti teachers as Tukaram, Namdeo, Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya, Dadoo and Kabir, not to mention Nanak. The establishment of the sects accompanied by wealthy patronage, accounting for the prosperity of temples and institutions. The last thousand years have been the most assertive thrust of the major 'Hindu' sects.⁴ As a matter of fact non-violence of Hinduism is the nineteenth century myth, largely invented as a response to requirements of nationalism stressing the spiritual superiority of Indian culture.

Romila Thaper has aptly coined the new term 'Syndicate Hinduism' for modern Hinduism. According to her 'Syndicate Hinduism draws largely on Brahmanical texts, the Gita and Vedantic thought, accepts some aspects of the Dharma Sutras and attempts to present a modern, a reformed religion. It ends up inevitably as a garbled form of Brahminism with a motley of 'values' drawn from other sources, such as bringing in elements of individual salvation from the Bhakti tradition of some puranic rituals. Its contradictions are many. The call to unite under Hinduism as a political identity is anachronistic.⁵

This new Hindu phenomena has acquired strength as a result of the widening of the social base of political Hinduism in the post-independence period. The backward castes or more appropriately 'the other backward classes' who benefited from the initial phase of agrarian reforms have now entered the socio-religious spheres which were till recently preserves of the upper caste-Hindus and have developed stakes in them. This phenomenon is also described as a process of political Sanskritization. Large scale mobilizations as the Ekatmata Yagna and the Ram Janam Bhoomi Andolan, in all probability would not be possible without the actual involvement of this enlarged base. Moreover, the following observation deserves attention: "The closing of ranks between the upper castes and the backward castes in recent year seeks external enemies in order to consolidate its somewhat uneasy solidarity. Hindu communalism directed against minorities and scheduled castes is one of the outcome".⁶

Nineteenth Century Religio-Reform Movement and Modern Hinduism

The chauvinistic thrust of the new Hinduism becomes strikingly evident if one compares it with the dominant spirit of the religio-reform movement of the nineteenth century and the Bhakti Movement of the medieval period in India.

The modernization process introduced by the British despite its distorted nature, encouraged a secular and rational outlook, scientific knowledge and technical skills, new ways of thinking and self-reliance. It was a process by which men began to breakaway from medieval customs and superstitions and the fatalism based on traditional beliefs in *karma*, *maya* and transmigration of the soul and by which new occupations and new relations among men began to emerge.

As brought out by Late Damodaran "The 19th Century thinker, though could not completely free himself from the concept of the supernatural but he began to interpret karma creatively in stead of totalistically. The concept of karma underwent a radical change. Fatalism gave way to a new sense of strength and confidence. The new thinker asserted that

caste distinctions, priest crafts and animal sacrifices and customs like sati and child marriage were not ordained by God or karma, but were created by man's ignorance".⁷

Raja Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the modern age in India. He opposed the caste system, idol worship, religious separatism, child marriage and the practice of sati. He advocated remarriage of widow, inter-caste marriage, supported English education and fought for freedom of speech. He founded Brahma-Samaj. The teachings of the Brahma-Samaj are summarised as follows:

"This wide universe is the sacred temple of the Brahman or the supreme being. The pure heart is the only place of pilgrimage. Truth is the one eternal scripture. Faith is the foundation of all religions, love is the highest discipline and sacrifice of self-regarding interests and desires is the only form of ascetic renunciation recognized and proclaimed by the members of the Brahma-Samaj".

Further, "This universalism appears to be a synthesis of the best elements of the upanishadic teachings and the ideas of Islam and Christianity".⁸

Ranade also being inspired by the teachings of the Brahma-Samaj, proclaimed intense faith in individual freedom and human dignity. He insisted that revival was impossible and that reform was the only alternative open to sensible people. The emphasis now shifted from god to man and from a transcendental life to mundane existence. Freedom of individual was now interlinked with his social and political emancipation.

"In the middle ages' as so aptly argued by late Damodar," self-emancipation was interpreted as an escape from the idea of sansara i.e. from social life. The ultimate aim of life was to end the cycle of births and deaths, to liberate the atman from the physical body and the material environment and to identify it with the absolute spirit. With the beginning of the modern age the concept of self-realization assumed a new meaning. The self was no more abstracted from life. The self was the social life, the self that could find the fullest being only in social life. Self realization as the realization of the

identify of the individual self with the universal self, meant the identification of one self with the whole of humanity. Man could realise himself only in other man, in the totality of human existence that is Brahman.⁹ Vivekananda himself explained this truth as follows:

“The individual’s happiness is the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole, the individual’s existence is inconceivable. This is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is built”.¹⁰

As a matter of fact freedom, democracy and human dignity were the values of the 19th century. Old values of renunciation, denial and withdrawal began to give place to social action. Concepts like *karma* and *dharma* assumed new meanings.

Nevertheless, while highlighting the distinct contribution made by the 19th century religio-reform movements one should not overlook the fact that the Bengal renaissance as well as its counterpart of Maharashtra were essentially sponsored by upper caste elites who were initially exposed to western liberal ideas and values and aspirations based on democratic and scientific spirit. Although they came in sharp conflict with Sanatani orthodox Hindu religious protagonists, their impact was by and large confined to certain selected intellectual circles.

In sharp contrast to this elitist movement, it is argued that the movement led by Jotirao Phule through the Satyashodhak Samaj founded by him in 1873, stood for a revolutionary social transformation as against revitalization of the old social order sought by the former under the pretext of modernization.

As pointed out by Gail Omvedt, “Their identification was with an elite of education and knowledge, as upper castes within the Hindu cultural system and as modern intellectuals concerned about the scientific and industrial progress of India. Hence they developed an ideology which sought to use a revitalized Hindu tradition as the spiritual and moral centre around which the liberal modernism of the west could be created”.¹¹ This is also dubbed as “Eastern Morals and Western Science’. Upper caste elites accepted the ‘Aryan

theory of race' which had implication of identifying them ethnically with their British conquerors rather than majority of their countrymen, which traced civilization in India from the Aryan conquest, and which provided a new pseudo-scientific justification for the caste hierarchy. And they developed an economic theory which looked to the capitalist development of India freed from the destructive bonds of British Imperialism. Hence, they opposed foreign exploitation without considering the exploitation of workers by native capitalists or peasants by landlords and the lower bureaucracy.

It is also further argued that the majority of Indians were dark-skinned non-Aryans. The majority of Indians in traditional varna terms were shudras. The majority of Indians were peasants and had no hope either in the near or distant future of becoming members of the bureaucratic elite or capitalist, large or small. The liberal modernization of Hindu culture and the capitalist development of India did not conform to their interests. Peasants, tribals, workers, low castes, untouchables were all adversely affected by the colonial regime and responded, like the upper caste elites, with both renaissance and rebellion. But lacking access to education, lacking control over media of communication, their renaissance and their rebellion, their ideology and organization, remained in a more incipient, crude, localized and in complete form. Nevertheless it may be said with Jotirao Phule the low-caste, non-Aryans, peasant masses of India came to consciousness.¹²

While taking note of the fact that Dayananda's version of Aryan culture was not racial as he stressed on acquisition of virtues of ideal vedic practices and rejected birth as determinant of individual's status in society and similarly Vivekananda called for the liberation of women and ending of Brahmin superiority even as he bitterly attacked 'westernised reformers', Gail Omvedt along with several others holds the view that those religious leaders sought to harmonise the early emphasis of liberal and conservative Brahmins; they argued that the Hindu nation must be considered holy; but insisted as well that social evils of the present day, including caste, were not ancient religious customs. They formulated a revivalistic nationalism that was to have dangerous anti-Muslim aspects.¹³

In dismissing totally the dominant religious traditions of India, it is further stated that, Phule accepted the assumption that something had to be put in its place; even a revolutionary culture required a moral-religious center. Hence he never rejected the idea of dharma but rather attempted to establish a universalistic one. Sarvajanic Satya Dharma, it is suggested that expressed this concept completely; implying that the moral basis of society had to be centered on truth or rationality and it had to be one that unified all men and women as equals. The world was regarded as good and holy, in contrast to the vedantic projection of it as an illusion.¹⁴

Further the same author remarks that Phule's thinking does not show "Indian tendency to the reconciliation of opposites" and is based upon the principle that an irreconcilable conflict of interests existed between the Brahmin elite and non-Brahmin masses. Secondly, Phule's theory of exploitation focuses on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic and political ones, although he displayed great concern for economic and political aspects of exploitation. Phule's ideology, in short was based on identification with peasant masses and on attachment to revolutionary values of equality and rationality such concern for the poor kisans also reflected in his projection of Baliraja as a peasant god, drawing on the image of the common man and his focus on the plight of woman and untouchables.

The basic question that is posed in this context is about the appropriate center of a 'national culture'. If the focus is on 'Sanskritic Hinduism, Vedic Culture, Vedantic Philosophy, Mahabharata and Ramayana stories, this implies bias in favour of the upper castes and towards indirect support of the caste system; and geographically in favour of north India. If the emphasis is towards non-vedic culture, towards peasant traditions and tribal traditions, towards traditions of religious cultural revolt running through Buddhism and the Bhakti cults, then the bias is socially in favour of the masses and geographically in favour of the outlying linguistic regions of India. In scholarship and nationalist thinking the bias upto now has been towards a Sanskritic and therefore elite basis to Indian

culture, but in fact non-sanskritic traditions have as much claim to an all-India spread".¹⁵

Non-Brahmin movement or what was also popularised as self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Periar had powerful emotional appeal for the masses. Periar preached a new secular form of marriage which would have no priest of any caste. Idol breaking, removal of caste name plates (particularly those of Brahmins), propagating the eradication of superstitious beliefs and practices, burning the copies of Ramayana and the Puranas and demanding the expulsion of the Brahmins from Tamil Nadu, were his major programmes of anti-Brahminism. Periar's popular methods of communication and programmes adopted by him created the popular stream in the elite N.B.M, in Tamil Nadu.

Both these protest movements against the Brahminic domination and landlord, money-lenders exploitation of poor kisans in Maharashtra, later degenerated into castists and elitists' movement utilizing anti-Brahmin platform for subserving the interests of vocal and affluent sections of backward castes. In a sense they over a period started, articulating the aspirations and interests of the rich farmers and intermediate caste elites that had begun to emerge under the British patronage and the socio-economic changes brought about as a result of the British conquest in India. In the case of Tamil Nadu the movement was dominated by the elites right from its inception.

As a matter of fact the present aggressive version of 'Syndicate Hinduism' is jointly sponsored and articulated by the upper and backward castes. As observed earlier backward castes have acquired wider social and political base as a result of first land reforms introduced after independence.

As we could see the major focus of particularly the nineteenth century religio-reform movement and even of much more radical pro-poor movement led by Phule including that of non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu was on the propagation of liberal values and rational outlook and were essentially directed against orthodox Brahminic rituals, undesirable customs as Satee, child-marriage, prohibition of widow-marriage, superstitions, monopoly of priesthood, against

untouchability and for the spread of education among women, towards the improvement of women's plight and their rehabilitation against monolithic, aggressive, highly authoritarian new version of Hinduism as projected by the upper and backward castes in recent years.

The progressive liberal character of the nineteenth century religio-reform movement, though dominated by upper caste affluent section and despite its very limited impact, could be seen in its reinterpretation of traditional religious ideals, *Tatawam Asi*, self-realization in terms of striving for collective happiness of Indian humanity late Damodaran while tracing the genesis of the post-independence resurgence of religious revivalism remarks, "Millions of people had hoped that political independence would lead to new social order which would abolish poverty, unemployment and human degradation and guarantee opportunities and freedom for every individual to build his personality. But all these hopes belied in practice. . . The wide spread poverty and unemployment, exploitation and squalor leading to human degradation torment sensitive hearts. Corruption, bribery and the blackmarket have generated a 'get-rich-quicker' mentality and abominable 'success ethics' has begun to dominate society. Moral values are sacrificed at the altar of the profit, rent and interest. The individual regards his own interest as something opposed to the interest of other people. This exaggerated pre-occupation with one's own person vitiates and distorts all human relations. It is only natural that under such conditions man is encountered with a sense of insignificance and powerlessness. He is subjected to feelings of isolation and abandonment. This situation has already produced a crisis of cultural and spiritual values leading to frustration and despair. People are left with a feeling of emptiness. The turmoil and the squalor, the anxieties and the anguish, the anarchy and the violence created by the capitalist path of development makes life untenable and miserable".¹⁶

Vast bulk of toiling strata, petty bourgeois and others gravitate towards religion out of sheer sense of helplessness and apathy. Ruling classes by effectively playing on this sense of frustration and helplessness among the masses have whipped

up religious propaganda which has already become instrumental in dividing and generating animosities among the different sections of Indian population on communal lines.

As a matter of fact since independence the ruling classes in India as pointed out by Dr. A.R. Desai have evolved a dual policy which may appear contradictory but has proved extremely effective in perpetuating their rule and consolidating and expanding the capitalist development in this country. In economic, administrative and legal spheres they have evolved logical, rational, this worldly approach that could result in maximization of economic gains to bourgeoisie. While in social and cultural sphere they have encouraged feudal institutions and traditional, religious values which has succeeded in stupefying, confusing masses and generating pessimistic, fatalistic outlook among them. With increasing political instability and aggravation of economic crisis as reflected in growing unemployment, widespread industrial sickness, increasing pauperization of masses, rising inflation and the total bankruptcy of the ruling party and the state in resolving them, the dominant classes are desperately seeking to regain their credibility by increasingly relying on whipping up of religious sentiments in order to retain their hold over people in recent years.

In this context it is interesting to note that material conditions created as a result of the introduction of modernization process by the British in the nineteenth century paved way for the emergence of religio-reform movement which in a sense also articulated the aspirations of the rising bourgeois. Decadence and utter bankruptcy of the capitalist system in resolving any of the basic economic, political, social or cultural problems faced by Indian society and the resultant crisis of the legitimacy have created conditions giving rise to new aggressive, religious fundamentalism particularly since last decade.

As pointed out earlier the modern version of Hinduism itself is based on concoction and distortion of earlier historical traditions and unfortunate identification of nationalism with Hinduism since the nineteenth century (an outcome of peculiar historical situation) left sufficient room for future distortion.

Hinduism as popularly projected today is a down light reactionary formation and rules out any possibility for the emergence of any form of any liberation theology within its fold.

Buddhism in its formative stage was certainly far more liberal and progressive with dialectical orientation compared to later vedic or upanishadic traditions. Under the circumstances, Dr. Ambedkar's protest against Hinduism took the form of call to his followers to enblock conversion to neo-Buddhism.

It is also suggested that focusing on dynamic elements of earlier Buddhism, certain sects of medieval Bhakti movements, radical aspects of satyashodhak samaj and other non-Brahmin movements one can evolve liberation theology which may prove quite effective in mobilizing the oppressed and exploited classes and ultimately might pave way for just and egalitarian social order free from all form of exploitation.

Unfortunately the entire history of social movements based on caste and sectarian loyalties drawing inspiration from some of the above tradition does not leave much room for such optimism.

In this context it is worthwhile to draw a contrast between the dominant Hindu religious traditions and early Christianity. Jesus Christ was literary a messiah of poor and oppressed and he upheld their cause and ultimately was crucified for this 'crime'. Heroic martyrdom of Jesus for the proletarians of his time leaves enough scope for future inspiration. Secondly, the missionary traditions in the church of working with the poor, coupled with peculiar oppressive and suffocating conditions in most of the Latin American countries could give birth to liberation theology. In India, conditions are quite different in terms of nature of capitalist development, political set up, astute leadership of bourgeoisie, even in terms of history and traditions of the country. It is not surprising that one of the main architects of Indian theology of liberation had to admit that as far as India is concerned, liberation theology is likely to be in a low key in the years ahead, due to specific conditions obtaining here. As he further remarks, "The parties of revolution have been tamed and absorbed into the bourgeois politics of power and expediency to a point where they scarcely differ from the parties of order. Gandhism is today a spent

force, being no more than a convenient ritual. The prospects of fresh revolutionary energies springing up from the subterranean consciousness of the masses are not bright. The power of the establishment to neutralise dissent knows no bounds".¹⁷

Notes

1. Siegel Paul N.—*The Meek and the Militant* (OUP, 1987) p. p 21-26
2. Ibid
3. Thaper, Romila—"The Hindus and Their Isms" Syndicated Moksha? *Seminar* Sept. 85, p. 14
4. Ibid p. 15
5. Ibid p. 22
6. Nirmal Mukarji & Ashis Banerjee—"Neo-Nationalism" *Seminar*, Sept. 85, p. 26
7. Damodaran K.—*Man and Society* (Delhi, 1970) p.p. 75, 84
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Ibid
11. Omvedt, Gail—*Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society 1976* (Bombay, 1976) p. 99
12. Ibid, p.p. 99-100
13. Ibid, 104-105
14. Ibid, 108
15. Ibid. 112-115
16. Damodaran K. op. cit. p. 88
17. Kappen, S. "In Search of a New God," *Illustrated Weekly*, June 9, 1985, pp. 27-28.

The Buddhist Way to Liberation of Society

Kuliyapitiye Prananda

Part One

Religions and Ideologies in Asia

The great religions of the world originated and had their early growth within the Asian social background. Hinduism was born in India. The Zoroastrian religion had its birth in Persia, presently known as Iran. Judaism originated in Palestine. These are the oldest among the world religions. Confucianism, which was more a code of ethics than a religion, had its birth and became widely accepted in China and made the biggest impact in the Far East. The three great religions that evolved subsequently were Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

The Jain Religion of India, Taoism of China and Shintoism of Japan did not become worldwide, but remained confined to certain regional boundaries. But their contribution to the formation of Asian cultures was considerable, due not only to their long history, but also because of their richness in spiritual values.

At the same time, there also emerged schools of philosophy that reacted to these religions and there has been a continuing

dialogue between them, which has had a profound impact on Asian social development. The ancient civilisations that grew up in China, India and in Central Asia gave rise to vast improvements in the field of production. These in turn influenced the religious and ideological trends in society and enriched the cultural life of the people. The emergence of science, at the beginning of the modern age, started in the West and spread to Asia like a great storm and shook traditional Asian thoughts. This same storm continues to produce ever renewing waves of influence on Asian societies. Particular attention should therefore be paid to this influence and the dialogue that is created by them.

To deal with our subject fully and in depth, one has to examine all these different aspects. We do not propose to do this, not only owing to the constraints of time but also because such an undertaking is beyond the scope of one individual in one's life-time. I have been asked to look at this topic from a Buddhist point of view. I must first confess that I am no expert even to discuss this limited area completely.

To examine the influence of Buddhism on the formation of Asian Societies, it is necessary at least to study the teachings of the two basic Sects of Buddhism, their history and the impact they made on the social formation of the different countries of Asia. Various scholars have tried to study them and synthesise them separately. This Seminar is the first occasion that I know of which attempts to take a wholistic approach to the study of this topic.

The Great Dialogue on Dhamma

The basic sects that I referred to earlier are the Mahayana and the Hinayana. My own view is that this very terminology contradicts the true Buddhist tradition. It is said that Siduhath (Sidhartha) the hermit, defeated the forces of evil in attaining the state of "Buddha" or in reaching the understanding of "the Truth." There were ten evil forces and tenth was described as "Attukkansana-Parawambhana", that is to praise one's own self and to degrade the others. To separate the path of liberation, described in the fundamental teachings of Buddhism

into two camps (or two sects) and to say that one is greater (Mahayana) and the other is less (Hinayana) is to fall prey to this evil tendency that Buddha defeated at the foot of the Bo-tree. Evil forces are the views and attitudes that obstruct the attainment of liberation. Therefore, we can imagine the extent of damage done to the essence of the liberational message of Buddhism by conceding this classification.

This division into sects, however, has contributed towards the spreading of Buddhism in different regions of Asia. It led to competition between the sects to out-do the other in popularising one's own sect. There were many positive results too. This inter-sect competition resulted in the building of a great dialogue on 'Dhamma' both among Buddhist philosophers and among ordinary people. This dialogue greatly enriched 'Dhamma' literature and strong new philosophical trends were born. (The formulation of the theory of Relativity by the Great teacher Nagarjunapada is an example). These had a great impact on social life too. The Great dialogue on 'Dhamma' contributed towards the formation of democratic traditions in the life of the people. Another outcome of this competition was that popular masses began to be attracted by the greatness of mind and the spirit of dedication of the philosophers and thinkers who spearheaded this dialogue.

In general, these dialogues were conducted in a peaceful, democratic and an intellectual atmosphere. However, seeing the great influence that these schools of thought had on the popular masses, there were numerous instances when the rulers (that is the State) took sides with one or the other sect. Sometimes this led to unpleasant consequences. That was when unnecessary clashes or conflicts arose among the sects leading to burning of books and libraries, demolition of temples, Viharas and ashrams. There were also rare instances of physical violence on the clergy and laity. Thus this inter-sect rivalry took different forms in different countries and made tremendous positive and negative contributions towards the formation of the different societies. For a proper analysis of the past and the present role of Buddhism in the formation of Asian Societies in order to reach definite conclusions, it is necessary to study the history of Buddhism which separated

into two main Sects, the Mahayana and the Hinayana, relating it to a proper study of the socio-economic and political histories of the respective countries and their cultural environments.

The resources that I have at present and the time available would not permit me to attempt even a complete analysis of that nature. Therefore, I am naturally restricted to base my remarks primarily on the experiences of my birth-place Sri Lanka, its Buddhist traditions, its rites and usages, the doctrine and its social influence.

Buddhism—An Ideological Reflection of the Socio-Economic System

Hinayana Buddhism, one of the two basic sects mentioned earlier has taken deep root in Sri Lanka. It is more popularly named “Theravada Buddhism”. It is generally accepted that teachings of Buddha are recorded in an undistorted form in the “Tripitaka Dhamma” (the books of doctrine) of Theravada Buddhists. The fundamental doctrine (Dhamma) is in three volumes “Suthra”, “Vinaya” and “Abidhamma”. A deep analysis of the nature of the human person (or human-kind) and its classification into different categories is included in Abidhamma, while the nature of society and its classification into categories is found in the Suthra and Vinaya.

Although these are separated for the purpose of study, they cannot be understood in isolation. The doctrine of Buddhism cannot be understood without taking these elements together as an integrated whole. Although I have mentioned them separately as ‘human nature’ and the ‘nature of society’, on careful examination we see that the ‘Buddha’ analyses these two as the nature of human person and of society within a definite social system based on private ownership of property. Buddhist scholars and commentators of later periods have tried to study these as abstract works separating them from each other and as a result the integrated approach to analysis was gradually overlooked. The elements of doctrine on the nature of human person and its different categories have been subjected to very deep and sharp analysis, but it was done in a manner that isolates the human being from the nature of society

in which he lives. Therefore the extremely broad and detailed analysis seen in Abidharma Pitakaya is not seen in the other two volumes. In Abidharma Pitakaya, the analysis of the nature of human person is done by presenting necessary data, which are then classified, analysed and conclusions are drawn using statistical data, reports in symbols and graphical and tabulated presentations. All these point not to a definite human being in a historical context but to a concept of unchanging human nature for all time.

However, examining the elements of doctrine in Suthra and Vinaya Pitaka, it becomes very clear that the above is not the case. I would use two examples from Suthra Pitakaya to illustrate this.¹ They are

1. The first sermon preached by the Buddha “Dhamma Chakkhappawatta Suthraya”.
2. Chakkawaththi Sehanada Suthraya and Aaganna Suthraya in Deegha Nikaya.

It would have been possible to make a very sharp examination and an analysis of society using the above Suthras. If this is done, it would be possible to make a deep analysis of the evolution of society and to formulate a very clear system of political economy. Some of the basic facts given in the first example are as follows:

Indian Society of the day was divided into the two extremes of wealth and poverty. At one extreme there were those who possessed and enjoyed an abundance of the highest forms of worldly pleasures and there were others who suffered extreme forms of poverty and depravity. The ideological reflection of this reality was that there are two extremes in the concept of liberation and the paths to achieve it. One was to give maximum satisfaction and pleasure to the senses while the other was the complete suppression of the sensual desires. But the Buddha's finding was that neither of these would liberate human-kind since both extremes accept the situation as it is, and brings about no change and that liberation lies in the rejection of both these extremes. In order to change the existing situation, he presented the Middle Path (Madjima

Patipada) or the 'Arya Ashtangika Marga'-the Noble Eight-fold Path-as the synthesis that emerges from the conflict between the two extremes. He presented the Four Noble Truths (Chathurarya Sathyaya), that is the existing situation, the reason for the existence of this situation, the changing of the situation and the way to change it as the synthesis of all these: These are

1. Dukkha Satyaya — the existing situation
2. Samudaya Satyaya — the reason for the situation.
3. Nirodha Satyaya -- changing the situation
4. Marga Satyaya — the way to change

From the two examples from the Suthra mentioned earlier, we can see the socio-economic base and the historical evolution of such factors and their objectives. Accordingly, the Buddha explained the fact of existence of a very ancient "Sangha Society" (i.e. a Society based on the common ownership form of property relationships) and the gradual emergence of property relations based on private ownership within such a society. He further explained how women began to be considered a "private possession" of the men, which led to the use of sex, the separation of society into classes of "haves" and the "have-nots", taking up arms or weapons as a result of this division and the rise of regimentation (or the establishment of the organs of State machinery). The growth in complex relationships of production and the division of labour, which lead to the emergence of different professional groups was explained on that basis. In addition, the beginning of the formation of the clergy as a separate group was clarified. Finally, the negation of this society based on inequality was explained together with an indication of the basic characteristics of the ideal society that would emerge in the future as a result of such negation. The Buddha described these characteristics of the ideal social system as follows:

"It would be a society of prosperity and abundance, highly populated and with a plentiful supply of food. There

would be eighty-four thousand cities in such society. The earth would be freed from punishments, liberated from armaments, and become a righteous world. The Buddha named this Kingdom the Kethumathi.”

This description of future society says that it would consist of a large number of cities and would have a city culture. The people would be of very high productive ability and would therefore be free from want. They would also be free from weapons and punishment and would therefore be free from the burden of the State machinery.

We, who have experienced a number of social revolutions and the great achievements of the revival of modern science, are also able to see that this future society is not a mere Utopia, but a world that human-kind can achieve. This is why I said at the beginning that we have to pay special attention to the great achievements of modern science in dealing with the subject of the role of religion in the formation of Asian Societies.

By founding the “Sangha Samajaya” (‘Sangha’ is the term used for the clergy living a collective form of life), the Buddha intended to demonstrate to the people a practical model of the future society that he conceptualised.

The founding of Sangha society, its growth and extension

I now intend to draw your attention to examine the beginning of this Sangha Society its evolution, its extension and the impact it makes on the rest of society.

The Buddha did not inaugurate the ‘Sasana’ by setting up a Sangha society housed in a particular location. The conditions for this were created much later. It was only a programme for propagation of Dhamma (the doctrine). The first words of advice by the Buddha to the monks was ‘Go now monks and wander for the good of the people, for the happiness of the people out of compassion for the world’. ‘Let two persons not take on the same path.’ Therefore at the beginning the bhikkhu did not have any settled life. The Buddha, apart from not approving any person staying on in one place, did

not even approve two persons taking the same route. As more and more people of contemporary society accepted Dhamma as truth, as rational and intelligible, and accept it as the path for liberation, it began to obtain greater patronage and assistance. This had its influences on the "Sangha Sasana" in many different ways. The number entering the Sasana as clergy as well as the number of lay adherents increased. The acceptance of women into the Sasana as Bhikkunis was a great revolution in the attitudes that existed in the contemporary society. Great wealth was donated to the Sasana by the rich and the not so rich benefactors. The necessity arose for some form of discipline in the use and management of these. Therefore elaborate codes of discipline arose regarding attitudes towards such wealth. During the life time of the Buddha too, there were certain norms that were laid down based on the needs that arose²

When it became necessary for the monks to take up residence for as long as three months during the rainy season, the Sangha were gifted household goods and consumer requirements. It was necessary to accept these gifts (the dana) and to keep them for common use without any individual possession. The practice of common ownership became the basic principle. Further, detachment in life and the use of goods without any attachment or possessiveness was a discipline that was very strictly maintained.

Situations of crisis in production such as food shortages, famines that affect the laity, affected the Sangha society too. These gave birth to organisational arrangements with necessary codes of conduct.³ Irrespective of the wealth received, the life of the bhikkus was based on the principle of living on alms and monks did not engage in any production or have any links with the productive activity in society. The people could also support and maintain the Bhikkus due to subsistence agriculture, the self-sufficient rural economy and the craft form of manufacture that characterised this period. What were the historical factors that made this possible?

The 6th Century (B.C.) was a period when a great social transformation was taking place in Indian society. When the

Buddha was born this had already begun. The slave-owning Brahmin (priestly class) society was crumbling and the emergence of a feudal society had already begun under the leadership of the Kshathriyas (warrior class). The Buddha made the severest attack on the declining slave system of society through his teachings. In attacking the power and the views of the Brahmins and the entire value system of the Brahmana society, the Buddha was strongly supported by the Kshathriyas (warrior caste) the Vaishayas (trader caste) and the Kshudras (the caste of labouring people), that is by all oppressed sections of society. The oppressed classes obtained the best possible ideology from the teachings of the Buddha in their struggle against the ideology of the dominant Brahmin. Many of them entered the Bhikku Sasana. This is why Dhamma became widely accepted by the population in various regions of India and the Brahmin leaders fought so vehemently against it. The Buddha did not stop at this. His struggle was not confined to this particular society transformation. He had a broader perspective and a vision which was described earlier—in the Suthras mentioned. Therefore the missionary campaign that the Buddha began with 60 monks was transformed into a Sangha Sasana according to the needs of the times, and it was made the proto type of the future Kethumathi social system. The Sangha Sasana did not have anything Utopian in its practices. The democratic traditions of this society were from those practised by the Lichchavi Republic, which had the broadest democracy of the time. The Sangha-Sasana adopted the same principles of democracy, which had made the Lichchavis invincible.

The code of discipline for the Sangha could be described as a highly democratic constitution, without any exaggeration. It was practised in order to have a collective rule without the use of weapons and oppressive forms of punishment. Undoubtedly there were certain features necessary for the times, but the principles were based on the concepts of the future society that was envisaged.

This Sangha society exists today. But the foundation of the principles of this society does not exist. We should now consider the reasons for this situation. This can be done only

by examining the history of the Sasana, relating it to the history of the Asian Societies, which is over two thousand five hundred years old. Let us look at this briefly.

The Buddha showed us a middle path with the right understanding. He also demonstrated how truth could be seen by freeing ourselves from the extremisms and established a Sanga Society (a collective) acting and moving along this path. The Sangha society in its earlier period did not participate in the process of material production, which was based on the feudal system that had emerged recently. The people who had entered the newly formed social relationships of production undertook the task of protecting and sustaining these agents of Buddhist ideology with great devotion. This was because the above ideology had played an important missionary role in this revolutionary change.

On the other hand, the Buddha did not accept the feudal system simply because it was new. At the very beginning, the Buddha made a critique of some contradictions and inequalities in this system such as the caste discrimination. He therefore instructed the Bhikkus not to associate themselves with its production relationships. He clearly knew that he was not representing any form of private ownership of property, but the "Kethumathi" social system of the future, free of weapons of oppression and violence.

However, this aim was lost among the later generations of Bhikkus. They began to collaborate with the property owning class of feudals, became experts on the functions of feudalist state machinery and experts on international relations, through their involvement in cultural missions among States. They also began to enjoy dominant power in society as a result of their gaining property ownership. By becoming land owners they too began to share in state power and in the ruling class. Apart from the Kings' Palaces, the highest forms of creative architecture and art are seen in Buddhist temples, Viharas and the monasteries. This indicates that the Bhikkus were closely associated with creative artists, architects and other craftsmen. They were themselves specialists in these fields. They were associated with the administrative machinery with the rulers in order to protect and maintain the property

and the labour force that were under the control of their institutions. They were advisors to the kings. They even instructed them on military matters when necessary. As a result of their close association with the Kings' assemblies, some bhikkus became scholars in the theories of administration and military affairs (the "Ummagga Jathakaya" one of the stories of the five hundred and fifty Jathaka stories is a very good illustration of this fact)

The bhikku and the bhikku society became an essential component of the feudalist socio-economic system and thus the early Sangha Society was vitiated for the first time. The next great historical transformation in the social evolution of Asia was the downfall of the feudal system and its replacement by the capitalist social system. However, this revolution was not something that obtained its sustenance from the spiritual and the cultural values created by the Asian civilisation and thus it was not in accordance with the structure of the Asian Society. It was during this period that all spiritual and cultural values that prevailed so far had to face the strong challenge of being re-evaluated. Asian Society was subjected to the powerful shock of the tremendous conflicts generated by the impact of the aggressive intrusion of Western Capitalism. The growth of capitalism in Asia was under the powerful pressure exerted by the invading Western Capitalism.

When all social, economic, political and cultural elements described so far began to take their capitalist form, Buddhist institutions too were subjected to this change. The Sangha Society, which had earlier become a feudal institution changed too. All feudalist religious traditions which were treated as sacred were devalued by the power of money. The Japanese Bhikku and the Bhikku Society can be cited as a very clear illustration of the change that took place within the Asian Society as a result of capitalist transformation. The Sri Lankan Sangha Society too is being subjected to this change in accordance with the changes that are taking place in Sri Lankan society under the aggressive impact of Western Capitalism. However, the Sri Lankan Bhikku is not generally rich in his knowledge of capitalist economic theories and its principles of

commerce and trade. Therefore they are not familiar with the capitalist political theory and the various philosophical trends that reflect these economic theories. The lay intellectuals stand far ahead of all religious leaders in this field. Some clergy feel that this is a field that they should not engage in.

Since capitalist development came to us in the form of an invasion, and the forces of resistance emerged from the old feudal society, some of them tend to look into the possibilities of using the traditional feudalist concepts to fight against capitalism. But as oppressive social influences generated by capitalism push them day by day into positions of helplessness, they sometimes tend to give up their counter-attack and get integrated into the system, pretending to look into possibilities of development within capitalism. Imperialist forces support this and try to propagate the myth of Development through Capitalism. When these myths are exposed they tend to look into other ways to achieve freedom. In order to do this, the inheritance from our own history is subjected to a scientific analysis. What is irrelevant is rejected and what is useful is further developed in order to present the oppressed people with a new ideology and new attitudes. We are experiencing today this dual character of the social influence of capitalism. We can see both these trends among the Sri Lankan Bhikku. However, he has not yet become sufficiently strong in building the counter-force to capitalism. It is important to note that a continuous effort has been growing in Sri Lanka throughout the last century in building this force.

A More Recent Experience in Sri Lanka

It was the scholarly Bhikku who took the first steps towards the anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation in Sri Lanka in their campaign against the cultural invasion and religious oppression, which accompanied Western capitalism. Among those who took up this struggle of the people, Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thero, Venerable Ratmalane Dhammarama Thero, Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero, Venerable Udakendawala Saranankara Thero, Venerable Muththettuwigama Dharmeshwara Thero,

Venerable S. Mahinda Thero, a Tibetan, Venerable Kotagama Wachissara Thero, Venerable Batapola Anomadassi Nayaka Thero and Venerable Dumbara Palitha Thero were the pioneers. Ven Udakendawela Saranankara Thero and Muththettuwigama Dharmeshwara Thero had even participated directly in the struggle for independence in India and had been detained in prisons.

By January 1946, there was a great campaign and a well-known dialogue initiated by these same monks on the topic of "Bhikkus and Politics". Their activity in politics was the cause of this great dialogue, which spread not only among the bhikkus of Sri Lanka, but also among the Buddhists in other countries. In February 1946, the teaching staff at Vidyalan-kara Pirivena issued the well known "Vidyalan-kara Bhikku Declaration" replying to their opponents who held the view that Bhikkus should not be involved in politics. Here are some extracts from this declaration.

"The Buddha has permitted the Bhikku Sangha to change the Small and the Very Small Kudhanu (Kuddhaka) norms of discipline if and when they agree on such changes. However, there is no evidence so far about any such changes by the Theravada Bhikkus in their history. Neither do we say that such changes in the disciplinary norms should now be introduced."

"However, we have to accept that the economic, social and the political situation that existed during the life-time of the Buddha has now changed, and that the life of the Bhikkus has also changed."

"It is very clear that the life of the Bhikkus have undergone considerable change over this period as a result of this change."

"We believe that all programmes for the good of the people in today's world come within the field of politics. . . Therefore whatever programme that is carried out for the good of the people, that would not cause damage to the Bhikku life, should be suitable to the Bhikkus, whether it is labelled as politics or otherwise."

It further says—

“Bhikkus today are engaged in political activity whether they are conscious of it or not, by being involved in educational work, village rehabilitation, prevention of crime, social relief, temperance activities, and other social activities. We do not admit that it is wrong for Bhikkus to be engaged in such work.”

“We accept that it is right for the Bhikkus to work for the upliftment of the people and to work against the factors that obstruct their well being. For instance, it is the highest obligation of the Bhikkus to act against all attempts to destroy the recently introduced system of Free Education in order to ensure its survival.”

Thus, by supporting all efforts made in Sri Lanka that are for social development according to our own experience and by working against all forces that oppose such development, it is possible to build peoples power against this oppressive social system. The fundamental principles of the Sangha Society cannot be sustained unless this counter-force is essentially against all forms of imperialism, hegemonism, feudalist traditions, capitalism and all types of oppression and suppression.

On the other hand it is impossible today to set up a collective (Saangika) system limited only to those committed to a Bhikku life. We have a legal system that establishes private ownership of property within a capitalist system. Accordingly, the property that belongs to the temples, which is said to be for the Sangha (Saangika) is merely an institution that is subject to this legal system and serving the capitalist economy. In Sri Lanka this is an institution serving the neo-colonialist economy. On the other hand the individualist character of production relationships is disappearing and is being increasingly replaced by relationships of a socialist nature. As a result, the Sangha Collective (Saangika) system advocated by Buddhism is caught in the contradiction between the private ownership of property established by the legal system and the socialised relationships that exists in the process of production. Therefore the principles of this collective system (the Saangika)

can only be put into practice within a new set of social, economic, political and cultural relationships that would emerge through the abolition of the entire socio-economic system based on capital accumulation, which encourages and strengthens greed (Thanha).

Part Two

Social Influence of Buddhism

Our discussion so far on Buddhism and the Sangha Sasana in Asian Society was centred mostly on the experience in Sri Lanka on the impact of the evolution of different social systems on Sangha Society, and the efforts made today to change this situation. However, this was dealt with very briefly.

Unless we examine the impact of these historical events in the opposite direction, our presentation will not be complete in the face of the present challenges in social development. That is, we have to examine the impact made by the traditions and values that existed in Sangha Society on the rest of the society over this long period of its history and at present.

Buddhism performed its mission in social development by providing the guiding ideology that was needed for the great historical social transformation that was taking place over 2,500 years ago. It also provided an abundance of spiritual values that were needed by the feudalist social system in its onward march against the system of slavery. By establishing a system of humanitarian values which became strongly rooted among people, Buddhism also made it extremely difficult for feudalism to impose non-compassionate, oppressive and a ruthless dominant rule. It provided the people with the necessary freedom of thought based on the principles of democracy which enabled them to point boldly at the mistakes of even those who shared power. It also provided the people with a strong ideology and a course of action against treating human beings according to superior and inferior categories based on caste, which was a feature that feudalist society inherited from the Brahmin social system. The maintenance of this new

ideology and tradition was the responsibility of the generations of the Sangha.

The Buddha Preached Against Individualist Leadership

When the question arose about the person who should succeed the Buddha as leader, His answer at the death bed was that the Sangha should make the “Dhamma and discipline” their leaders. This was the first Great Dhamma Convention in human history against individualist leadership. This was a factor that influenced not only the Bhikku Sangha, but also people who were inspired by it, to resist the wrong tendencies that arose as a result of individual leaderships, throughout the social history that came under the influence of Buddhism.

The history of Sri Lanka did not either see despotic rulers as there were strong peoples, resistances which completely toppled such rulers or controlled them. The two well-known examples are the rebellion led by Siri Meghawannabhaya against Mahasen (276-303 AD) and that under the leadership of Ambanwela Rala against Rajasingha II (1635-1687 AD). King Mahasen accepting his faults and admitting that the rebels were just is an instance that is extremely rare in the entire history of Royal Governments in the world. Both these kings however, were not extremely cruel dictators. The country had achieved self-sufficiency in rice under the agricultural policies of Mahasen. Rajasingha II gave effective leadership to defeat the Portuguese invaders from the West, who practised extreme forms of cruelty. In spite of these the rebellions occurred during their rule due to the suppression of the social and cultural life of the people.

A Righteous Rule

King Dutugemunu (161-137 BC) was waging just war. In order to prevent the mass killing that would result from a protracted war, he engaged in an individual confrontation with the opposing king and gained a victory. King Dutugemunu is supposed to have regretted the deaths of those who died in war

throughout his lifetime. He even constructed a monument to honour his opponent who died in this battle. He did not force his people to engage in unpaid labour (as Rajakariya) in his construction projects of religious and cultural importance. Each worker was paid a salary.

King Buddhadasa (340-368 AD) who set up free medical centres from village to village even provided facilities to treat sick animals. Upatissa I (368-410 AD) is said to have kept up the full night once, when his bed was getting wet due to a leaky roof since he believed that it was bad to get the servants to work in the night. He is supposed to have taken his meals regularly together with ordinary people in a common dining hall where people received alms (Daana), Agbo V (718-724 AD) is said to have based his rule on three basic principles :

1. Avoid improper investment.
2. Avoid improper treatment.
3. Avoid improper consumption.

Sirisangabo (251-253 AD) who sacrificed his life to save the lives of his people and Dhatusena (459-477 AD) who had to lose his own life since he insisted that the wealth of his treasury was the water that he had conserved in the massive irrigation tanks, knowing that he would be killed if he stood by this statement, are two examples of inspiring personalities that enlighten our history.

Parakramabahu the Great (1153-1186 AD) who stated that “not a drop of water that falls should be allowed to flow into the sea without being made use of” and made a great contribution to the development of agriculture in the country by constructing great tanks and channels for irrigation is highly respected and adored by the Sri Lankan peasant.

Out of about 191 Kings who ruled Sri Lanka from ancient times, most of them except a mere handful have had qualities such as those described above. All of them tried to present themselves as a “Bodisatva” (that is a person who aspires and practices the perfections necessary to become a Buddha in a later life). They were encouraged to act with this concept in

mind as a result of the impact made by Buddhism. Basically, the principles and policies adopted by Sri Lanka's rulers of the State were based on the Buddhist concepts.

The policies and the programmes of action of the rulers included "Dasaraja-Dhamma", ten principles of Dhamma for the rulers, and the striving to achieve the Dasa Paramitha (ten virtues or perfections) namely Dana (Generosity), Seela (Morality), Nekkhamma (Renunciation), Panna (Wisdom), Viriya (Energy), Kshanti (Patience), Sathya (Truthfulness), Adhittana (Determination), Metta (Loving-kindness), Upekkha (Equanimity) and the four means of right treatment-generosity, pleasant speech, economic well-being and equality.

The vision that Guided our History

Considering not only worldly wealth, but even one's own life as secondary to the well-being of others is a social value that is not uncommon in our history. Freedom from greed (Thanha nirodha) and simplicity of life (Sallahuka Wuththi) are two important positive factors that strongly influenced the socio-economic development process of the country. It was a common feature to see even the Kings, the Ministers and other leaders in the country considering the accumulation of surplus value and the enjoying of extreme forms of luxury as degrading.

Each chapter of 'Mahawamsa', the great book of history of Sri Lanka that had been written, uninterrupted from very ancient times, ends in a verse that emphasizes the importance of a righteous rule and the impermanence of life and also stressing that there is no virtue greater than that of working for the well-being of others. The end of each chapter says that chapter..... of Mahawamsa was written for the serene joy and emotion of the pious.

This was the ideology and vision that the history of our country taught its people and it had a very strong impact on their lives. But this should not be mistaken to mean that the working people of the ancient Sri Lanka did not have any problems or suffer any hardship and oppression and that they lived very happy lives.⁴ But Buddhism certainly had given to

people many such common values that influenced their social life. They had built certain social values as common practice in their lives such as protection of common property, appreciation of collective action, helping those who are in distress, hospitality towards strangers, compassion towards all living beings.

But as a result of the maturing of the feudalist system, the increasing influence of Hindu culture, which introduced extremist life-styles, and the impact of Western invaders, this simple life-style was subjected to a gradual process of change. Particularly after the forced introduction of the capitalist socio-economic system of the British imperialists and under the influence of colonialist education system, the ideology of development in the country underwent a rapid and a drastic change.

Imperialist Domination and Distorted Development

The principle given in Deegha Nikaya-3 Chakkawaththi Seehanada Suttaya which says “*Attadeepa Viharatha, Attasarana Annanna Sarana—Dhamma Deepa Viharatha Dhamma Sarana Annanna Sarana*”, that is the principle of making oneself an island and depending not on the help of others but on one’s own self and making Dhamma an island and depending not on anything other than Dhamma, was given up, which means the life based on right policy and self-reliance has been suppressed and a life of dependence on other countries has replaced it. All the concepts that Buddhism emphasized have been reversed today. Selfish accumulation of wealth has replaced Daana (Generosity) intolerance has replaced pleasant speech. We have uneconomical wastefulness instead of a rational economic life, and large social disparities instead of equality.

As a result of the measures adopted to enhance private accumulation of wealth in the name of development of the country poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, ill-health, disease, have increased together with rapidly growing alienation. Together with the old and the neo-colonialist form of capitalist development, the three principles of rule that existed in the past in our country, which were enunciated by King Agbo V, mentioned earlier, have totally disappeared, What we see

throughout the country today is improper investment. This is a type of investment that is beneficial to foreign multinational companies. It is the investment that increases peoples poverty and nourishes anti-social forces. The past rulers of the country who avoided inappropriate investment were able to achieve a high standard in economic development. This is how Sri Lanka came to be known as the "Granary of the East".

But today inappropriate investment has brought extremely harmful results making Sri Lanka one of the poorest countries in the world. Instead of avoiding improper conduct, we have bribery, nepotism, granting favours to party supporters and many other forms of improper treatment and their denial to the deserving. This has led to great dissatisfaction, hatred and extreme forms of selfishness, which look for one's own interest with complete disregard for the consequences on the other. The third aspect of wasteful consumption has led to the degradation of the entire social life. This situation is seen not only in Sri Lanka but also in the other Asian and non-Asian countries throughout the world that were linked to imperialism.

The five types of trade that the Buddha prohibited have become the largest profit-earning traders in today's world. The sale of deadly weapons takes the first place. The expenditure on arms production is being increased every day while millions of people die of starvation and hunger. The super powers who dominate the world have become 'sellers of death and have become the biggest obstacle to social development. Sale of narcotics and poison is not secondary to the above. The sale of narcotics comes next to the sale of arms which brings the greatest profits within the shortest possible time. The larger share of the land throughout the world is allocated not for production of food that feeds the hungry but for producing raw materials for alcohol. Production of liquor which was considered in the past to be one of the most degrading ways of earning a living is today seen in almost every village in Sri Lanka. Coconut cultivation throughout the coastal region in Sri Lanka is being used for production of toddy, which is converted to various forms of alcohol as a Government

patronized industry. Sugarcane cultivation has also been used for production of liquor.

Today, a number of Multinational Companies have formed joint State Companies together with the Government of Sri Lanka to cultivate sugarcane for sugar industry. Can we be sure that these sugar plantations will not be used more for production of liquor rather than for production of sugar in time to come? Those who are concerned more about profits than with development would tend to do so. A number of big Tobacco Multinational Companies have already covered a considerable extent of land with tobacco. They are attracting more and more vegetable and food crop farmers, particularly the small farmers, to grow tobacco in place of food crops. Tobacco brings no benefit to the country and to its people, apart from earning large profits within short periods to the Companies.

However, the religious leaders in our country have been unable to defeat these trends. Can we think of reviving Asiatic social values without defeating them? The situation is the same regarding the sale of human persons, animals and meat, which were condemned by Buddhism. Labour market is one of the means by which the greatest profits are earned. It is not better than those mentioned earlier. Slave trade was an important business activity in the past. Today it has taken the form of sale of labour. In this trade, human relationships have been greatly degraded and it has become a great obstacle to the development of productive forces. Labour when sold cheap result in a great loss to society. In Sri Lanka too, the sale of cheap migrant labour to the Middle-East, which has expanded tremendously over the recent years, has led to serious destruction in social life and this question has led to a great commotion in our society. With the coming of Multinational Companies into the country, labour is offered cheap and in abundance. This has become lucrative business to some while creating serious confusion in the social relationships. The sale of flesh of animals is an activity that needs careful re-consideration at least in the context of the Asian social value system, whatever may be its validity in the cold climatic regions of the West. When the required balance between the

environment, the animals and human beings and the need for survival of animals is given due consideration, it is important to rethink whether the sale of meat should be allowed and promoted as a means of profit making.

Three Models that Influence Asian Social Development

Although there have been such specific tendencies, imperialist capitalism has not succeeded in completely uprooting the foundations of the Asian Societies. However, a leap forward in Asian social development has been prevented for many centuries as a result of its subjection to the growth of 'Western' capitalism. During this period, an abundance of social values that Asian civilisation could have contributed to the process of world development, stopped in their growth. If feudalist Asia moved forward in its own evolution and growth, advancing through capitalism in its own way, this situation may have changed. But this growth did not occur according to an Asian model.

If at all, this occurred only in Japan, although China engaged in this effort in 1911, no free growth of capitalism was possible due to the already present impact of Western capitalism. The contradictions were created due to the interaction between the growth of capitalism internally, the inability of the weakening feudalist system to face the threat of Western imperialism, the influence made by a number of imperialist forces on China, the growth of forces of liberation within China together with the new thinking generated by the 1917 October revolution resulted in China moving out of the direct path of capitalist development on to a new path.

This new orientation is making a tremendous impact on the formation of Asian Societies and it will add a new wealth of experience to Asia in the effort to free itself from the clutches of Western capitalism and towards building a new society based on the principle of self-reliance. In spite of the tendencies that are seen today within the entire movement for liberation in China, to swing to the left and to the right from time to time, China with an ancient Asian civilisation and an unbroken history would make a great contribution to the rest of the

world by scientifically upgrading the essence of its Asian cultural and spiritual heritage. In the meanwhile, development of the Indian region has forced a tragic fate in face of imperialist influences. So far no liberation movement either religious or social in nature has succeeded in emerging as capable of overcoming the many racial divisions and other conservative forces in its society. However, when the immense historical heritage of this regional society with its tremendous spiritual values obtains the necessary impulse to find free expression the momentum of the creative forces of this region will over-throw the reactionary Brahmin forces that suppress them, and would shine as the new sun of liberation upon the entire world community.

On the other hand, Japan that moved ahead independently along a path of capitalist development could not free itself fully from the contradictions and disturbances created by the impact of Western capitalism. Japan, which had a craving to reach the highest peak along the capitalist path disregarded her religious and cultural inheritance and finally brought in extremely destructive results upon itself and on the neighbouring world by engaging in a fascist course of action. Japan was the Asian country that obtained the most shocking results and experiences from World War II. When the fate of the civilisation that Japan built independently is being subjected to a serious challenge as a result of its imperialist course of action, the fascist tendency, and by being the laboratory for testing the atom bomb, it would be extremely important not only for Asia but also for the entire world to carefully examine how the Japanese have synthesized these experiences for themselves.

The end of Second World War was an ideal occasion for Japan to have examined historically the experience of the Emperor Asoka, who ruled in India a long time ago. Asoka was disillusioned with life as a result of the great destruction to human life caused by the Kalinga War. The way of the Buddha guided Asoka to understand life and to become a humanitarian. His greatest transformation was to understand that if his motherland India could contribute anything to the world, it was not the greatness in war but the greatness of

Dhamma (that conquering of the world should not be through war but through Dhamma). We, a very small island in Asia and a people who possess a culture formed under the influence of Buddhism, would like to direct this question to the people of Japan. Have you, as a nation that has Buddhism as your cultural inheritance, looked back at the living experience of the great destruction to human life caused by World War II? The victorious Indian emperor Dharmasoka gave up the ideal of victory through war and started serving the people through aspiring for victory through Dhamma, and he devoted all the wealth that had been amassed in his treasury to the good of the people. It is said that he finally had only half a Nelli fruit, which he gave to the Bhikkus near him. Japan an Asian country, which is still aspiring for a capitalist future should look at this historical lesson of Dharmasoka.

A Buddhist Way of Understanding the Present World Situation

Though there are regional differences as discussed above, the formation of Asian societies and their evolution is not independent of the world situation. In what way does Buddhism help us to clarify this aspect? The principles that the Buddha preached in his first sermon helps us to understand the world situation and to find our way towards changing the same. As preached by the Buddha, the world as a whole has divided itself to two extremes. There is a group of countries that have achieved a great development in the material sense. At the other extreme are the countries of Asia, except Japan and the other under-developed countries of the Third World. The developed countries, through imperialism, are suppressing the Third World and its peoples. They exploit raw materials and human labour from the Third World and the world's capital accumulates only in the hands of a few powerful states, while poverty grows in its extreme forms in the Third World countries. The production of commodities for luxurious consumption by the developed countries has led to a life style similar to that described by Buddha as "Kamasukallikanu yogi" while the extreme lack of essential goods, preventing the meeting of basic needs, has created the other extreme form of

life described as “Attakilamathanu yogi”. The world society is thus divided.

This world socio-economic system has also created the extreme ideologies as its reflection. They also appear as ideologies for the liberation from social suffering. In some places in the world today there are extreme ideologies that hope to achieve liberation by inflicting suffering on the human body. There are some religious sects that avoid medicine when sick believing that death would bring liberation. In Great Britain, we hear of groups such as the “Exit Society”, who commit suicide to be liberated. There are the Yogis of the Indian tradition who practise extreme forms of self-discipline remaining for long periods in one physical position. Sometimes we see some Western intellectuals too being attracted by these. Such Yogi Societies have been formed in some places.

There are also those who try to please their senses for liberation through use of narcotic drugs together with ideological trends that correspond to these practices. There are societies of hippies who take very expensive drugs such as LSD. Marijuana, Heroin to experience a state of liberation. They say drugs help them in better meditation. There are others travelling around the world seeking various pleasures and they have corresponding ideologies. But none of these extremes can change the world situation. While it is wrong to believe that the world situation cannot be changed and adheres to the traditional religious or ideological extremes, it would be equally wrong to take up adventurist extremes with the hope of changing the world situation.

The Approach Towards Social Transformation

We have to reject all extremist ideologies. Rejecting them involves the rejection of the life styles of extreme luxury and of extreme suffering that generate these ideologies. Rejection of these extreme forms of life means the building of a new order for the liberation of human-kind. That would be a middle path which avoids the extremes. This is not something located in between the two extremes, but a rejection of both.

For this the middle path that the Buddha described would provide the necessary guidance when understood in the present context. The elements of the path for liberation for the present world population too would be the right views, right aspirations, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought and concentration.

The world history has moved forward step by step, from time to time, towards changing the world that was reflected by the above extremes, and the first step towards the changing of the present world in order to build a new world was taken in 1917. Our people today have learnt the lessons of the experiences of success and failure of the liberation movement that moved forward from that point, and they have gained strength by it. Therefore what has to be done today is to reject the capitalist economic system, which is decomposing and to build a "Saangika" system of property ownership and a Sangha society, which is the same as that which existed prior to the first rejection, but which is of a broader base and material strength.

A model of such a society can be established today in its total sense in one political unit, that is in one country. But the people of that country will have to go through an extremely difficult task to protect such a unit until the entire humankind accepts such a model. This is proved by the international experience of the modern times from 1917.

This experience is totally in accordance with the Buddha's preachings in Chakkawaththi Sehanada Suthraya. This model in fact would not begin simultaneously in all places, but would be from one country. Then it would gradually spread to the whole world with the first country as its pilot. This growth is mentioned in the Suthra as follows:

"O Bhikkhus, in the city of Benares there would be a kingdom named Kethumathi, which would be prosperous, wealthy and highly populated, with an abundance of food".
 "O Bhikkhus, in this land of India, there would be eighty-four thousand cities which would take Kethumathi as its model and the guide".

“A righteous King Chakrawartha would be born in this kingdom”.

“They would then live in peace and justice throughout this earth that has the great seas as their boundaries”.

The vision of the Buddha about the future is truly in accordance with the march of history. It would not be a kingdom of heaven that would come down suddenly, neither is it a magic world that could be built overnight. It is a society that would start forming in the City of Benares and spread out to the land of India, and then to the whole of the earth. One may raise the question why it did not originate in Asia. We have already discussed the historical reasons for this deviation. A thinker would speak about the future possibilities and the course of action generally starting from one's own setting and environmental situation. Both Karl Marx and Engels first thought that socialism would overcome capitalism starting from Europe. But it emerged from Russia and did it not turn towards under-developed Asia without spreading towards Europe?

However, it is our task to make this a reality. It is our historical mission and the social responsibility.

A Conclusion

Asian society has now gained a wealth of experience in relation to this. But Asia will not succeed in building a new society outside the foundation that its ancient civilisation and culture has constructed. There is a contradiction that awakening Asia has to resolve between its many centuries old historical development and the period of stagnation over a century that occurred due to the impact of aggressive capitalism from the West.

The resolution of this historical contradiction would be possible with the contribution of the new scientific thought and the ability to correctly absorb what is valuable in the old. Buddhism would be able to provide a powerful source of guidance in resolving the above contradiction in order to create a new Asian social model.

I think it is opportune for me to end this talk by quoting to you from a speech that the Late Sri Lankan Bishop, Lakshman Wickremesinghe made in Bangalore, India in 1981 at the Christian Conference of Asia Assembly. During this talk, he quoted from the Russian Marxist Parfionovich, which I would repeat before you:

“Well, did not Lenin say that Marxism, far from repudiating the past, should absorb and work on it as the only sure foundation of a proletarian culture? Who can deny that Buddhism has been not simply a religion but a way of life for millions? That its cultural and historical values have moulded the spiritual heritage of mankind?...”

Notes

1. The Maha Nidana Sutra included in the Digha Nikaya of the Sutra Pitaka provides another example. A special feature of this Sutra is its analysis of social problems in terms of cause and effect according to the theory of “dependent origination”. To quote one instance:

Ananda, thus does feeling beget desire. Desire leads to search (of objects of attachment). Search leads to gain (of the objects of attachment). Gain leads to estimation (the good or bad results of the objects of attachment). Estimation leads to attraction (towards the objects estimated). Attraction leads to personal identification (as I and mine). Personal identification leads to possession (ownership consequent to desire and false belief). Possession leads to greed. Greed leads to protection. Protection requires clubs and weapons, creates quarrels, opposition, arguments, altercations, gossip, lying and other puerile evil consequences.

“Ananda, therefore, clubs, weapons, quarrels, opposition, arguments, altercations, gossip, lying and other evil consequences have protection of possessions as their sole cause, sole origination, sole basis, sole support” (Digha Nikaya, 2 p. 87, from Buddha Jayanti Sinhala translation).

Thus has the Buddha explained the origin of social crises, according to the theory of Dependent Origination.

This will be clear if one examines how, as a result of certain methods adopted by Bhikkhu Dhaniya (a potter's son) to construct a temple, the Buddha had to take suitable action and lay down the second rule (in Parajika Pali in the Vinaya Pitaka.) decreeing it unworthy of Bhikkus to build well finished houses etc. even for personal

residence. Another example is the method approved by the Buddha for the construction of hermitages for Bhikkhus. Vide: Senasanakanda in the Chullavagga Pali in Vinaya Pitaka.

2. There was a famine in the city of Rajagaha. As a result, the Sangha had to face great difficulties in obtaining their requirements. For there was a shortage of provisions and irregular distribution of what was available. In the Senasana Khandaka of the Chullavagga Pali in the Vinaya Pitaka, a long description is given of a System of distribution organised with the Buddha's approval.

The following are extracts showing the reason for the creation of this organised system and the democratic way in which responsibilities were assigned.

"63. At that time, the six monks (The group of six-Editor) were taking for themselves the better food and giving the worthless to the other monks. The Buddha was informed of this.

"Monks, if there be one that does no evil by own choice or by hate or by ignorance or by fear and also knows who has claimed and who has not, such a monk having these five qualities do I approve to be selected as Bhattudesaka (Rice Receiver). Monks such selection should be made in the following manner: Firstly, a Monk should be invited to accept selection as Bhattudesaka. Thereafter an eloquent and authoritative monk should be made to announce to Sangha as follows:"

"Venerable Sirs, I seek your attention. If the Sangha are all here assembled they shall select Venerable so and so as Bhattudesaka. So do I announce.

"Venerable Sirs, I wish to be heard. The Sangha are to select Venerable so and so as Bhattudesaka. Those of you who approve the selection of Venerable so and so as Bhattudesaka, may remain silent. Those who do not approve may speak.

"Monk so and so has been selected as Bhattudesaka by the consent of the Sangha. Hence the silence, so do I understand."

Then, the Bhattudesakta Monk thought:—How should the rice be distributed? The Buddha was consulted.

"Monk, I approve the drawing of lots for the distribution of rice. The names may be written on pieces of eakel or stripes and enclosed and mixed and then drawn" said the Buddha.

Similarly, for all matters, big or small, affecting the Sangha, persons suitable for the task are selected and appointed, as for example in: 64. Allocator of Seats; 65. Treasurer; 66. Robe Receiver; 67. Robe Distributor; 68. Gruel Distributor, Fruit Distributor, 69.

Short Eats Distributor; 70. Minor Personal Requirements Distributor; 71. Provider of Rainwear. 72. Overseer of Temple Staff and Supervisor of Novice Bhikkus.

3. The description given to Prince Anuruddha about the way rice is created," vide-Chapter 19 of the Pujavaliya, regarded as written during the Dambadeniya period, provide a clear view of the life and work of peasants of that day. It is also a sharp reply to some who try to assert glibly that there was prosperity in the past and that the people lived a contented life. The Author of Pujavali, describing step by step the vicissitudes of peasant life, summarizes the facts as follows.

". . . When examined, the peasant never enjoyed a free day. When ill, they couldn't earn a livelihood. Even when in employment, they couldn't earn their meals for they couldn't finish their work in industry. So, with crutches under both arms, with a shabby look caused by shameful rags and hunched, they have to go from door to door, like some caricature in masks, begging in that country where they once did earn their livelihood."

Robert Knox's notes on his imprisonment show how the above situation had worsened so much that during the time of the Kandyan Kingdom the peasants were burdened with debt. Knox was a special prisoner of King Rajasinghe 2, in the second half of the 17th century. This is what he states about peasant debt.

"I began to set up a new Trade.....which was to lend one Corn. The benefit of which is fifty per cent per annum...he that useth this Trade must watch when the debtors field is ripe and claim his due in time, otherwise other creditors coming before will seize all upon the account of their debts and leave, no corn at all for those that come later. For those that come thus a borrowing, generally carry none of their corn home when it is ripe for their creditors ease them of their labour by coming into their fields and taking it and commonly they have not half enough to pay what they owe....." (A Historical Relation of Ceylon: Knox—Tisara Publication—p. 281).

Domination—Liberation: A New Approach

Enrique Dussel

This article is divided into two parts. The first part consists of a detailed analysis of some of the themes currently prevailing in Latin American theology. This is followed, in Part II, by a methodological analysis to show the relevance of this theology not only for our Latin America, but for all “peripheral” cultures—in fact for theology throughout the world, beyond the bounds, that is, of strictly European theology.

I. Domination—Liberation

In this first section we shall examine in detail the trends taken by Latin American theology, which always starts, not from a theological position, but from the state of affairs as they actually exist. We start, therefore, not with what theologians have said about the situation, but with the situation itself. As we can indicate only some of the themes possible, we shall consider the three which tradition suggests should be the most important. In Semitic thought Hammurabi declared quite clearly in his *Code*: “I have defended them with wisdom, so that the strong shall not oppress the weak, and that justice be done to the orphan and widow.” These political, sexual and educational levels are also indicated in Isa. I. 17: “Correct

oppression; defend the fatherless; plead for the widow.” The same three levels are also indicated by Jesus: “Truly I say to you, there is no man who has left house, or wife or parents or children . . .” (Lk. 18.29). In the sixteenth century, Bartolome de las Casas accused European Christians of injustice because “the men—for in battles normally only children and women are left alive—are oppressed with the hardest, most horrible and harshest servitude.”¹ The brother-to-brother aspect (male, oppressed, weak) is the political level; the man-woman aspect (home, wife, widow) is the sexual level; the father-son aspect (orphan, child) is the educational level. Let us see how, on these three levels, an argument can be constructed from the situation as it acutally exists.

I. The Political Starting-Point

The present world situation reveals in its structure an imbalance that is already five centuries old. Byzantine Christianity was destroyed in 1453 and, thanks to the experiences of Portugal in North Africa and the failure of its eastward expansion (the conquest movement of the crusades in the Middle Ages which tried to reach the Orient by way of the Arab world), Latin Christianity began to expand in the North Atlantic, which has remained, up to the present day, the centre of world history, politically speaking. First Spain, then Holland and England, followed by France and other European countries, worked out the framework of a truly world-wide oikumene, for until the fifteenth century the Latin, Byzantine Arab, Indian, Chinese, Aztec or Inca oikumenes were purely regional. The new oikumene had its centre in Europe and, since the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the present century, the United States, Russia, and more recently Japan. It also had a huge periphery—Latin America, the Arab world, Black Africa, South East Asia, India and China.

European man first said, through Spain and Portugal, with Pizarro and Cortes: “I conquer”—and he said it to the Indian. With Hobbes he stated more clearly still: “Homo homini lupus.” With Nietzsche he called himself “the will to power”. Thus the political and economic structure of the world was

unified into one all-powerful international market. Here is an example to illustrate the profound moral injustice of this dehumanizing structure.

Exports of Precious Metals from the Private Sector to Europe, with Corresponding Imports of Merchandise into Latin America (In maravedis, the currency of the period)

Period	Exports from the private sector	Imported goods	Balance in Spain's favour
1561-1570	8,785 million	1,565 million	7,220 million
1581-1590	16,926 ,,	3,915 ,,	13,011 ,,
1621-1630	19,104 ,,	5,300 ,,	13,804 ,,

(*Source* : Works of Alvaro Jara, Pierre Chaunu, Osvaldo Sunkel).

This dependence and colonial injustice was to last without interruption from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Raul Prebisch tells us in 1964 that, between 1950 and 1961 in Latin America, “net remissions of foreign capital of all types reached the figure of 9,600 million dollars, while Latin American exports overseas amounted to 13,400 million dollars.”² So far as the political situation is concerned (brother-to-brother) domination is now exercised by the centre over the periphery. This pattern is repeated when the capital city exploits the interior or the provinces,³ or where an upper-class minority dominates the working classes, and where bureaucracy directs the fortunes of the masses.

2. *The Sexual Starting-Point*

Interpersonal relations show that in the relationship of man to women, injustice has existed for thousands of years—an

injustice which reached its highest level in modern Europe. If it is true, as Freud so brilliantly revealed, that, in our male-dominated society, “the *libido* is generally masculine in nature”⁴, it was not so clearly seen that the colonizer was usually male and his victim in our case was the Indian woman. Bishop Juan Ramirez of Guatemala, wrote on March 10th, 1603 : “The worst forms of force and violence, unheard of in other nations and kingdoms, are perpetrated upon the Indian women. The wives of Indian men are raped forcibly by order of the authorities and they are obliged to work in the homes of planters, on farms and in labour camps where they live in sin with the master of the house, with mestizos, mulattos, blacks, or with other cruel men.”⁵ The colonial male who lies illegally with the Indian woman is the father of the mestizo, and the Indian woman is the mother. The male conquistador—first the planters and colonial bureaucracy, later the native-born creole minority and finally the bourgeoisie of the dependent territories—sexually oppressed and alienated the Indian, the mestizo or the poor woman. The male from the national higher-class minority seized the local girl from the hands of the poor working man living on the outskirts of the big cities—a theme sung in the Tango “Margot” 1918, by Celedonio Flores—while demanding of his own high-born wife both purity and chastity. This particular piece of hypocrisy was pointed out by W. Reich and it can be observed extensively in the Third World.

The everyday “I conquer”, the ontological *ego cogito*, comes from the oppressor male, who as we see by psychoanalysis of Descartes, denies his mother, his lover and his daughter. To borrow an expression from Maryse Choisy and Lacan, we might say that these days “phallocracy goes hand-in-hand with plutocracy”.

3. *The Educational Starting-Point*

Political and sexual domination is completed through *education*: the child is conditioned within the family, and youth in society is moulded through the media. Since Aristotle⁶

educators have maintained that “parents love their children because they regard them as they regard themselves (*heatous*), for they are in some sense one’s self (*tauto*), yet divided into separate individuals” (*Et. Nic.* VIII, 12, 1161 b 27–34). Cultural conquest of other peoples is equally an expansion of the self. The conquistador or the propagandist achieves his aim by force of arms or by violently imposing on the other (the Indian, African, Asian, the community, the worker, the oppressed) so-called civilization, or his religion, or by exalting his own cultural system (the ideological closed system). Educational domination is dialectical (from the Greek *dia*=through)—a movement whereby the cultural boundaries of the father, the imperialist or the obligarchy extend so as to embrace the other (the son) within its self. The process of conquest and cultural assimilation in America, Africa and Asia and the education of the son into the self (as Socrates proposed in his *meyeutika* as a means of “being delivered of one’s ideas”) is a kind of inverted Passover, an ideological dialectic whereby the new being (the other, the young person) is eclipsed and domination made complete. Further, it is projected into the personal and social ego, so that the son or the oppressed culture even begins to sing the praises of his oppressor: “two different civilizations can be seen side by side—the one belonging to the country itself and the other to European civilization.”⁷ Sarmiento spurns the culture of the periphery, the dependent nation, the *gaucho* and the poor; instead he exalts the culture of the “centre”, which is a minority culture, elitist and oppressive.

4. *Face-to-Face Encounter—the Closed System and the Outside*

Starting-point of our argument was the “actual situation” or (reality) considered at three levels. But reality can have two different basic meanings. Anything within the world is real as having existence in the world⁸ and in this sense the Indian was a real being assigned to a master and the Black was a real being, who was enslaved. On the other hand, something can also be real from a universal point of view⁹ as constituted by its essential physical structure.¹⁰ The political, sexual and educational points we have made are events taking

place within various situations, with men playing different roles, whether as dependent underdeveloped countries, as woman or as child. These situations are, however, distortions or denials of that very basic human (one might even say, sacred) quality--face-to-face encounter. The real situation of men *within* circumstances of oppression is a denial of the real nature of man as "another being",--which is the metaphysical meaning of reality.

Encounter face-to-face (Hebrew *pnim'el pnim* of Ex. 33. II), person-to-person encounter (Greek *Prosopon pros prosopon*, I Cor. 13. 12), is a linguistic reduplication, common in Hebrew, used to convey the greatest nearness of comparison--the very closest in this case: closeness, the immediacy of contact between two mysteries each equally aware of meeting another. In sexual activity this encounter is mouth-to-mouth--i.e. the kiss: "Oh that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!" (Song of Song I. I). This is a fundamental truth, a *veritas prima*--to see the face of someone without oneself losing the quality of someone; to see the face of the other, and yet to remain oneself; to encounter the mystery which opens out, incomprehensible and sacred beyond the eyes that I actually see and which actually see me in the closeness of encounter.

There was a day when the conquistador stood face-to-face with the Indian, the African and the Asian. The boss stood face-to-face with the unemployed who came to seek work. The man was face-to-face with the helpless woman begging for mercy. The father stood before his new-born son, face-to-face, as a man talking to his intimate friend. With its closed system (the ontological), Europe opened itself as the male and the father was open to the otherness (the metaphysical if *physics* is "being" in the sense of the world's horizons) of the peripheral cultures, to the woman and child, or, we might say, to the "stranger, the widow and the orphan", as the prophets had it.

The other is primary (the parents who beget the son, the society which admits us into its traditions or the Creator who gives us real being). Man, rather than relate to nature (the economic level), chooses to expose himself to another man. We are born in the womb of a someone (our mother); in our first waking moments we eat that someone (we suckle at the

breasts of our mother). We ardently want to remain face-to-face ever afterwards. After the closeness of face-to-face relationship the separation necessitated by economic dealings is a painful alternative.

5. *The Oppressor Praxis—Sin and the Poor*

Biblical symbolism shows us through the prophetic tradition an argument or line of thought which we shall here set out briefly. In the first place "Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen. 4. 8) and Jesus adds the comment "innocent Abel" (Mt. 23. 25). To say "no" to my neighbour is the only possible sin, it is the "sin of the world" or the fundamental sin. The same "no" to my neighbour is said by the priest and the levite in the parable of the Samaritan (Lk. 10. 31-2). Augustine, in his political interpretation of original sin, says clearly that "Cain founded a city, while Abel the wanderer did not".¹¹ Historically and actually sin since the fifteenth century has taken the form of a "no" on the part of the North Atlantic centre to the Indian, the African, the Asian and to the worker, the peasant and the outcast. It has been a "no" to the woman in patriarchal families, and a "no" to the child in the oppressor's educational system.

"No" to my neighbour (anthropologically speaking) or fratricide leads to maximizing the reign of the "flesh" (*basar* in Hebrew; *sarx* in Greek). The device of *temptation* (and not of Prometheus bound to the *ananke*) is the one proposed by the closed system in the words, "You shall be as gods" (Gen. 3. 5). Sin, beginning as "no" to my neighbour, takes the form of self-deification, the exalting of self as an object of worship, and leads to idolatry—"no" to the Creator. To be able to say with Nietzsche "God is dead" it was necessary first of all to kill his manifestation of himself to the Indian, the African and the Asian.

Idoltrous exaltation of the *flesh*, in this case as seen in the modern structure of European Christianity, produces within the closed system a separation between the one who dominates "the world" (a new term for "*flesh*", but now completely deified) and the oppressed. On the one side stand "the rulers"

(*archontcs*) of the nations (who) lord it over them (*katakryrieousin*) and the great men (who) exercise authority” (Mt. 20. 25). These are the “angels” (sent by) the “Prince of this world” and the Pilates who “ask for water and wash their hands” (Mt. 27. 24). The present world order (economic, cultural, sexual and aesthetic) is the prevailing rule of sin, inasmuch as it oppresses the poor. The “rulers” have their group projection which they objectivize as the projection of the whole system and which expands as an imperialist projection by means of conquest in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The “self” remains the “self”. The “praxis of domination” of those who usurp the position of God and exalt themselves is sin in a very real and strict sense. This is the praxis of “no” to my neighbour, spoken to the oppressed brother, to woman as a sexual object, to the child as the unthinking reproducer of traditional ways of life.

The oppressed one is Job. He suffers because sin (the praxis of the great one acting as *oppressor*) alienates him, but he is not aware of having committed any sin at all. The wise men in his situation, speaking for the system (Bildad and Sophar), try to convince the oppressed one in the name of Satan, that he is a sinner. By so doing they maintain the innocence of the real sinner—of the oppressor.

The oppressed one humanly speaking is not the poor (the oppressed as an other). The “poor” in the words “Blessed are the poor” (*ptochoi*) (Lk. 6.20), or better still in the words “The poor you shall have with you always” (Mt. 26. II) is the other in that he does not share the supreme value of the socio-political system. The “poor” are just as much a category—they are the oppressed nation, class, person or woman in that these are outside the structure of the oppressor. In this sense the “poor” (in the biblical sense) are not the same as the alienated oppressed living *within* the system, but they do share many of the characteristics of the poor socially and economically speaking.

6. *The Praxis of Liberation—Redemption and the Prophet*

To make the contrast with the “praxis of sin” set out in the previous section, we can now look at the praxis of liberation,

of anti-sin or the direct opposite of the negation of the other.¹² The Bible speaks, in the story of Moses (Ex. 3 ff.). or in the parable of the Samaritan, of a direct “yes” to my neighbour when he is still oppressed within the system. The prophetic light of faith permits us to see through the outward surface of the oppressed and to see the other within. Behind the slave of Egypt lies man, liberated. Behind the beaten, robbed traveller lying at the roadside is the otherness of the human *persona*. This is not a turning aside (*aversio*) from the other, but a turning towards (*conversio*) the other as a fellow citizen of the City of God. As we see in the case of Bartolome de las Casas, that ardent anti-conquistador and modern European, the righteous man discovers the other as he really is: “God made these people (the Indians) the simplest of men, without guile or cunning, not quarrelsome, riotous or rowdy. They bear no ill-will or hatred, and they seek no revenge.”¹³

To say “yes” to my neighbour, the system first has to be broken into, opened up. We have, in other words, to cease to believe in the system. The Virgin of Nazareth, the flesh, opens us to the spirit (otherness). Jesus said that we should “render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and to God that which is God’s (Mt. 22.21). Like the prophets before him, he thus did not believe in Caesar, the flesh and the closed system. When Feuerbach and Marx said they did not believe in the “god” of Hegel and of the European bourgeoisie (the only god they knew), they set out along the correct and orthodox path.¹⁴

To achieve the breakdown of the closed system of sin, otherness has to attack it subversively. The ana-lectic (what is outside the system), the absolute Other, the Word (in Hebrew *dabhar*, which has nothing to do with the Greek *logos*) breaks into the closed system and becomes flesh: “. . . in the form of God . . . he emptied himself (*ekenosen*) and took the form of a servant” (*loulou*) (Phil. 2.6-7). Christ, the Church, the prophet must assume within the system the position of the oppressed. The servant (*‘ebhedh* in Hebrew, *doulos* or *pais* in Greek) really assumes the position of the oppressed, whether socially, politically, culturally or economically. In their alienated position they become like the Indian, African or Asian, the worn-out woman, the educationally manipulated child. They immerse

themselves in the prison of sin (the system), but do not obey its rules.

The servant, the prophet or the poor in spirit¹⁵ acting from amongst the ranks of and together with the oppressed, carry out the praxis of liberation (Hebrew 'abodhah; Greek—*diakonia* which is a work of righteousness and worship performed by the saving God. This service performed by the Samaritan or by Moses for the sake of the poor or the slaves as members of the outside, is a subversive praxis, both historical (and hence socio-political, cultural, economic and sexual) and eschatological. To this end he is called (Lk. 4.18; Is. 61.1) to undermine the system and direct history along a new path¹⁶ and to liberate the poor in a year of festival or rejoicing.¹⁷

The liberator or the servant prophet, by responding to the cry of the poor (as other), discloses himself as the herald of the new system over against the old system of sin, imperialism and oppression, whether international or national, economic, political, cultural or sexual. Hence he announces the dispossession of the ruler and the end of him as an oppressor. The closed system or the flesh transforms mere domination into repression, violence and persecution. So the liberating servant is the first to die: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!" (Mt. 23.37). In such a case the liberator becomes a redeemer—the one who, by a truly expiatory sacrifice (Hebrew—*kibburim*), pays in his own flesh for the liberation of the other: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*), and he who would be first among you must be your slave (*doulos*); even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve (*diakonesai*) and to give his life as a ransom for many" *luton anti pollon*— (Mt. 20.26-28).

There are many examples of this praxis of liberation—the prophets and Jesus, the Christians persecuted under the Roman Empire, Bishop Valdivieso (murdered in 1550 by the governor for defending the Indians in Nicaragua), Pereira Neto in Brazil in 1969 or Mahatma Gandhi or Patrice Lumumba in the non-Christian Third World—we see how the liberator, when he announces the end of the old system, is assassinated violently and in cold blood by the angels of the Prince of this World,

that is, by the conquistadors, the imperialist armies, the capitalist bankers or the “herodian” governments of the dependent nations themselves. The closed system spells death for itself. The death of the liberator is, on the other hand, the death of death and the beginning of a new birth (Jn. 3.5-8).¹⁸

7. Towards an Ecclesiology of Redemptive Liberation

All the foregoing is constantly lived out in the actual historical context of the community of the “called”, that is the Church or even world history itself.

Since the liberating and redemptive death of Christ, world history has been living under a new order of reality, since any man of good-will receives enough grace for salvation. However, because of sin, historical institutions (social, political, economic, sexual and educational) tend to close in on themselves, petrify and become self-perpetuating. They have to be given new impetus, be opened to new influence and be given dialectical flexibility in the direction of the parousia. God, from the creative outside, has founded the Church at the very heart of the flesh, of the world, of the closed system (an alienating or kenotic movement). The Church, his gift, is the becoming flesh of the spirit. By baptism, the Christian is consecrated to the liberating service of the world, and received into the community. The earthly phenomenon of the Church, an institutional community, was born, geo-politically speaking, in the western Mediterranean and reached maturity in Latin and Germanic Christianity, in other words in Europe, which together with the United States and Russia is the geo-political centre of our modern world. On the other hand, since it was born, socially speaking, among the oppressed people of the Roman Empire, it today finds itself part of those nations that oppress the dependent peripheral nations and frequently finds itself compromised with the ruling classes (at national level) or with the ruling culture.

Thus, the Church which has become flesh in the world (like the leaven in the dough in the parable) comes to be identified with the flesh and the closed system. This self-identification with the Prince of this World is the sin of the Church, which

petrifies the system and even sanctifies it. The terms *Holy Roman Empire*, *Christian countries*, *Western Christian civilization*, and so on, bear witness to this.

But the essential nature of the Church as the liberating community and institution requires it to identify itself with the oppressed so as to “break down the barriers” of the systems which have become closed by the work of sin, or by injustice, whether political—at national or international level—economic, social, cultural or sexual. The sign (*semeion* of St John’s Gospel) of the Church, its proclamation, can only be effected by involving the community in the movement of liberation (Hebrew —*pasah* means moving, march of flight), to move a system which acts oppressively towards becoming a new system which acts to liberate. And this, in its turn, is, so far as the Church is concerned, the sign of the eschatological forward movement of the Kingdom. The Eucharist is a foretaste, in the forward movement of the Kingdom; it is a feast of liberation from sin (from slavery in Egypt). The liberation of Latin America is, therefore, the compelling call to the Church in Latin America (a dependent and to some extent oppressed sector of the World Church). At the same time, liberation of oppressed classes—women, children and the poor—is also the basis of evangelization.

Application of the Theological Argument

We must now turn our attention to the theological argument itself, first of all as we see it in Europe. (We shall therefore be looking at what might be called the white theology of North America). This may lead us to define the theology that emerges as a theology of oppression—whether applicable on a world-wide scale (coming from the peripheral nations), a national scale (coming from the oppressed classes), to sex (a theology of woman) or to education (from the point of view of the younger generation).

1. Conditioning of Theological Thinking

It is widely accepted by critical thinkers in Latin America today that all political expansion soon comes to be based on an

ontology of domination (an *ad hoc* philosophy or theology). Modern European expansion had as its ontological foundation the *ego cogito*¹⁹ preceded by the actual fact of “I conquer”. For Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, the *ego* is a fragment of the unique substance of God—a position which the young Schelling and Hegel were to adopt later—the European *ego* had been deified. Fichte shows us that in the “I am that I am”, the “I” is absolutely fixed.²⁰ It is an “I” that is natural, infinite and absolute (and in Hegel definitely divine). In Nietzsche, the “I” becomes a creative power (“I” as the “will to power”), while in Husserl it becomes the most abstract *ego cogito cogitatum* of phenomenology.²¹ The most serious effect is that *the other* or the neighbour (the Indian, the African, the Asian or the woman) is reduced to the level of an idea. The meaning of the other is formulated in terms of the “I” who dreamed it into existence. The other is made a separate entity, becomes a thing, is abstracted into a *cogitatum*.

Similarly, European theology or the theology of the centre cannot escape from this reduction. The expansion of Latin-German Christianity gave rise to its own theology of conquest. Semitic and Christian thought of the Old and New Testaments was reduced to a process of Indo-European Hellenization from the second century onwards. Medieval European theology was able to justify the feudal world and the *ius dominativum* of the lord over the serf. Tridentine and Protestant theology had nothing to say about the Indian, the African or the Asian (except the Salamanca School and that only for a few decades). Finally the expansion of capitalism and neo-capitalism allowed Christians of the centre to formulate a theology of the *status quo* and the ecumenism of peaceful co-existence between Russia, the United States and Europe so as to dominate the “periphery” more effectively. The other—the poor—was once again defined in terms of the European “I”: *Ego cogito theologatum*. With the basis of theological thinking so reduced, a parallel reduction occurs in the whole field of theology. Sin is reduced so as to apply only to *intra* national injustice; it is exclusivized, allowed to have no political application, shown to have nothing to do with sex (or at other levels shown to have

an excessive relation to sex). But more seriously the limits and meaning of salvation and redemption are equally reduced to the narrow bounds of the Christian experience of the *centre*. We have an individual salvation, interiorized and other-worldly, resorting frequently to some painful masochistic experience at a given time and place, whereas the true cross of real history demands our life at the least expected moment.

This theology suffers from many unconscious limitations. Firstly, the limitations of the religiosity of German-Latin-Mediterranean Christianity which was accepted without hesitation as real simply because it was Latin. Then there are liturgical limitations, in which the Latin-type liturgy is regarded as the only one acceptable for the Christian religion and which still prevents other cultures having their own liturgies. There are also cultural limitations, in that theology is the province of an intellectual elite, university professors in well-paid and secure posts, a situation far removed from, and unhelpful to the study of Tertullian and St Augustine. There are political limitations, for it is a theology adjusted and compromised by its closeness to the metropolitan power of the world. There are also economic limitations, for this theology finds favour for the most part among upper-class minorities in the bourgeoisie and in the neo-capitalist world (although sometimes there may be poor monks, they belong to "rich" orders). Finally, there are sexual limitations, because those who think theologically are celibates and have been unable to formulate an authentic theology of sexuality, marriage and the family. For all these reasons, modern European theology from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries is unconsciously compromised by its connection with the praxis of oppression in the political, educational and sexual fields.

It would be no exaggeration to say that in many respects it is really a theological ideology in that many facets of it remain unseen by virtue of its origins, just as we are unable to see the further side of the moon simply because we are inhabitants of planet earth. And what is still worse, in Latin America there are many progressive theologians who simply repeat the theology of the centre and by so doing they obscure their own

message and, to their shame, become just as much advocates of oppression.

2. *Revelation and Faith—the Anthropological Epiphany*

Western theology has for centuries taken certain presuppositions for granted as unquestionably correct. Kant's ontology (which postulates a rational faith), Hegel's (which sees faith as within the bounds of reason) or Heidegger's (the comprehensiveness of Being) admit the Wholeness of being as the only frontier of thought. Being-in-the-world is the fundamental fact, original and primary.²² Existential theology starts from the basis of the world as the Whole. The fault lies in that, in fact, the Whole is always mine, ours, the European's or the centre's. What passes unnoticed is that I am thereby denying other Christian worlds and other equally valid experiences. I am denying anthropological otherness as a possible starting-point for theological thought.²³

As the older Schelling so clearly saw in his *Philosophie der Offenbarung* faith in the World of the Other lies beyond ontological reason (the Hegelian *Sein*), an argument that Kierkegaard carried forward (e.g. in the *Postscriptum*). Faith stands upon the revelation of the Other. Revelation is only the outgoing message of God, existentially speaking, which sets out the guidelines for interpreting the reality of Christ. In everyday life (existentially),²⁴ God manifests the hidden secret (the fact of redemption in Christ) by means of an interpreting light (a classicist would put it: *ratio sub qua*), or by supplying guidelines (categories) for all mankind and for all history. God gives not only a specific revelation, but more importantly, the categories²⁵ which permit us to interpret it. Revelation comes to a peak in Christ with the New Covenant, but it unfolds its potentialities throughout the course of history. What we are trying to stress here is that this revelation is not effected in history by human words alone, but through man himself (as exterior to the flesh or the system), the poor and the Christ-man.

Faith, which accepts the World of the Other, becomes Christian faith when the divine Word in Christ is accepted

through the mediation of the poor man in history, who actually lives in a concrete situation. The true showing forth of the Word of God is the word of the poor man who cries "I hunger". Only the man who hears the word of the poor (beyond the system, and therefore ana-lectic, which presupposes that he does not believe in the system) can hear it as the Word of God. God is not dead. What has been assassinated is his self-manifestation—the Indian, the African and the Asian—and because of this God cannot reveal himself any more. Abel died in the self-deification of Europe and the centre, and therefore God has hidden his face. The revealed category is clear enough: "I was hungry and you gave me no food. . . . They also shall ask, Lord, when did we see you hungry?" (Mt. 25.42-4).²⁶ Following the death of the "divine" Europe, there can rise the faith in the poor of the periphery, faith in God as mediated by the poor. The new manifestation of God in history (not a resurrection, for he never died) will be brought about by righteousness and not by endless theological treatises on the death of God.²⁷

3. *The Praxis of Liberation and Theology*

Given the data of revelation and by virtue of living faith, theology is a reflection of reality. Recently there has been much talk of theologies of earthly realities or doubt, leading eventually to a theology of revolution²⁸ or development.²⁹ In European circles, to take just the term political theology³⁰ the matter has sterner implications. But Latin America detects in the theologico-political argument an attempt to restrict the prophetic voice of protest to the narrow national sphere. From this narrow viewpoint the fact of international, imperialist injustice passes unnoticed. But eschatological, indiscriminating protest must reach out not only to the constituent parts of the system, but to the system as a whole.³¹

In the same way the provocative theology of hope³² betrays the limitations of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (which influences Metz) and the works of Ernst Bloch (who inspires Moltmann). Both these philosophical hypotheses have failed to overcome ontology and dialectic, and they consider

the future as a development of the Self. Although Moltmann understands the future as otherness, he still has difficulty in finding beyond the projection of the system (but this side of the *eschaton*) an historical projection of political, economic, cultural and sexual liberation. Hope extends as far as an historical change in the pattern of life,³³ but not to a radical renewal of the present system with a view to an historical liberation movement as a true sign of eschatological advance. Without this concrete mediation their hopes reaffirm the *status quo* and constitute a false dream.

On the other hand, a European theology of liberation will bring out clearly the question of Christianity and the class struggle,³⁴ but within the limits of a national Marxism and before moving on to the theory of dependence. It has not yet seen that the struggle of the proletariat within the centre itself, that is, in the metropolitan powers, can be oppressive in terms of the colonial proletariat of the periphery. Classes have been thinking double and may often oppose their own interests at international level. National liberation of the dominated countries goes hand in hand with the social liberation of oppressed classes. Hence the category known as the people takes on a special significance as opposed to the category of class.³⁵

Latin American theology derives, by contrast, from the thinking of many politically involved Christians about the praxis for liberating the oppressed. This theology-ethic is a product of the periphery, coming from the outsiders, from the *lumpen* of this world. Their inspiration is not only sheer necessity (the existence within the system of matters needing attention), but also the desire to liberate (Hebrew *'abhodhah*; Greek—*diakonia*), that is a ministry of liberation beyond the limits of ontology. And the sphere of liberation is not only political, but also sexual and educational. In fact, this is a theology of the poor, woman as a sexual object and the child.

4. *Towards a Theology of Liberation*

After the great theology of Christianity from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries and modern European theology from the

sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the theology of liberation of the periphery and of the oppressed is in fact the whole of traditional theology set into redemptive motion from the point of view of the poor. The theology of Christianity (the old model) almost identified the Christian faith with Mediterranean Latin or Byzantine culture, subsequently halting progress. The argument over Latin in Vatican II itself is an obvious recent demonstration of this. Modern European theology, individualized and imperialistic, is reproduced in the colonies as progressive theology by those who operate as an oppressive colonial minority and take as the scheme of salvation a theology which for the periphery is meaningless and therefore uncritical. The *status quo* is once again supported. By contrast, the theology of liberation (where a theology of revolution is only a first stage, political theology is just one of the possible applications and the theology of hope looks to the future) is based on the praxis of liberation, or on the movement or way through the desert of human history, moving from sin as the dominating influence exerted by the various systems (political, sexual and educational) to irreversible salvation in Christ and his Kingdom (the *eschaton*). This movement is accomplished by every man, all people and every age—in short, by the whole of human history. However, there are certain critical periods (*kairos*) in history and Latin America is living through one such period now,³⁶ when complete eschatological liberation can be more clearly indicated by the prophets, Christians or the Church. Thus the theology of liberation gradually becomes an African or black theology, though to-date there has been no response from Asia,³⁷ and finally a theology of the whole world and of all the oppressed.

The theology of liberation which is coming from Latin American thinkers³⁸ can be distinguished when its dependence as a theology is realized in the same way as economy or culture is realized to be dependent (the culture of oppression as Salazar Bondy said in Peru in 1968). Gradually this theology discovers its own methods which I have defined as *ana-lectic* and not only *dialectic*,³⁹ in that it is listening to the trans-ontological voice of the other (*ana-*) and is interpreting its message by means of analogies. (The other, however, remains mysteriously

distinct from us, until such time as the progress of the movement towards liberation allows us to enter upon its world). It adds an entirely new dimension to the question of analogies.

For its own part of the theology of liberation favours the interpretation of the voice of the oppressed as the basis for its praxis. This is not a private departure within the unified Whole of universal abstract theology, neither is it an equivocal, self-explanatory theology.

Starting from a unique position of difference, each theologian, and indeed the whole of Latin American theology, takes a fresh look at traditional themes passed down through history, but enters the interpretative process from the distinct emptiness of his new found liberty (that is, with a blank sheet). The theology of a true theologian or a people like the Latin Americans is analogically similar, yet at the same time distinct, and hence unique, original and completely individual. If what is similar becomes univocal, the history of theology will remain European. On the other hand, if difference is made absolute, theologies becomes equivocal. The aim is not Hegelian identity, nor yet Jasperian equivocation, but analogy. The theology of liberation is a new focus in the history of theology, an analogical focus which has come to the fore after modern developments in Europe, Russia and the United States, and predating to some extent the most recent African and Asian theology. The theology of the poor nations, the theology of world-wide liberation is not easily acceptable to Europeans, who believe too passionately in their own invariable world-wide acceptance. They will not listen to the voice of the other (the barbarians, non-being if we define. Being as the European way of thought), the voice of Latin America, the Arab World or South-East Asia and China. The voice of Latin America is no longer a mere echo of European theology. It is a barbarians' theology--as the apologies would say, making the contrast with the "wise according this world." But we know that we have taken up our stand on the further side of the modern, oppressive, European closed system. Our minds are set upon the liberation of the poor. We point towards the world—man of the future—man who shall be eternally free.

Notes

1. *Brevisima relacion de la destruccion de las Indias* (Buenos Aires, 1966), p. 36. For an historical insight into the argument of this present article, see my *Historia de la Iglesia en America Latina. Coloniaje y liberacion (1492-1972)* (Barcelona, 1972); for the theological matter see *Camino de liberacion latino-americana*, two volumes (Buenos Aires, 1972-73); for the philosophical background, *Para una etica de la liberacion latino-americana*, three volumes (Buenos Aires, 1973-74).
2. *Nueva politica comercial para el desarrollo* (Mexico, 1966), p. 30. If to this is added the deterioration in price-ratios between raw materials and manufactured products, the so-called under-developed countries have been simply exploited, expropriated and robbed. From this bulletin of CEPAL (UNESCO) came the so-called social economy of dependence based on the works of Celso Furtade, Jaguaribe, Cardoso, Faletto, Theotonio dos Santos, Gunter Frank or Hinkelammert in Latin America or of Samir Amin in Africa, with the European position given by Arghiri Emmanuel or Charles Bettelheim. See also a bibliography on the subject in *Desarrollo y revolucion, Iglesia y liberacion (Bibliografia)* produced by CEDIAI, Bogota, Parts 1 & 2 (1971-3).
3. In the presidential elections in Argentina on 23 Sept. 1973, the Federal Capital (Buenos Aires) awarded the working/peasant class candidate 42% of the votes, while the poorest provinces in the north-east awarded more than 75% (Jujuy, Salta, Tucuman, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca, La Rioja). The big Latin American capitals provide evidence of internal dependence.
4. *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, III, 4. Freud's error consists in confusing "the reality of masculine domination in our society with the "reality of sexuality" as such. See my "Para una etica latinoamericana" (chapter VII in *Para una etica de la liberacion, latinoamericana*, III, pp. 42-7).
5. *Archivo General de Indias* (Seville), Audiencia de Guatemala 156.
6. See my *Para una etica de la liberacion, op. cit.*, pp. 137 ff.
7. Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo* (English trans.)
8. This is the meaning of reality for Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, 1962).
9. Expression used by the older Schelling (*Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, XXIV); *Werke*, V (Munich, 1959), p. 748; *transmundan*, though not with the same meaning. Beyond being and beyond the world, is the Lord of being (*ibid.*).
10. Xavier Zubiri, *Sobre la esencia* (Madrid, 1963), p. 395; "Reality is the object as something in its own right. The object is actualized in the mind and presents itself to us intellectually as existing in its

- own right before (*prius*) we actually see it." In the same sense the other for Levinas is the reality beyond the closed system and beyond being (cf. *Totalite et Infini*, The Hague, 1961). See also my *La Dialectica hegeliana* (Mendoza, 1972), pp. 141 ff.
11. *Civ. Dei*, XV, I. *Civ. Dei* expounds the two basic biblical categories: the "closed-shop" founded on self-seeking love (*libido*), and openness which lies open to the future in loving concern for others (*caritas*). See *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, Chap. IV, SS 20-23, and Chap. V, SS 26-8, volume II, pp. 13-88.
 12. In Hegel this is the negation of distinction and the object, which for its part has been the negation of Being in itself or Totality taken as the originating and divine Identity. On the other hand, in our case it is a matter of denying the alienation of the other (reduced to the level of an object), that is to say, to affirm (say "yes" to) the other who is distinct. (See my *Para una etica de la liberacion*, chap. III, S 16, vol. I, pp. 118 ff.; chap. IV, S 23, and chap. V, SS 29-31, vol. II, pp. 42-127); thus this is a negation of what Hegel affirmed coming from an Outside unknown to him.
 13. *Brevisima relacion*, p. 33.
 14. See my paper "Atheism of the prophets and Marx", delivered to the 2nd Argentine Theologians Week, Guadalupe (Buenos Aires, 1973), and "Historia de la fe cristiana y cambio social en America latina", in *America latina, dependencia y liberacion* (Buenos Aires, 1973), pp. 193 ff. There I show that the prophets begin their attack on the system of sin with a criticism of the idolatry and fetishism of that system. Would it not be both truly Christian to attack the fetishism of money (Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, chap. XXIV, 1: "Das Geheimnis der ursprunglichen Akkumulation")? Is it perhaps not correct that Hegelian theology should be denied in order to affirm instead an anthropology of the Thou (Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*), especially if we remember that Christ is the Other made man and mediator with God the Father and Creator? We might say that Latin American theology of liberation is non-believing when it comes to the religion of oppressionist Europe (not to confuse religion with Christianity: see my article. "From Secularization to Secularism", in *Concilium*, September 1969 (American edn., Vol. 47).
 15. I may be permitted this translation of *hoi ptokhoi to pneumati* (Mt. 5. 3), to distinguish between the "poor" as the outsider (the sense in which I use it in S 5), and the "poor in spirit", i.e. the actively involved liberator, the prophet. See in my *El humanismo semita* (Buenos Aires, 1969), the footnote on "Universalismo y mision en los poemas del Siervo de Yahveh" (pp. 127 ff.).
 16. "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Lk. 1. 52-3). *Sub-vertere* in Latin is to make low what was high and vice versa'

17. Lev. 25. 8-12 "Jubilee" comes from the Hebrew *yobel*, the horn-shaped trumpet which announced the liberation of the slaves (Ex. 21 2-6).
18. "That which is born of the flesh (the closed system) is flesh. That which is born of the spirit (the other, the outsider) is spirit" (*ibid.*),
19. "*Je pense, donc je suis*" was a statement so firm and confident that the most determined contradictions of the sceptics were not enough to shake it;" see *Discours de la methode*, IV (Paris, 1953), pp. 147-8.
20. "Ich bin Ich. Das Ich ist schlechthin gesetzt" (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), S 1 (Berlin, 1956), I, 96). He still says that "the essence of critical philosophy is the absolute position of an 'I', absolute and unconditional, and not to be defined in terms of any higher order." For the only translation in German: "Darin besteht nun das Wesen der kritischen Philosophie, dass ein absolutes Ich als schlechthin unbedingt und durch nichts Hoheres bestimmbar aufgestellt werde). (*Ibid.* I, S 3; I, 119).
21. See my *La dialectica hegeliana*, 4-9 (pp. 31-121) and *Para ana destruccion de la historia de la etica*, SS 11-21 (Mendoza. 1972), pp. 75-162.
22. The theology of Karl Rahner comes from Heidegger's philosophy (also influenced by Marechal) and is set out in *Spirit in the World* (London and Sydney, 1968), or in *Hearers of the Word* (London and Sydney. 1969). Quite rightly Eberhard Simons, *Philosophie der Offenbarung. Auseinandersetzung mit K. Rahner* (Stuttgart, 1966), demonstrates that the *Mit-Sein* has not been brought out sufficiently in Rahner's thinking. It is not a matter of mentioning the other as a mere aside, but of making it the starting-point of theological argument. but not merely of the *divine* Other.
23. For a philosophical point of view see the works of Levinas (*op. cit.*), and Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* (Berlin, 1965). and chap. III of my *Para ana etica de la liberacion*, vol. I, pp. 97 ff.
24. As Yves Congar so well shows, the *locus theologicus* is everyday events ("the history of the Church, in a certain sense, embraces all of it"), see his "Church History as a Branch of Theology" in *Concilium*, September 1970 (American edn., Vol. 57). Revelation is mediated by historical otherness—God reveals himself in history. In the same sense Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* (London and Melbourne, 1967), offers us the 'Word as the medium of revelation'. However, in both cases, as with Schelling and Kierkegaard, the mediatory function of the anthropological outsider is not grasped. It is not enough to say that revelation is possibly effected in the form of human speech, as Rahner does in his *Hearers of the Word*, but we must go on to say that the poor, like the metaphysical other is the mediator chosen by God for his revelation. As a fact of history (not just of myth as in Exodus 3)

- Moses heard the word of God through the mediation of the poor (Ex. 2. 11-15), as Schillebeeckx says in his *Revelation and Theology*.
25. These categories are flesh (Totality), the poor (the human outsider), God as creator and redeemer, the Word, the Spirit (outreaching modes of the divine in face-to-face encounter") and service (*bhōdhah* or *diakonia*). See my *Caminos de liberacion latinoamericana* II, VI. The category is what is revealed in Christ as essential revelation. What is interpreted by these categories is the Christian meaning of event, the fruit of faith.
 26. In *Concilium*, February 1973 (American edn. vol. 82): much was said about liturgy, Scripture, poetry, but almost nothing about the privileged place of faith in the other—the poor; without him faith becomes ideology, mere doctrine, obscurity.
 27. See *Caminos de liberacion latinoamericana* I, SS, 1-7; *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, SS 31 and 36.
 28. From Latin America see Hugo Assmann, *Teologia desde la praxis de la liberacion* (Salamanca, 1973), pp. 76 ff. A bibliography on *Desarrollo y revolucion*, CEDIAL, II, pp. 73-95. This idea and the one that follows are inspired in part by the Christian praxis in Latin America.
 29. Cf. Bibliography in CEDIAL (*op. cit.*), II, 31-47.
 30. The works of Johann Baptist Metz is of importance: starting with "Friede und Gerechtigkeit. Ueberlegungen zu einer 'politischen Theologie'", in *Civitas* VI, (1967), pp. 13 ff.; then *Theology of the World* (London, 1969), and "The Problem of a Political Theology", in *Concilium* June, 1968 (American edn., Vol. 36); and finally the colourless "Erlosung und Emanzipation", in *Stimmen der Zeit* 3 (1973), pp. 171 ff. (where the world "Befreiung" is avoided in its ambivalent sense of "cross". The "cross" of the murdered prophet is not the same as the "pain" of the oppressed poor.
 31. Liberation protest as a function of the Church (see J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, *op. cit.*) is very different if it concerned with international political protest (pointing out the unjust acquisitiveness of the centre), and with social protest (pointing out the oppression of the ruling classes). In this situation we still look for a concrete programme of action to make the protest really mean anything. Theology is essentially an ethic, and most important, a political ethic.
 32. Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London, 1969); *idem*, *Perspektiven der Theologie* (Mainz, 1968) and *Diskussion uber die 'Theologie Hoffnung'* (Munich, 1967).
 33. See J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, *op. cit.* Something in the nature of a reactionary professional ethic, but not a subversive movement to oppose the closed nature of the system, and which knows it has to initiate a programme of historical liberation as a sign of the coming Kingdom.

34. Cf. Jules Girardi, *Christianisme, liberation humaine et lutte des classes* (Paris, 1972).
35. See my *De la dialectica a la analectica*, general conclusions (to be published in Salamanca, 1974).
36. Bear in mind that Latin America is the only continent, culturally speaking, which has been both Christian and colonial. Europe has been Christian, but was not colonized. Other colonial peoples have not been Christianized. This places Latin America in a unique position in world and ecclesiastical history. From our unique experience must come, of necessity, a theology which must be different to be authentic.
37. In Africa, such authors as V. Mulango, A. Vanneste, H. Burkle; the "black theology" of J. Cone, A. Hargreaves, Th. Ogleree, Ch. Wesley point to this line of thought; see also J. Peters, "Black Theology as a Sign of Hope", *Concilium*, November 1970 (American edn., Vol. 59); G.D. Fischer, "Theologie in Lateinamerika als 'Theologie' der Befreiung". in *Theologie und Glaube* (1971), pp. 161-78; R. Strunk, "Theologie und Revolution", in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, I (1973), pp. 44-53; and CEDIAI, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 58-72). Some European opinions, for example, Vancourt, the "Theologie de la liberation", in *Esprit et Vie* 28 (1972), pp. 433-440 & 657-62, who thinks that this theology is inspired solely by the Marxist method, are very biased.
38. G. Gutierrez wondered in his short work "Hacia una teologia de la liberacion" (Montevideo, 1969) whether beyond a theology of development we ought to formulate a specific theology of liberation. The previous year Rubem Alves in *Religion: opio o instrumento de liberacion?* (Montevideo, 1968) had already gone some way with this idea. Also Methol Ferre in his article "Iglesia y sociedad opulenta. Una critica a Suenens desde America latina", in *Vispera* 12 (1969), offprint, pp. 1-24, points to a "struggle of two theologies", since "all theology one way or another has political implications", and in fact, "within the Catholic Church itself there exists oppression by the richer local churches of the poorer ones". Thus there arose a new theological argument.
39. See my *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, S 36; vol. II, pp. 156 ff. I would define theology as "an analectic pedagogy of historical and eschatological liberation". A Pedagogy, for the theologian, is a teacher and not a politician, nor is he involved sexually; analectic because the method is neither purely epistemological nor dialectic. For this definition see my *Caminos de liberacion II*, lecture XII.

Christianity in the Cause of Liberation

Errol D'Lima

Religion is seen to be a means of personal liberation. It is seen as the path of moksa (Hinduism), the road to nirvana (Buddhism), the way to surrender oneself to God (Islam), an instrumental cause of salvation (Christianity). Most often, religions centre on the individual person, whether he or she acts out of correct motives, whether one's relationship to God produces merit and happiness for oneself and whether one can obtain full self-realization. The context within which an individual person lives and functions is seen to be no more than a stage upon which the self-constituted performer acts out his/her part. And while it is true that no religion disregards one's obligations to one's neighbour, still the structure of relationship between the self and the others is considered to be contiguous at the most, not constitutive of the self's liberation.

Today's world which enshrines social concern, views liberation as not confined to the individual self, important as it is, but also as present in the social structures within which the self-operates. For instance, to claim that one can be a free person in an excessively policed and totalitarian state will give pause for question : does one's liberated existence extend only as far as one's bodiliness? If so, then even in the most stable and persistent state of oppression, we should find no difficulty

in gleefully affirming ourselves as liberated beings, and our reason for saying so would be that the other is quite inconsequential for conditioning the self at the depth level.

If the self is seen not as one entity opposed to the others around it but as intrinsically linked to and participating in the world of persons, then it follows that liberation cannot be claimed for the self to the exclusion or disregard of the others. In short, liberation must be seen as present in the structures of society and not only in the individual self of the person who follows his/her particular *sadhana*. A corollary to this is that if religion is truly to effect the emancipation of the individual self, it must, at the same time, concern itself about the transformation of the social structures surrounding the individual self.

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that religion is a potent force in the pursuit of liberation for and in today's world. I hope to do this by examining the phenomenon of Christianity in terms of its Biblical roots and its historical evolution. Biblically and historically, Christianity does manifest, sometimes less clearly perhaps, the dynamics which contribute to the realization of liberation. And these dynamics are Incarnation and Prophetism.

Before examining the phenomenon of Christianity, it would be appropriate to discuss if religion as such can truly further the course of liberation as understood today, for not merely individual person but sociological structures too come under its purview. In fact, a Marxist critique of history would see organized religion as a traitor to the cause of human emancipation and therefore to liberation in general. Such a critique finds its expression in the saying : religion is the opium of the people, in that it dulls people's perception even to the extent of causing them to forget the chains that bind or the oppression which they endure.

The problem could be re-stated in the following way : if the self can be constituted without reference to another then emancipation of the self becomes a totally internalized experience and does not require external parameters to indicate such emancipation. If however, the self is constituted by relationship to the other—a model that is prevalent in the 20th

century in the wake of phenomenology and existentialism of the Heideggerian variety—then both the self and the context must become the subjects of emancipation for they constitute one whole : a single human phenomenon.

We may also add that the Marxist critique overlooks the fact that if there are ambiguities in the functioning of religion through the ages, no less are there ambiguities in the Marxist analysis of world history, for in every historical movement the privileged moment of foundation suffers from the oftentimes faltering if not subversive process of routinization.

Secondly, in India, the practical experience of different religious communities living together has not been altogether happy : communal conflagrations have erupted with a sickening regularity. The aftermath of each of these has brought about a greater arrogance in the name of religion and a nameless fear in the interests of survival. In the context of religion, it would seem that the goals of liberation become more distant than ever.' Could the answer to this fact of experience lie in the prior sin of our having prostituted religious fervour and identity at the altar of political or economic expediency? If so, religion is not to be blamed.

Thirdly, religion is meant to offer its adherents a vision of the world in which they live so as to give meaning to their everyday existence. Frequently, religion is spoken of in terms of fulfilment, self-realization, salvation. In today's India, not only Hinduism which is professed by the majority community but also Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, etc. offer their adherents a vision of life. In each of these religious communities, certain observable parameters are present. These would be rituals, beliefs, rules and religious traditions in general which affect the lives of persons and shape them into a closely integrated community. Such a closely-knit community possesses shared goals, values and a culture which constitute it as a well-motivated group and hence a potent force in the task of nation-building. A concerted action by such groups would be conducive towards the realization of socialist ideals which are enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Such action would be the direct result of a religious group sharing common commitments and concerns. However, the existence of different religious groups in the

same nation contributes less towards a consolidated national community and more to a disintegrating nation'. For here, the danger of each religious community forming a self-enclosed and isolated sociological units is more than a mere possibility. Can religion be presumed to further the cause of liberation when it seems to fan the flames of parochialism? May not the minority status of one community which religion puts paid to, argue the preponderance of one group's rights and freedom over others? Perhaps the answer to this problem lies in effecting a national unity which is supra-religious or discovering true religious values which have been buried under the clay of worldly objectives masquerading as religious.'

Finally it has been argued that the very concept of religion is self-contradictory: it professes to bring about the liberation of men and women but in fact it enslaves them by esoteric ordinances, obscurantist ideals and tyrannical domination. This happens because human beings have mistaken their basic self-consciousness for religion, the divine and the supra-human. Emancipation will occur, it is opined, when religion is divested of its other worldly leanings and is referred to the secular situation of men and women in their present context. Ludwig Feuerbach describes this position thus:

The necessary turning-point of history is therefore the open confession...the . . . consciousness of the species; that man can and should raise himself only above the limits of his individuality, and not above the laws, the positive essential conditions of his species; that there is no other essence which man can think, dream of, imagine, feel, believe in, wish for, love and adore as the *absolute*, than the essence of human nature itself.¹

The issue raised here is not easily resolved. Should one reduce religion to the limits of human consciousness, he/she has unwittingly reduced the totality of the human phenomenon to a mono-dimensional significance. To keep on discerning the absolute in religion is the best way of preventing the human from arrogating to itself the prerogatives of the divine. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that the Enlightenment in the 18th

century arose in the context of a religious tradition. In fact, the present day interest in liberation theology - a Christian phenomenon which saw its origin in the South American context - owes its existence to the prophetic dimension which Christianity provided.

It would be correct to state that while religion possesses in itself the ambiguities which often obscure its true function, there is enough justification to discern elements within Christianity itself which, if examined, reveal themselves as effective factors for liberation. In this paper, I shall use Christianity as an example of religion which could further the cause of liberation.

My hope is that what is discovered in Christianity will also have echoes in other religions for I assume that all religions are deeply concerned with the liberation of human beings.

I. Biblical Roots of Liberation in Christianity

In the Judaeo—christian tradition, the watershed of liberation is the event referred to in the book of Exodus. In essence, this was an event through which a people gained their freedom through a historical action of God on their behalf. The Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt and under the leadership of Moses, some-time between 1350-1200 B.C., were delivered from their Egyptian masters. This event was given pride of place in the religious traditions of the Jews. At the time of the Passover Feast which the Jews celebrate, the following is recounted so that succeeding generations of Jews may recognize and acknowledge the God who saved them from oppression:

A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord our God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord

I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation; . . . (8/5).

He promises such retribution to those who deal deceitfully with false balances, buy 'the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals', and 'sell the refuse of the wheat' (Amos 8/5-6). In general the concern for the destitute shown by some prophets emerged from the changed social and political scene that obtained when Israel became a nation made up of the haves and the have-nots:

The state with its taxation and its civil service had brought about a further disintegration of the old social order within the tribes of Israel. In this connection, the transference of the focal point of the economy to the towns was a particular blow. The great landowners, who already lived in the towns, gained control over the country people, and the result was severe social injustice. . . . The country people became increasingly part of a proletariat.²

In the New Testament, we find the Letter of James upbraiding those who discriminate between the rich and the poor in social life:

. . . if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there." or, "Sit at my feet", have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2/2-4).

The biblical texts which undergird the theme of liberation express concern very pointedly for those who suffer economic, social and political distress. Further, it is not as though an abstract religious principle exists emphasizing concern for one's neighbour to which an accidental corollary is added of focusing concern on him/her if poor. Rather, the texts remind one

that to be related to God is to do justice to one's suffering neighbour.

In the Biblical context then, religion is not seen as an adjunct, a second-story added to the social, economic and political life of people, but as something that is realized and authenticated in each of these spheres of human living. One is considered as being faithful to God's covenant precisely in the carrying out of one's social obligations to those who are needy. One brings about the emancipation of the suffering, the poor and the oppressed and in doing so he/she is seen as practising religion authentically.

II. Liberation in the History of the Church

From early times, the Church proclaimed the gospel of Jesus as a message of freedom. One may wonder why this message of freedom was mostly addressed to the individual in the main. According to Aloysius Pieris, it was the Stoic influence in Rome which succeeded in limiting this message of freedom to the individual person :

The Stoic perception which is the ideological substratum of Roman theology, sees liberation primarily as spiritual/personal/interior. It does, however, tolerate an individual's search for freedom from external social structures that are enslaving—as exemplified in the case of slavery. But it does not envisage any radical change of social structures. The Roman theology which christianized Stoic ethics, goes further. It clearly mitigates, with Christian love, the social antagonisms between the various divisions of society. Moreover, it also earnestly pleads for changes of evil social structures. But it clearly upholds that such structural change is secondary to, and a consequence of, interior spiritual liberation achieved through love.³

It is not as though the Church was interested only in saving the spiritual interiority of persons. The arts and sciences did flourish and creativity on the part of Christians spawned

innumerable inventions. Structures in society existed and changed with the passage of time : the concept of Christendom testifies to awareness on the part of the Church as well as the State, of a common purpose in the ordering of society, and of concern for the welfare of men and women in general. But sociological patterns in society wherein some lived as 'proletariat' and others as 'masters' were understood by the Church to be the effect of natural circumstances or even the will of God ! The doctrine of the 'divine right of kings' is of a piece with such considerations. When in the 18th century, the winds of change began to blow and nationalism began to assert itself in the American and French Revolutions, when the concept of the Christian State was called into question, the Church failed to understand the true import of these events. She reacted by roundly condemning socialism, portraying revolutions as anti-christian and terming the secular state as atheistic.

It required a person like Karl Marx (1818-83), the great 'master of suspicion' to demonstrate that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in society were not the effect of chance factors but of market forces which were being manipulated by the ruling class. Marx had struck a blow for the working class and the Church could not but afford to take note of his contribution to the emancipation of the working class. The social teaching of the Church began to be enunciated in accents of the working class a few years after Marx's death.⁴ And what began as Christian moral teaching became a well-respected theological stance in the 20th century: liberation theology.⁵

For the liberation theologian, the emancipation which God brings to the poor and the powerless, includes a religious dimension: in the experience of freedom from alienation, hunger, injustice or political servitude, individuals must also realize their personal freedom which includes the love of God and neighbour.

Today, liberation theology is acknowledged in the Church as an authentic way of reflecting on the message of Jesus Christ and of drawing appropriate conclusions which further human emancipation. The Vatican has issued two documents on the subject. The first was issued in 1984 and was entitled:

“Instruction on Certain Aspects of ‘Theology of Liberation’ ”. While calling attention to some incorrect understandings of liberation theology, the document says:

...it is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the Church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defence and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially the poor.⁶

The second document “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation” was issued in 1986 and was intended to “highlight the main elements of the Christian doctrine on freedom and liberation”. In this document, the Church clearly states that “freedom demands conditions of an economic, social, political and cultural kind which makes possible its full exercise.”⁷

Dynamics for Liberation: Incarnation and Prophetism

Enough has been said to show that the Christian tradition possesses, in its biblical foundations as well as in its recent historical development, a liberation thrust. This thrust was not discernible in its present form during the originary phase of Christianity, but this absence must be coupled with the fact that the growth of social awareness intensified with the rise of an industrialized society. Further, ideologies in earlier centuries had to reckon with the absence of well-developed and formulated social sciences. Today, we are all heirs of the postnaivety phase which has followed the publication of *Das Capital*. No longer can Christianity distance itself from the social structures in community; salvation must affect the individual and the context. Christianity realizes that the authentic conditions for

achieving the emancipation of the individual are tied up with the whole and hence emancipatory structures as a whole need to be created.

If a comprehensive understanding of liberation includes a preferential option for the poor, attainment of political freedom, equal economic and social opportunities, responsible decision-making at various levels and an awareness that no human enterprise is to be absolutized, then we should say that Christianity—in spite of the ambiguities which we have noted above—does possess the dynamics which would bring these about. The dynamics are Incarnation and Prophetism.

Incarnation

Christianity has less to do with a set of doctrines than with a person: Jesus Christ. A perusal of the New Testament uncovers its leit-motif: in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ God was manifesting himself in the world of persons. For the Christian, the experience of Jesus is written into every feature of his/her life. Validation of this experience always occurs in a community of persons.

Christianity cannot be conceived without a community of persons. Jesus was a historical person. Born like others of a human mother, he lived his life of faith and discovered his unique vocation to do God's will even to the death of the cross. By living his life with others and through prayer, he encountered the transcendent God whom he witnessed in the historical events in the world. Jesus interacted with a group of persons (the first century apostolic community) in such a way that they acclaimed him as their leader and ended by believing him to be God's accredited representative.

Throughout his life, the community remained the privileged context and medium through which God manifested himself to the people of that time. The gospel narratives which tell of the life that Jesus led were written down and they formed the accounts found in the New Testament of the Bible. Already in the Old Testament, we can observe the importance of the community in understanding and preserving God's revelation during the patriarchal period:

We first encounter Israel in Palestine as a confederation of twelve tribes (an amphictyony). Within this amphictyony Israel's sacred traditions and institutions developed and achieved normative form.⁸

If God (Yahweh) is seen as establishing his covenant with human persons, it is because they symbolize the corporate personality of the Jewish people, that is, an individual is seen as chosen for the sake of the community (Deut 7/6; Gen 13; Exodus 19):

A covenant meant the union—indeed the unification—of two parties who had previously been independent but were now to be regarded as a single entity.

Israel was a single people, a *nation*, and she had achieved her unity, indeed her existence, through union with Yahweh.⁹

In effect, this means that the Christian does not 'prepare' himself/herself for a transcendental experience of the divine. Rather, he/she already experiences the divine in a community context and then elaborates the *a-priori* conditions for such an experience. Further, the Christian eschews religious experience that is described as 'the flight of the alone to the alone' (Plotinus). The world of persons is constitutive of his/her experience of God.

Hence, when the Christian professes belief in God, he/she does not affirm a mere nameless supernatural force, a power beyond compare, a supreme transcendence, but an Incarnate God who takes his place through and in the world of persons. When Jesus proclaims freedom, he offers it to persons and society as a whole. In the past, the Church has always been wary of an experience of God which claimed to be purely internal (individual). Gnosticism attempted to separate the Christian experience of God from its intimate link with worldly reality; it professed the following:

. . . a rejection of the concrete present; a 'flight' into the sphere of the divine, reached by philosophical knowledge

and by asceticism (and pictured in speculations about spirits and angels); . . .¹⁰

It was condemned by the Church as anti-christian.

Christianity does include elements of a reflective, interiorized and self-purificatory experience of God, and different groups of contemplatives have exemplified such an experience, e.g., Anthony the hermit (251-356), John of the Cross (1542-1591), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), but contemplation is never to be identified with the abandonment of the world and its history.

In the commandment to love others, Jesus teaches that loving one's neighbour is the condition for loving God. He uses two texts from the Bible to illustrate the intimate link between God and one's neighbour:

Given the then current Jewish technique of interpreting one biblical text by means of another . . . , the addition of Lev 19/18 to Dt 6/5 may well have been intended by Jesus as a way of *interpreting* the text from Deuteronomy . . . Jesus would be saying that to love God with all one's heart means in fact to love one's neighbour as oneself. (p 45) According to the New Testament, then, to do good to the neighbour is to love God, indeed it is the only way we can love God genuinely and without illusion. That is why the correct formulation of the love commandment of the New Testament will not be 'love God' (as the rabbis would have said), nor 'love neighbour' (as the humanists would say today), nor even 'love God and neighbour' (as Christians have traditionally understood Jesus to have said). The true form of the love commandment of Jesus is that we 'love God IN the neighbour" (p. 49).¹¹

The Incarnation supposes an experience of transcendence in the world of persons, which means that neither individual persons nor persons included within the sociological structures are expendable. It is for this reason that the Church sees little justification in an effort towards liberation which assumes class warfare as the guiding principle. Class warfare, if made

into an inexorable condition for forming an egalitarian society, disregards personal freedom and other personal interactions. The thrust towards liberation must not espouse collectivism:

. . . neither the State nor any Society must ever substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and of intermediate communities at the level on which they can function, nor must they take away the room necessary for their freedom. Hence the Church's social doctrine is opposed to all forms of collectivism.¹²

Incarnation implies a mediated transcendence which allows persons to encounter each other in freedom. This remains the ideal which the Church's liberation theology acclaims; but at the same time, acknowledging the complexity in the world of persons and the structures, the Church wants to safeguard both the personal and the communitarian:

The priority given to structures and technical organization over the person and the requirements of his dignity is the expression of a materialistic anthropology and is contrary to the construction of a just social order.

On the other hand, the recognized priority of freedom and of conversion of heart in no way eliminates the need for unjust structures to be changed. It is therefore perfectly legitimate that those who suffer oppression on the part of the wealthy or the politically powerful should take action, through morally licit means, in order to secure structures and institutions in which their rights will be truly respected.¹³

Prophetism

In himself, the prophet is a person who is obliged to communicate to people a message which they may not be willing to hear; he is also the person who reads correctly the signs of the time and interprets authentically the meaning of events which affect the lives and history of individuals or nations. The religious prophet is one who experiences a certain

assurance given him by God so that he may perform a 'non-institutional' task. Jeremias, the Old Testament prophet who is afraid to accept his role as prophet is assured by God as follows:

Do not say, 'I am only a youth';
for to all to whom I send you you shall go,
and whatever I command you you shall speak,
Do not afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord
(Jer 1/7-8).

To society at large, the prophet is a man sent by God with a commission and he challenges the *status quo* in the light of a religious tradition or imperative. And he does this with no concern for his personal safety or interest.

The prophet . . . always comes forward with a new message. He has to produce his own credentials. His task cannot be, strictly speaking institutionalized. Where mention is made of 'disciples of the prophets', these are followers and assistants, but not really prophets in the course of formation. Hence the uniqueness of his vocation is essential to the prophet. He is the envoy of God. He is always to some extent the religious revolutionary, and since religion and society form a unity, he is often the critic of society speaking in the name of his God.¹⁴

In the Old Testament, some of the prophets are noted for their social consciousness. It is not as though they had performed a social analysis of society and felt that redress must be sought. They were conscious of a morality that stung their conscience in the social conditions prevailing. The prophets recognized that the poor and the destitute existed because of the greed of others. And poverty was not romanticized by the prophets, even if simple living was :

Poverty was never sentimentalized by the prophets of Israel; in keeping with the rest of the Old Testament, they regarded

it as an undesirable thing. The poor man was not just because he was poor, but the existential fact could not be ignored that poverty and injustice were frequent companions. It was the evil of other men that had created this situation, and the whole prophetic effort was directed against the evil.¹⁵

Jesus, like the prophets of old, is a non-institution person. The gospels do not describe him as belonging to a priestly class nor do they refer to him as a priest occupying a public office. Jesus is more properly described as a prophet ("And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this'? And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.'" Matt 21/10-11). To the consternation of the orthodox, Jesus does not hesitate to cure a person on the sabbath ("The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath;..." Mk 2/27). He upbraided those who made of temple worship a commercial proposition ("My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers." Matt 21/13). He did not allow customary protocol to come in the way of his showing compassion to sinners even when they were women ("Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Jn 8/11). Finally, Jesus relativized cultic religious observance by affirming the greater necessity of being reconciled with one's fellow companion ("...leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Matt 5/24).

The prophetism which Jesus showed in his own life can also be discerned in the life of the Church. In the 11th century the Church insisted on herself appointing bishops to their diocese. The then pope Gregory VII (1073-85) incurred the displeasure of the secular rulers yet this action of his prevented office in the Church from becoming politicized. In our own times, the Church has continued to assert the right of the Palestinians to a homeland of their own and has rejected compromise with Israel on this issue. Besides, the Church has continually championed the rights of the unborn and consistently opposed euthanasia.

In today's world, the liberation theologians embody the prophetism that Jesus practised in his own life. They point out that in a class-ridden (not to mention caste-ridden) society, to accept victim-hood on the part of the oppressed merely because of the threat of violence breaking out is a possible choice, but it need not be the only one a Christian is asked to make. Confrontation, even as Jesus confronted his captors or Gandhiji the British Raj, can well be the right choice in the light of the Christian faith. The liberation theologians would find it strange that people who are systematically oppressed and forced to live in subhuman conditions are not encouraged to gain their rights or confront their oppressors for fear of violence. The fear of violence must not make cowards of the committed. While it is true that there is no Christian imperative advocating the annihilation of the oppressor, it is equally false to assume that nothing should be done till the oppressor has himself suffered a change of heart. If the oppressor fails to practise justice, there must be a resolute effort by the oppressed to gain his/her rights. This may produce confrontation, conflict and even violence. What is true is that violence is not to be a routine method of seeking redress. It is pertinent to note, however, that a situation is often already violent and the effort on the part of the oppressed is more in the nature of self-defence. While aware of the dangers inherent in having recourse to violence, the Church has not condemned armed defence of oneself or one's neighbour.

Conclusion

Religion will foster the liberation of men and women only when the transcendent is mediated through the world of persons without being simply identified with that world. Like other human efforts, liberation as a movement can become domesticated and serve the interests of a few, unless it is critiqued and questioned repeatedly. The two dynamics of Incarnation and Prophetism which are present in Christianity should remind the liberationist of his/her commitment to human community and the challenge that must be addressed to the effort of liberation.

Because of the ambiguities present in its history and because of the ever-present danger of one or the other element being idolized, Christianity needs to be purified from within and from without, to be questioned and challenged as to its essential tenets, and also to be persuaded about the necessity of change so as to remain the liberating force it was meant to be by its founder. In the course of time, many usages and customs are invested with divine sanctions. It is the community as a whole that, through its members and structures, prevents time-bound and humanly fashioned religious observances from making religion obscurantist. Thus can Christianity preserve its message of freedom, bring about the emancipation of men and women who are oppressed and effect authentic liberation.

Notes

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7. Published by Theological Publications in India, St. Peter's Seminary, Malleswaran West, Bangalore 560 055, (1986), p. 1.
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Religion, Ideology and Liberation Theology—An Islamic Point of View

Asghar Ali Engineer

The people of Asia and Africa are struggling today to transform their society. Struggle for socio-economic transformation is by itself a stupendous task. However, before we get on with the subject it is important to answer three relevant questions. The right perspective to the subject can be obtained only if we answer these questions.

First important question is transformation for whom, second question is transformation for what and thirdly how to bring about this transformation. As for the first question is concerned I have no hesitation to say that transformation, through modernization and change or otherwise, if it is to be meaningful, must be primarily for the weakest sections of the society. In other words, mere elite-oriented transformation would not only be hardly beneficial to the weaker sections of the society but—and it is important dimension of the problem to be taken into account—it would also lead to development of highly authoritarian structures in the society. The elite-oriented development can be sustained only if protest from below can be stifled and only an authoritarian regime—whatever its democratic pretensions—can ‘successfully’ crush such a protest.

Many Asian and African countries started, after their liberation from the clutches of western imperialism, with a democratic model but were soon transformed into authoritarian regime as their socio-economic development was designed to fulfill the aspirations of upper class elites. In such a model of development all the surplus extracted from the toil of the weaker section is invested in high-tech projects designed to benefit these elites. High tech and westernisation thus become not only the main idiom of development process but also become the touchstone of progress and change.

Here I would like to draw the attention of the participants to yet another phenomenon consequential to this model of development. Westernization and elite oriented modernised development is not rooted in the native society and culture and thus sets the process of religio-cultural alienation in motion. It also gives momentum to the process of migration from rural to chaotic urban areas where the rural population lands itself in slums further deepening the process of alienation. The social change which is neither meaningful to them nor beneficial and also becomes incomprehensible creates a sense of frustration and fatalism and develop deep conservative tendencies and are ready for fundamentalists to exploit them for their own political ends. Like thr Khomeini of Iran they might even use radical religious rhetoric to entice them.

The Shah of Iran, it must be noted, followed the policy of westernization and modernisation immensely benefitting the social elite of Iran in turn breeding corruption—both moral as well as material. This process of modernisation not only left the rural and urban poor high and dry but created among them a strong sense of resentment towards his regime. The rural poor, victims of the Shah's 'land reforms' policy which only facilitated deeper penetration of American agri-business corporations, were compelled to migrate to the urban areas and swell the ranks of urban poor. In urban areas they experienced nothing but poverty, unemployment, giddy heights of inflation and rank corruption. Thus their alienation was complete. They developed deep antipathy towards westernization and western ways of living and thinking.

The religious tradition was the only prop they could resort to and draw psychological strength from. Ayatollah Khomeini, both through his suffering at the hands of the Shah and radical religious rhetoric, provided an alternative model which greatly inspired the people of Iran, specially the rural and urban poor and the traditional mercantile classes of Tehran and other towns and cities. In the given circumstances in Iran at the time, this model had tremendous appeal and provided the greatest thrust for change. It would be wrong to reject Iranian revolution as a sudden outburst of religious frenzy or sheer fanaticism inspired by the charismatic personality of Ayatollah Khomeini. The whole development, on the other hand, must be seen in its proper socio-political and developmental context. There is much to learn from what happened in Iran and to devise proper developmental strategies for the struggling people of Asia and Africa.

I

It is also necessary to analyse and understand why in the given situation like the one prevailing in Iran, religious rhetoric succeeded and Marxism failed to make any impact. Here we would also like to take up the second question raised in the beginning--development for what and also the third question how to bring about this transformation i.e. what strategy to be followed. As for the second question it must be borne in mind that the process of development should not be seen by the masses as being a moral. let alone being immoral. Again, going back to Iranian situation, the whole process of socio-economic transformation was perceived by the people as immoral and hence incited deep revulsion. In the rapidly developing situation, even the westernised middle classes joined the ranks of those so perceiving the situation. Again, as pointed out earlier, it would not do to seek explanation in religious bigotry, obscurantism and illiberalism. This is precisely the idiom employed by western liberals who are the main beneficiaries of the process of development and who are looked upon by the masses with a sense of hostility, if not with a sense of downright hatred.

The process of development should be so designed as not to be perceived as violative of conventional morality, if it is to inspire and enthuse the masses. The sense of hostility increases manifold if the process of development is seen not only as breeding corruption but if it also leaves them out completely. This is what is happening today in most of the Asian and African countries. This is precisely the reason why religious fundamentalism is striking deeper and deeper roots in all these countries leaving most of us wondering as to why greater degree of economic development and spread of modern education results in strengthening, rather than weakening, religious conservatism. More educational and economic development, howsoever rational and scientific in its contents, cannot bring about spread of rational and scientific outlook, if it remains elite oriented and also amoral, even if not immoral.

This brings us to the third basic question posed earlier i.e. what developmental strategy to be followed. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the strategy is to be so devised that firstly, it provides greatest benefit to the weakest sections of the society, does not uproot them from their socio-cultural environs and secondly, does not deeply hurt their religio-cultural sensibilities. This, however, does not mean leaving superstitions or certain spiritually hollow, petrified conventional practices untouched, let alone encouraging them. Far from it. They must be attacked and eliminated. But such attacks would produce result only if the process of development is really beneficial to the masses and also if the campaign is so devised as to combining attack on such practices with emphasis on certain positive aspects of given cultural complex which are rich and creative.

II

Marxism and Religio-Cultural Traditions

Marxism thinkers and ideologues in India in particular and in other countries to the third world in general, have not shown much appreciation for native cultural sensibilities, let alone religious feelings. They too adopt western cultural idiom and

elitist approach. Marxism is by and large defined in terms of economic goals rather than aiming at enriching spiritual and cultural life of the people, in an idiom which appeals to them. Thus there has not developed a genuine Marxist idiom, rooted in native cultural ethos. Marxism remains, more or less, a middle class elitist ideology and workers and peasants are drawn to it for limited economic goal and are left cold as far as their spiritual and cultural ethos are concerned. No wonder then if they remain under the spell of fundamentalist, conservative and reactionary forces as far as the latter needs are concerned and, make no mistake, these needs are, in their case, as compelling and powerful as their economic needs. No wonder then if they remain religiously under the influence of highly conservative elements and are unable to change their outlook in this respect. Also, such conservative religiously-oriented parties like the Jamat-e-Islami float their own trade unions to keep workers under their total influence.

It is therefore highly necessary for the Marxists to evolve an integrated approach in religio-cultural and economic spheres rooted in the native ethos. It requires great deal of original and creative thinking and ingenious theorising. Western-oriented Marxist with all its paraphernalia would not cut much ice. It would also not do to ignore religion, let alone opposing it. It is highly necessary to do some hard thinking on this subject. It is very short-sighted approach indeed to depict religion as 'opium' for the people and discard it. Religion, it must be remembered, is a powerful instrument and could be used either way— as an opium or as a revolutionary ideology. It becomes opium, as Marx puts it, only when it becomes 'sigh of the oppressed', the 'heart of the heartless world' and 'spirit of spiritless situation'.

Religion, however, is not always the sigh of the oppressed; it also becomes sword in their hands. It does not always act as opium to benumb the fighting vigour of the exploited: it also provides a powerful motivation to overthrow the status quo. There are several such instances. Buddhism, Christianity as well as Islam, all were powerful revolts against status quo. All three helped establish new revolutionary orders. Even Judaism earlier was a revolt laid by Moses against Pharaoh.

Even in our own time what happened in Iran and in the Philippines proves this point. Islam in Iran and Christianity in the Philippines stood against the Shah and Marcos respectively.

It is true that these religions, in times to come, once again became powerful establishments and allies of status quo. But the same can be said of political revolutions as well and hence many revolutionaries often talked of 'permanent revolution'. Any revolution can degenerate if there is no constant watch and if men of unquestionable integrity are not in charge of its affairs and if revolution is allowed to turn into an establishment.

In fact it is no use discussing religion *per se* shorn of its socio-political context. Religion *per se* can be discussed *only* in philosophical sense. Thus Marx rightly points out in *Capital*: "Every history of religion even, that fails to take account of material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialized forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one."¹ However, no Marxist has ever tried to develop such a corresponding celestialized form from actual relations of life. In other words, religion has to be seen in the concrete sociological conditions and its critique to be attempted only in the sociological context.

Religion, in my opinion, must be seen both in its sociological as well as its philosophical context. Religion can become opium or a revolutionary force depending firstly on concrete socio-political conditions and secondly who it is made to ally with: revolution or status quo. Religion in a philosophical sense is a different proposition altogether. It is then primarily a question of how one wants to relate oneself with the cosmos and how one wants to draw spiritual sustenance through this relationship and also how one gives meaning to ones life. Reason and science can help in exploring and understanding the universe but not in relating oneself with it. Theism and atheism both after all are philosophical positions. One choses

one or the other depending on his/her philosophical disposition and intellectual inheritance. Neither theism always implies rejection of material objectivity and scientific approach to empirical exploration nor atheism inevitably means doing away with spiritual aspects of life. Still an atheist or a theist may radically differ from each other in relating himself to the universe.

Religion, therefore, must be studied as a serious intellectual, spiritual and historical enterprise, rather than being brushed aside as a spiritual fraud, as often done by many rationalists. Engels rightly observes about Christianity: "A religion that brought the Roman world empire into subjection and dominated by far the larger part of civilized humanity for 1,800 years cannot be disposed of merely by declaring it to be nonsense gleaned together by frauds. One cannot dispose of it before one succeeds in explaining its origin and its development from the historical conditions under which it arose and reached its dominating position. This applies to Christianity."²

He further observes very significantly "The question to be solved, then, is how it came about that the popular masses in the Roman Empire so far preferred this nonsense—which was preached, into the bargain by slaves and oppressed—to all other religions that the ambitious Constantine finally saw in the adoption of this religion of nonsense the best means of exalting himself to the position of autocrat of the Roman world."³

III

Liberation Theology

If religion is to be taken pretty seriously and an ally of revolution, progress and change, it must be divested of those theological aspects—which at best are later accretions—and were made part of it to serve not the oppressed but the oppressors. In other words liberation of theology is needed to develop theology of liberation. Theology today by and large is monopolised by those who swear by status quo. It, therefore,

tends to be highly ritualised, dogmatised and incomprehensibly metaphysical. It is only in this form that it can develop mystique of its own and keep the masses hypnotised. The theology of liberation must radically purge many of these elements. It is undoubtedly a challenging task, though of course, highly necessary. Religion cannot cease to be celestial but it cannot cut itself adrift from earthly matters too, from mainstream of life, if it has to retain its relevance. The historicity and contemporaneity of religion on one hand, and, its mundane and celestial elements, on the other, must be fused into a living, dynamic reality. Theology today is mere bundle of soulless rituals as far as toiling and oppressed masses are concerned and abstract intellectual and metaphysical or mystical exercises for the middle class elite. In both these forms it serves the cause of status quo. It must be jettisoned of these soulless rituals as also of sheer metaphysical abstractions. It must become a soulful motivation for the oppressed to change their condition and a spiritual force to relate oneself meaningfully with and comprehend higher, spiritual aspects of reality.

IV

Islam and Liberation Theology

Islam was both—a religion in technical sense and also a social revolution which posed powerful challenge to the oppressive structures of its time in and outside Arabia. Its basic thrust was towards universal brotherhood, equality and social justice. Firstly, it emphasised unity of mankind through the Quranic verse “O mankind, surely we have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the noblest of you Allah is the most pious of you.”⁴ This verse clearly demolishes all notions and concepts of racial, tribal, national or familial superiority with one stroke and puts emphasis on piety. Piety, as far as the Quran is concerned is no mere ritual piety. The Quran defines piety in terms of justice—“Do justice; it is closest to piety.”⁵

Secondly, as it can be seen from the above verse, Islam lays great emphasis on social justice in all its aspects. There can be no justice without the liberation of, and giving leadership to, the weaker and marginalised sections of the society. The Quran does not hesitate to entrust leadership of the whole earth to the *mustad'ifin* i.e. the weak. According to the Quran they are the leaders and the inheriters of the earth.⁶ It also enjoins on the faithfuls to fight for the liberation of the weak and the oppressed. "And what reason", says the Quran, "have you not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Thee a friend and grant us from Thee a helper."⁷

Thus it would be seen from the above verse that the Quran puts forward a theory of what can be termed as 'liberative violence'. The oppressors and the exploiters persecute the weak and readily use force to defend their interests. It is not possible to liberate the persecuted without fighting. In another verse the Quran enjoins upon the Muslims to fight until there is no more persecution.⁸ The Quran categorically denounces *zulm* (oppression) and wrong doing. Allah, the Quran says, does not approve of harsh crying except by one who has been oppressed.⁹

In the context of Pharaoh also the Quran, denouncing him as *zalim* (oppressor) and *mustakbir* (powerful, arrogant) again repeats that the weak shall inherit the earth: "And we made the people who were deemed weak to inherit the eastern lands and the western ones which we had blessed. And the good word of thy Lord was fulfilled in the Children of Israel—because of their patience. And we destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had wrought and what they had built."¹⁰ It thus can be seen that Allah does not tolerate the structures of oppression and destroys them and this destruction is brought about through the oppressed themselves. Moses is projected as the leader of the oppressed by the Quran and he launches struggle to liberate the oppressed children of Israel.

If Moses was liberator of the enslaved Israelites, Muhammad was liberator of the whole of mankind through liberation of the weak among them. He launched powerful struggle

right at the outset against the rich and the mighty of Mecca. Even before he was commissioned as the prophet, he took active part in *hilf al-fudul* (association of the meritorious) which was formed to get justice for the weak and he ever remained proud of having joined this association.

Through the inspired words of Allah he threw challenge to the rich by strongly denouncing accumulation of wealth as it is this lust for accumulation which leads to exploitation and oppression. It describes accumulation of wealth as a burning fire which rises over the hearts and closes in on the accumulators.¹¹ The accumulation will thus put the whole society on fire and break it into pieces. Muhammad warned Meccans, and through rich Meccans the whole humanity. However, denunciation of accumulation of riches should not be misunderstood. Islam did not preach, like some other religions, renunciation in its place. It, on the other hand, encourages reasonable consumption provided it is legitimate and not earned through exploitation, injustice or fraud. In this connection the verses 10:93, 16:73, 17:70, 20:81, 23:51, 40:94, 45:16 are indicative of the Quranic outlook.

In all these verses, the key term used for consumption is *taiyyib* which literally means good, agreeable, healthy, pleasant. However, the context of these verses clearly show that the Quran uses this term for social health and social good. The Quran thus permits consumption provided it is agreeable physically and such as not to disturb social health. The concept of social health is very fundamental to an Islamic society and it can be achieved only through distributive justice. Thus the Quran says: "Eat of the good things (*taiyyibat*) wherewith we have provided you, and transgress not in respect thereof lest my wrath come upon you . . ."¹²

It would be seen here that Allah clearly warns that consume of good things but do not transgress as transgression invites his wrath i.e. if few rich in the society consume in excess whereas others are deprived of if it would lead to great turmoil in the society which is described as 'Allah's wrath' in a theological idiom. This is not my own construction. It is more clearly stated in another verse: "And when we would destroy a township we send commandments to its people who lead easy

lives and they commit abomination therein and so the word (of doom) becomes effective and we annihilate it with complete annihilation.”¹³

Here it is less of theological and more of a secular idiom and it is made clear that a town gets destroyed when its rich (those who lead easy lives) transgress all limits in consumption and hence it is distributive justice which can prevent such disaster. In yet another verse the Quran makes it clear that all that is more than ones basic needs should be given away for the needy and the poor.¹⁴ Here another important question arises. How the objective of social justice to be achieved? Through charity or through compulsory extraction of surplus? Islam rules out neither. It must be remembered that fundamental values remain unchanged whereas instrumental values change with the changing material circumstances. Equality is fundamental value whereas the institution through which equality is achieved represents instrumental value. In medieval ages the institution of charity was used to bring about semblance of socio-economic justice. In modern times the same can be achieved through either state welfarism or socialistic planning or by restricting, or even abolishing, right to property in certain spheres.

The Quran does talk of charity in the socio-economic context in which it was revealed but does not glorify it as an ultimate or permanent institution. It is aware of the fact that it can injure human dignity and cautions accordingly. It says, “Those who spend their wealth for the cause of Allah and afterward make not reproach and injury to follow that which they have spent; their reward is with their Lord . . .”¹⁵ It also says “A kind word with forgiveness is better than alms giving followed by injury.”¹⁶

Charity was indispensable in the context of time and has remained indispensable until our own time, specially in the capitalist society. In socialist society too, it has not disappeared completely though of course causes are quite different. In Russia, for example, donations are made for the peace movement as well as for privately run religious institutions like churches and mosques. Such causes would continue to

motivate human charitable instinct in future too. Thus charity may not be done away with altogether. Thus the Quran also encourages it but does not approve of causing any injury to human dignity.

To cause least injury to human dignity, the Quran levied *zakat*, a form of wealth and income tax combined. It was made a compulsory levy for all faithfuls. The Prophet established state treasury—*bait al-mal*—to collect and distribute the levy to the needy, the poor, orphans, widows, to pay off the debts of the indebted and to free the slaves. It was made obligatory for the state to look after the needs of the weaker sections of the society. However, for the reasons not to be discussed here, these liberative aspects of the Quran and the Prophet's *sunna* (practice) were soon pushed aside and main emphasis laid on rituals and personal laws as formulated by the latter theologians. These aspects unfortunately came to be accepted as the main thrust of Islam. It was not so during the Prophet's lifetime and for a brief period thereafter. The liberative aspects of Islamic theology came to be discarded with the emergence of dynastic rule first of the Umayyads and then of the Abbasids. The liberative aspects never came to be emphasised again as far as the mainstream Islam was concerned. However, it did see its emergence in the heterodox movements like those of Khawarij, Quramita and others.

Right to property is not absolute as far as the Quran is concerned. Notionally, the land as well as all other properties belong to Allah and through Allah to the society as a whole. Private property in means of production was not permitted by the Prophet. Land was the main form of means of production then. The prophet not only prohibited share cropping he also prohibited retention of land by those who do not cultivate it. Shafi 'I, an eminent jurist and founder of one of the four schools of jurisprudence maintains in his *Kitab al-Umm* that if a person gives a bare land to a tiller with the stipulation that the latter will get a share of the crop—it is *muhagala*, *mukhabara*, and *muzara'a* (i.e. terms for share cropping) which were prohibited by the Prophet. (See *Kitab al-Umm*, Vol. VIII, P-102). Ibn Hazm, another eminent jurist of literalist persuasion (*Zahiri* school) argues on the basis of the Quranic doctrine

*al-hurumat qisas*¹⁷ that inviolable rights must be paid for in equivalent wages. Thus a tiller's right is as inviolable as that of a landlord.¹⁸

It would also be of great interest to mention here the views of a prominent companion of the Prophet Abu Dharr. He had caught the real revolutionary spirit of Islam. To him Islamic brotherhood was meaningless without its emphasis on socio-economic equality. It was its very core. He was highly critical of the Umayyad's policy of appropriating large estates. He strongly protested against Mu'awiyah's¹⁹ attempt to change the nomenclature *mal al-muslimin* (wealth of Muslims) to *mal al-Allah* (wealth belonging to Allah) for its obvious implication that it then could be easily appropriated without accountability to the Muslims.

Justice, in economic, social and political matters is very central to the teachings of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya, a distinguished jurist of medieval period considers justice so central that he says, "The affairs of men in this world can be kept in order with justice and a certain connivance in sin, is better than pious tyranny. This is why it has been said that God upholds the just state even if it is unbelieving, but does not uphold the unjust state even if it is Muslim. It is also said that the world can endure with justice and unbelief, but not with injustice and Islam."²⁰

These are but some of the aspects of liberation theology in Islam. There are several other which cannot be dealt with here in view of limitation of space. Suffice it to say that one cannot conceive of Islamic teachings and their real thrust, if divorced from the concept of socio-economic justice, equality of sex as well as race, freedom and dignity of man.

Notes

1. See *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion* (New York, 1964), pp. 137.
2. Frederick Engels "Bruec Bauer and Early Christianity". *On Religion* op. cit., pp. 195.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Quran*, 49 : 13.

5. Ibid. 5 : 8.
6. Ibid. 28 : 5.
7. Ibid. 4 : 75.
8. Ibid. 8 : 39.
9. Ibid. 4 : 148.
10. Ibid. 7 : 137.
11. Ibid. 104 : 6-8.
12. Ibid. 20 ; 81.
13. Ibid. 17 : 16.
14. Ibid. 2 : 219.
15. Ibid. 2 : 262.
16. Ibid. 2 : 263.
17. Ibid. 2 : 194.
18. Zia-ul-Haque *Landlord and Peasant in Early Islam*. (Delhi, 1985) pp. 80.
19. Mu'awiyah was the first Umayyad Caliph.
20. Ibn Taymiya *Public Duties in Islam* English tr. by Muhtar Holland. (U.K., 1983) pp. 95.

Islam and the Challenge of Poverty

Asghar Ali Engineer

Religion according to its Latin origin *religio* means consciousness and piety on one hand, and to tie, or to bind on the other. Religion, in other words, can be defined as a set of spiritual and metaphysical doctrines binding together all those who subscribe to them. Religion also becomes, over a period of time, a system of significations symbols and rituals providing a deep sense of identity in a complex world to exist where in it self is an existential challenge. Also, religion in the history of human beings, had its origin as a project of quest of life, truth and ultimate destiny. However, and it is negative side of religion, this quest for truth often loses its dynamism and gets crystallised in the form of immutable dogmas. Soon a set of complex rituals arise around these dogmas providing psychological solace and a sense of symbolic fulfillment for the faithfuls.

A few privileged casuists on the other hand, pursue metaphysical questions so abstract in nature that neither do they have any links with existential human problems nor with any sublime human destiny. Religion for them becomes a sterile intellectual exercise. Religion thus neither serves as a dynamic ethical and moral code inspiring its followers to lead spiritually meaningful life within the space of essential material needs nor

does it provide guidance for sublimating human destiny and integrating it with the cosmogenic process. In other words religion becomes a set of dead rituals for the masses on one hand, and, a set of abstract, incomprehensible metaphysical doctrines, on the other.

If religion has to be meaningful project, closely integrated with human destiny, both in its mundane and sublime sense, it will have to be liberated from sterile rituals and theological casuistry. However this task is not easy to accomplish. Masses, at the most primitive level of existence, materially as well as intellectually need ritualised religion; oppressed and persecuted, they cling to it for mental solace. They dive into it to drink nectar but remained drowned in a sea of misery. The privileged casuists and theologians on the other extreme are intoxicated with their intellectual abstractions, enjoying full patronage of the established order and mortally afraid of disturbing it. Their jargonised metaphysical abstractions fill in the interstices of the hollow establishment and try to save it from final collapse.

A religion, if it has to ensure social health, and avoid becoming merely a source of mental solace and acceptance of miserable existence, it will have to transform itself into a powerful instrument of social change, an active agent challenging the decrepit social order having inbuilt socio-legal and politico-economic mechanism to perpetuate privileges and powers of a few upper castes and classes. The fundamental question, therefore, is: Can religion lend itself to playing such a role without violating its real spirit and legitimate role? My answer is in the affirmative, though often a contrary view has been held by religionists and theologians. However, in my opinion certain major historical religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are imminently suited to play this role. The theologies of these religions, due mainly to the circumstances of their origin. These religions were, to begin with, powerful protest movements not only against established religions but also against the prevailing power-structure. While the Buddhist philosophy (Buddha's proclaimed agnosticism and his this-worldly pragmatic approach did not lend Buddhism to evolving a theology

in the traditional sense) stressed abolition of *dukha*, Christian and Islamic theologies, in their early non-speculative phases, identified themselves with the oppressed. It was only much later that these theologies became part of powerful established empires and began to lose their militant character.

Here I wish to make another important point. A theology, even if derived from revealed scriptural text, remains partly situational-contextual in character and partly normative-metaphysical. The militant fighting character predominates when theology remains identified with the oppressed masses and speculative metaphysical elements begin to predominate as it begins to identify itself with the establishment which becomes into existence with the religious movement in the later phase. Christian and Islamic theologies both suffered the same fate over a period of time. Both the theologies came under the shadow of neo-platonic speculative philosophy and became highly metaphysical in character. These theologies lost contact with the common people and hence lost militancy and dynamism in the process.

In order to meaningfully discuss the problem of ISLAM AND THE CHALLENGE OF POVERTY it is important to understand the Quranic approach to certain related problems. The Quranic prophets, as the Iranian Islamic thinker 'Ali Shari'ati rightly points out, are part of the masses, not of any ruling establishment or ruling chieftains (with a few exceptions like David and Solomon). The holy Quran clearly states that "He it is who has sent a messenger amongst the masses *from among them*" (62.2. Emphasis supplied). Thus it would be seen that the Quran emphasises the fact that God sends His messengers *for* the people and *from among* them. These messengers stand by the people and never identify themselves with the rulers or with the ruling classes (*mala*, ruling chiefs).

When the prophet Nuh (Noah) began to preach among his people the arrogant chieftains rejected his message and ridiculed him. "The chieftains of his people" (*Qaum*) says the Quran, "who disbelieved, said: We see you but a mortal like us. and we see that the lowliest amongst us follow you without deep thinking. We see no merit in you above us and we deem you liars." (11:27). Again in yet another chapter the Quran says:

“And we sent not unto any township a warner, but its affluent ones declared: Lo ! we are disbelievers in that which you bring unto us. And they say: We are more (than you) in wealth and children. We are not punished. (34:33.36).

The Quran, in keeping with its approach, describes the rulers, chieftains and those who stand by them as *mustakbirin* (arrogant, drunk with power) and the ruled, or the masses of people as *mustad'ifin* (weakened, oppressed). The messengers of God naturally arise from amongst the weak and fight for their liberation from the clutches of the oppressors. Prophet Moses fought against the mighty Pharaoh for liberating Israelites who were being oppressed at his hands. Pharaoh was thus *mustakbir* (arrogant oppressor) and the Israelis *mustad'ifin* (the weak and the oppressed). The entire ruling class supported the Pharaoh in this struggle, according to the Quran. “The chiefs of Pharaoh’s people said: (O King), will thou suffer Moses and his people to make mischief (the ruling classes always dub any flight for justice as mischief, sedition or rebellion) in the land, and flout thee and thy gods? He said: “We slay their sons and spare their women, for lo! we are in power over them.” (7:127).

Thus the Quran clearly and unambiguously stands with the weak in their struggle against their oppressors. It also laments, even reprimands those who do not come to the rescue of those who are being persecuted. Reprimanding them the Quran says: “Why should you not fight for the cause of Allah and the weak among men and of the women and the children who are saying: Our Lord! bring us forth from out of this town of which the people are oppressors ! Oh give us from Thy presence some protecting friend ! Oh give us from Thy presence some defender !” (4:75).

The Quranic theology thus not only strongly condemns exploitation, arrogance of power and oppression, it also enjoins upon the faithfuls to fight against these evils and come to the rescue of the weak and the oppressed as the above verse categorically indicates. Not only this; the Quran goes a step further and states its intention to put the weak and the oppressed in the decisive leadership position. It says. “And We desired to

show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them leaders and make them inheritors.” (28:5).

Also, according to the Quran no township based on injustice and exploitation, can survive long. “How many a township”, says the Quran, “have we destroyed while it was oppressive, so that it lieth (to this day) in ruins and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower.” (22:45).

Many more such verses can be quoted from the Quran which strongly condemn oppression and injustice. A tradition ascribed to the Prophet puts unbelief lower down the scale than oppression and injustice. This tradition says that a country can survive with its unbelief (Kufr) but not with its oppression (zulm). It is highly regrettable that later theological development completely overshadowed this noble spirit of Islamic theology. We shall throw some light on this aspect a little later.

Mecca was experiencing acute social tension when the Prophet began to preach there. Apart from intertribal conflicts and rivalries, Meccan society was dogged with tensions caused by accumulation of wealth in a few hands and lack of distributive justice. Breaking the barrier of tribal structure, a powerful class of mercantile bourgeoisie was emerging in Mecca. The tribal relations of production, in other words, were giving way to mercantile economy base on exchange. There of course continued handicraft production by individual artisans or groups of them. There also continued traces of pastoral economy of which we have evidence in the holy Quran, as well as in the early history of Islam. However, the commercial economy was becoming predominant.

The merchants began to accumulate wealth neglecting the tribal norms. The mercantile culture casts its shadow over the tribal one. The poor, needy and orphans began to be neglected giving rise to social tensions. There developed acute discontent among these weaker sections of the Meccan society. The Prophet felt deeply distressed at this state of affairs. We can clearly sense deep concern for destitutes of the society in some of the early Meccan verses which strongly condemn arrogance of the Meccan rich and their neglect of the poor, needy and orphans. “Hast thou observed him who belies religion? That

is he who repels the orphan. And urges not the feeding of the needy.” (107:1-3) Here it should be noted that believing of religion has been equated with repelling the orphan and denying food to the needy. This is very important social dimension of Quranic theology and the one very useful for meeting the challenge of poverty.

The Quran also condemns, in no uncertain terms, accumulation of wealth and arrogance generated thereby. The Quran says in no uncertain terms, “Woe unto every slandering traducer. Who hath gathered wealth and counts it. He thinks that his wealth will render him immortal. Nay, but verily he will be flung to the Consuming One. Ah what will convey unto thee what the Consuming One is! (It is) the fire of Allah kindled, which leapeth up over the hearts (of men). Lo! it is closed in on them, In outstretched columns” (104).

Here the whole imagery is worth noting. The one who accumulates wealth and counts it (without distributing it judiciously) will be thrown into the Consuming One which is defined as the fire kindled by Allah. The traditional theologians mean hell fire thereby – in the world hereafter. But one can hardly miss its immediate social context. One needs to evolve what I would like to call socio-theological approach to the Quranic verses in order to understand their correct import. The Meccan society, on account of fast developing disparities of wealth, was on the verge of getting caught into social turmoil. The Prophet with his acute sense of social concern had clearly sensed the gathering storm. Through the revealed verses, this situation was depicted in appropriate divine imagery. Thus the kindled fire of Allah would also mean the social turmoil into which the Meccan society could have been caught due to the disparities of wealth. Seen in this context we can better appreciate all such verses in the Quran revealed specially in the early Meccan period. It became an integral part of the Quranic theology that the wealth be justly distributed and should not remain concentrated in the hands of the rich. “That it (i.e. wealth) should not circulate between the rich among you.” (57:7) This Quranic approach remained unchanged even in the later Medinese period. There is strong denunciation of concentration of wealth in the Medinese chapter

Al-Taubah (Repentance). "They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, unto them give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful punishment." (9:34).

Needless to say if the challenge of poverty is to be met, social structure free from exploitation; oppression and concentration of wealth in a few hands will have to be built. Another kingpin of such a society is justice in social, economic, legal and political sense. The Quran lays great stress on justice and uses terms like 'adl and qist for the purpose. Also, 'adl and ihsan (justice and benevolence) are again the two key terms employed by the Quran for stressing the need for economic justice. One also has to be just in economic transactions. "That you exceed not the measure. But observe the measure strictly." (55:8-9). It is also necessary to achieve economic justice and balance that while reasonable needs for food, shelter, etc. be met, the tendency for extravagance be curbed.

The Quran requires the faithfuls to avoid extravagance. "O children of Adam", says the Quran, "Look to your adornment at every place of worship and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo! He loves not the prodigals." (7:31). We know that the advanced capitalist societies of the West based on structures of oppression and exploitation are affluent and plunder the economic resources of the third world for their prodigious expenditure and maintain unreasonably high standards of living at the cost of the poorest in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The ostentatious consumerist culture of the west in proving to be the greatest curse for the poor of the world. The socialist economies, on the other hand, while ensuring reasonable level of basic necessities, positively discourage ostentatious consumerism. The stress in such economies is on production of wage goods rather than luxury goods. The world economy can achieve balance only if the western economies avoid extravagance and plundering the resources of the third world perpetuating poverty therein. But as we know the North-South dialogue has not succeeded despite repeated attempts on the part of developing countries of the South. The countries of the North refuse to give substantial aide to boost the economies of the countries of the South. They refuse to

commit even 2 per cent of the gross product by way of aid to these under-developed countries. The challenge of poverty cannot be met if such an imbalance continues in the economies of the North and the South.

Looking to the complex problems of world economy today, economic justice can be established in order to fight the challenge of poverty only if the concept of justice is treated not only in economic, but also in social and political sense. The concept of justice should be as comprehensive as possible. The Quranic concept of justice, it would be seen on a careful study of its verses, is quite comprehensive in this sense. After saying that say: My Lord enjoineth justice" (7:29), it goes on to say, "O you who believe! Be you staunch in justice, witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred whether (the ease be of) a rich man or poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than you are). So follow not passion lest you lapse (from truth). . . (4:135).

In yet another verse the Quran requires of the faithfuls, "O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. *Deal justly, that is nearer to piety*. Observe your duty to Allah. . ." (5:8).

From the verses quoted above it would be seen that the doctrine of justice propounded by the Quran is not only comprehensive but also quite rigorous. It requires of the faithfuls that even the hatred of other people should not come in their way of dispensing justice. One has to be just even if it goes against oneself, against one's parents and relations and that justice is an integral part of *taowah* (i.e. piety). Piety does not lie merely in praying and fasting and abstinence but also in being rigorously just. And it is obvious that the battle against poverty cannot be fought without being just in its most rigorous sense.

The modern capitalist system is highly exploitative and so perpetrates unjust socio-economic structures. Within its framework neither social, nor economic nor political justice is conceivable, specially of the Quranic variety discussed above. Even if the political rule does not precisely correspond to the

class rule in the Marxist sense in the modern democratic societies due mainly to mass pressure, one can hardly deny the hegemony of capitalist class and their exploitative practices. Any form of exploitation of one human being by another human being is an acute form of injustice and cannot square with the Islamic doctrine of justice. There are other reasons as well why modern capitalist society cannot keep pace with the Islamic *weltanschauung*.

Islam, as pointed out above, is opposed to extravagance and lays stress on keeping needs under control (it should not be, under any circumstances, construed to mean renunciation as the same has been positively disapproved of by Islam). The Quran also requires of the faithfuls to give away what is superfluous (after meeting one's controlled needs). The capitalist society, on the other hand, perpetuates itself by creating artificial needs through high pressure publicity. The noted American sociologist Vance Packard in his books like *Hidden Persuaders* has systematically exposed the working of advertising agencies and their methodologies. He shows how, based on false claims, high pressure publicity, persuades in very subtle ways, the people to buy. Most sophisticated techniques are used by the advertising industry to create artificial needs so that the products, primarily aimed at making profit, can sell well in the market. It becomes the very rationale of the capitalist society.

It can also be very well understood by the perceptive observers that the high pressure publicity techniques work much more efficiently in affluent societies of the west which owe their affluence to the plunder of the third world, as already pointed out. Thus the injustice of the capitalist economy gets compounded. Creating artificial needs among affluent people (who owe their affluence to exploitation of the poor) is injustice compounded. The affluent north refuses to render economic help to the poor and undeveloped south because it does not want to cut into the artificially maintained high standard of living thus endangering capitalist profits. The holy Quran, on the other hand, exhorts its followers to control the needs and give away the superfluous for those who are deprived and dispossessed. And, for the reasons explained, this

is not possible within the frame-work of a capitalist society and hence it cannot meet the challenge of poverty.

Vance Packard, in his another equally remarkable book, *The Waste Makers*, shows convincingly how waste making is an integral part of American capitalism. In fact without waste making on colossal scale the wheels of industries in capitalist societies cannot run. Again-the greater the affluence the higher is the degree of waste in the economy. The usable products are destroyed so that the new products might sell in the market under the label of new 'models' without increased use-values, as is convincingly shown by Vance Packard in his series of books referred to above. This too is an unpardonable crime as far as Islamic ethics is concerned. Islam neither approves of extravagance nor of wasting valuable resources. Western affluence, generated by capitalist exploitation of the third world, perpetuates both the crimes against humanity and its future generations who would also be deprived of these un-replenishable resources due to their colossal waste by the present generation. Thus war against poverty would be very difficult to win for the future generations, if capitalism is left unleashed.

The Prophet of Islam hated poverty and starvation. There are number of hadith (traditions) ascribed to him to this effect. A tradition reported by Nissi says, "O Lord I seek refuge in Thee from poverty, scarcity and indignity and I seek refuge in Thee from being oppressed and from oppressing (others)." It is very significant tradition as it links poverty, scarcity, indignity and oppression, one aids and abets the other. The Prophet, by seeking refuge from all this makes it incumbent on all the Muslims to declare war against poverty. Another tradition reported by Abu Daud says, "O Lord I seek refuge in Thee from Kufr (unbelief) and poverty." Thus it is made unmistakably clear that kufr and faqr (unbelief and poverty) both are equally condemnable. Yet another tradition reported by Baihaqi and Tibrani says, "Poverty, in all probability, leads to unbelief (kufr)."

All these traditions ascribed to the Prophet make it clear that a Muslim must declare war against poverty. Poverty is as condemnable as unbelief and as a Muslim should fight

against kufr he should fight against poverty. Perpetuating poverty amounts to perpetuating unbelief. Any ism or system which seeks to thrive on perpetuating poverty, starvation and need, must be fought against, be it feudalism or capitalism. Thus war against poverty becomes an integral part of Islamic faith.

There are several related questions as far as Islam and war against poverty is concerned. Some of these questions have been hotly debated and have raised storm of controversy. One of the fundamental questions in this regard is that of property. Another important question, though of different nature, is pertaining to ribn' i.e. interest. It is important to throw some light on these fundamental questions, if we want to grapple with the problem of poverty and war against it in the light of Islamic ideology.

Before launching out on discussion of these fundamental problems, it is necessary to make one thing clear. I do not consider the concept "Islamic economics" as valid. Islam is religion whereas economics is a positive science. Islam, as a religion, provides us with a set of norms and values, not with scientific analysis or system. 'Islamic economics. if at all such a term could be used only in a normative sense, not in a positive sense of scientific and conceptual analysis. There have been of late some serious attempts at developing the concept of 'Islamic economics' both in a normative and positive sense. But it is difficult to accept this concept in the latter sense scientifically speaking.

Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi, in his book *Ethics and Economics—An Islamic Synthesis* (The Islamic Found. U.K., 1981) points four axioms of Islamic system namely Unity, Equilibrium, Free Will and Responsibility which are obviously all normative and value-oriented. He also points out in this connection. "It is important to note that the fundamental axioms themselves are derived not through any logical process, but through observations or by positing a value judgement about their universality." (pp. 31).

We will discuss the question of property, riba'etc. keeping this distinction between the normative and positive in mind and

that the Islamic teachings and doctrines are normative and do not constitute any positive science.

Property or Poverty ?

The traditional theologians have steadfastly maintained that the right to property is sacrosanct in Islam and cannot be tampered with. The Sa'udi theologians even took the view that nationalisation is not permitted in Islam in view of this right to property. But, on a deeper view of the problem, this position is hardly sustainable. We have already seen that the Quran not only makes strong plea for taking care of the poor and needy, it intends to make the *mustad'ifin* (the weaker sections) inherit the earth and also the leadership of the mankind. The case of helping the needy and poor constituting the weaker sections of the society has been repeatedly emphasized (though certainly not deemed) but has been subjected to the rights of the deprived sections of the society.

The Quran states categorically, "And in their wealth the beggar (or needy) and the deprived (who does not beg but nevertheless is needy) had due share." (51:19). This verse thus makes it very clear that the right to wealth or property is not absolute but is subject to the share of weaker sections of the society. We have also seen in the foregoing discussion that where there is accumulation of property among a small section of a society, poverty is bound to result in the larger section of that society (unless that society, like the western capitalist society keeps itself affluent by plundering other less developed societies). This applies much more to industrial society which is based on production and appropriation of surplus value than to a commercial society which is based on appropriation of exchange value.

Thus one has to decide between property and poverty. The crucial question is Property or Poverty? As far as Islam is concerned, the Quranic verses and the prophetic traditions make it abundantly clear that in the war against poverty, the right to property cannot be treated as inviolable. In fact due share will have to be apportioned for the needy and the deprived. It is also important to discuss here the question of

property in an industrial economy, The extent of the property owned by individuals in a mercantile economy differs quantitatively as well as qualitatively from the one owned by huge cartels, corporations and multinationals in a modern industrial economy.

The economic might of huge multinational corporations owned by Americans greater than the combined economies of some of the smaller Asian and African countries. The appropriation of the surplus produced by the sweat and toil of the workers keeps on adding to the economic might of these monopolies and multinational corporations. These corporations, using their strangulating hold over economies of the poorer nations, dictate terms and unreasonable prices and are thus largely responsible for perpetuating poverty in these countries. One can quote here the most recent example of Nigeria. Its economy has been nearly ruined as it refused to bow down to the dictates of the multinational oil corporations.

Islam was confronted with mercantile economy when the Prophet was preaching. It opposed and strongly attacked concentration of wealth even in a mercantile economy. How could it then allow right to private property remain inviolable in an industrial era? How nationalization could be ruled out, if it becomes necessary for supporting the cause of weaker sections of society? But either the theologians do not understand the intricacies of industrial economy or support the status quo as they themselves depend on it. We will throw some more light on the question of nationalization a little later.

Charity or Sharing of Wealth?

The traditional theologians have argued that Islam wants to meet the challenge of poverty by encouraging charity called *sadaqah*. It is true the Quran talks of *sadaqah*. Charity was one of the ways of combatting poverty or reducing its rigours in a mercantile economy in those days. However, it was and is not the only way. The Quran, as already pointed out, talks of the *share* of the needy and the deprived in the wealth and share is much more than charity, a right, not mere supplication.

The Quran was also aware of the limitations of charity. The sense of superiority of the giver and that of indignity of the taker often makes it less than worthwhile.

The Quran uses an appropriate simile to explain the inherent shortcoming of such a charity. It goes on to say: "O you who believe! Render not vain your almsgiving by reproach and injury like him who spends his wealth only to be seen of men and believes not in Allah and the Last Day. His likeness is as the likeness of a rock whereupon is dust of earth; a rainstorm smites it, leaving it smooth and bare. They have no control of aught of that which they have gained. Allah guides not the disbelieving folk." (2:264).

Thus the Quran emphasizes the element of reproach and injury involved in charity and that such a charity is washed away as the dust from the rock in a rainstorm as the same is without any roots. From this verse the Quran's attitude to charity is very obvious. It often carries the danger of reproach and injury to human dignity and hence cannot strike any firm roots in society. The limited effects, produced if any, by charitable acts, are destroyed through angry uprisings of the deprived sections of society (rainstorm is metaphorical expression for angry uprising).

The next verse following the one quoted above is also quite meaningful in this respect. Here is its text: "And the likeness of those who spend their wealth in search of Allah's pleasure and for the strengthening of their souls is the likeness of a garden on a height. The rainstorm smites it and it brings forth its fruit twofold. And if rainstorm smites it not, then the shower. Allah is seer of what you do." (7:265)

The verse could mean to refer to true charity which is done to earn Allah's pleasure. It is likened to a garden which brings forth twofold fruit. It could also mean to signify of wealth through social institutions which does away with any possibility of reproach and injury, since charity in true spirit is so rare in view of human nature. If redistribution of wealth is brought about through well-devised socio-economic institutions, it would generate mass enthusiasm resulting in redoubled efforts and increase in production twofold.

Trusteeship or Social Ownership?

Some theologians and modernists have also argued in favour of theory of trusteeship. This theory has been propounded as, according to the Quran, Allah is the real owner of all that is between heaven and earth. It is, therefore, argued that man is not the owner of his wealth but holds in it trust. God has entrusted wealth to him to spend on the needy and the poor. He only possesses wealth for the welfare of others. Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi and several others have also propounded similar theory. It seems to be quite splendid in theory. However, it assumes that man is motivated in his actions by idealism alone. It is far from true. The whole history negates this assumption. Had the man been motivated by idealism alone, the whole history of mankind would have been very much different. The earth would have long been a paradise. Human beings have a highly complex nature. They are motivated by ideals but not always so; they are motivated by selfish desires more than the ideal motives.

There are very few examples, besides that of the Prophet and few of his companions, in the entire history of Islam, of Muslim individuals and rulers who can be said to have held political power or wealth as a real trustee of God. The very early history of Islam is full of bloody strife both for political power and possession of wealth. It was for nothing that Abu Dhar Al-Chifari, that eminent companion of the Prophet had to fight against all those companions of the Prophet and other Muslims who had begun to misuse political power for amassing wealth and its ostensible display. But Abu Dhar met with a tragic end. He was exiled and died a lonely man. His fervent protests proved to be ineffective and amassing of wealth began on a large scale.

While advocating any idealist theory like that of trusteeship one will have to bear all these complexities in mind. What is happening in the Islamic world today should also serve as an eye opener to the advocates of such theories. Despite so much talk of Islamization in several Islamic countries no serious attempt has been made in any one of them for establishing just socio-economic structures. Disparities of wealth so fervently

denounced by the Quran continue and the upper classes indulge in conspicuous consumption while the poorer sections continue to suffer. The ruling classes who are the main beneficiaries of the status quo have not accorded any priority to the economic questions in their Islamization programme. Only a half-hearted attempt is made to establish interestfree banks keeping the present economic structure intact. We will discuss the question of interest-free economy presently.

What could be the alternative to the trustee:ship theory? Does the theory of social ownership fit into the Quranic framework? Let it be clearly understood that the Quran, as explained earlier, does not advocate any specific theory; it only lays down certain norms and emphasizes some values. It condemns oppression and exploitation and makes justice obligatory on its followers. What is therefore primary in Islam is putting an end to all forms of oppression and exploitation and establishing a just society by evolving suitable socio-economic formations. It is from here that the boundary of scientific approach to the economic problem begins. The nature of theory should be such as to take Islamic value system into account on one hand, and, should result in mitigating socio-economic injustices in the society, on the other.

It should also be borne in mind that the nature of socio-economic institutions, theories and practical measures would vary with the nature of socio-economic formations. What is valid or efficacious in a tribal, feudal or mercantile economy may not necessarily be valid in an industrial economy. While the fundamental values should not be tampered with (what we can term as *hudud Allah* i.e. limits of God in the Quranic parlance) the socio-economic institutions must be reconstructed or changed into in order to retain the efficacy of the values divinely inspired or intuitively gained. I would like to elaborate with reference to the point under discussion.

The institution of *sadaqah* (charity) could serve the end of mitigating the rigours of economic injustice in an emerging mercantile society or in a feudal society. While the overall spirit of the Quranic concept of socio-economic justice is much more radical it could not have been realizable to the same

degree in a tribal-cum-mercantile society. It has to be tempered suitably in the prevailing socio-economic milieu. The institutions had to be so devised as to meet the demands of the situation. Much too great a degree of radicalism in non-congenial milieu can defeat the very purpose sought to be achieved. Advocacy of non-pragmatic radicalism has often been the bane of many revolutions. Even a revolutionary like Lenin had to condemn certain measures advocated by a section of Bolsheviks as 'infantile communism'.

The concept of *sadaqah* in the Quran must be seen in this light rather than a permanent institution as sought to be done by theologians and others averse to any change. Only values are permanent, not the social institutions which serve those values in particular circumstances. It would be unfortunate to treat institutions as permanent at the cost of those fundamental values. The Quran was not satisfied, even in those circumstances with the mere concept of voluntary charity. It categorically states, "Takes alms from their wealth wherewith you may purify them and may make them grow . . ." (9:103). Thus *zakah* is to be taken from their wealth so that the needy and the poor may be taken care of and the wealth and society may grow in harmony.

It does not require much argument to conclude that traditional institution of charity can not meet the challenge of poverty in an industrial economy, especially in the third world which includes India. New socio-economic institutions will have to be fashioned to meet this formidable challenge. Private property cannot be left untouched in the hands of few, if the Quranic spirit is to be upheld. One will have to choose between property and poverty and the Quranic choice is abundantly clear. Private property cannot be treated as sacred and inviolable although it does not mean abolishing private property altogether.

Thus Mr. S.N.H. Naqvi also maintains, ". . . it should be clear that a substantial dilution, through direct and indirect policies, of the institution of private property must form the kingpin of any egalitarian Islamization programme. This is particularly true to those Muslim countries that live under oppressive feudalistic systems. The most objectionable element

of the private property system is landed property, which serves no useful economic functions whatsoever. No economic harm will be done, indeed, great social benefits will flow—if all landed property were to be confiscated by the State in one clean sweep and cultivated on its behalf.” (*Ethics and Economics*, Ibid, pp. 149)

In fact Mr. Naqvi raises important question here. In the countries of the third world there cannot be any effective solution of the problem of poverty without implementing land reforms. However, it is hardly on the agenda of any Islamic country publicising its “Islamization” programme. Pakistan for example, very badly needs implementation of land reforms. The big landlords are very powerful and no government enjoying their support can dare touch their lands. Zia’s “Islamization” does not make even an indirect reference to any such programme. The committee of expert economists appointed by the Zia regime stressed the urgent need for such reforms but the report was shelved.

The Committee, in its report, advocating land reform, says; “In addition to this land reforms should be introduced to reduce the size of the *family holding* of land. Steps should also be taken to promote the Islamic system of partnership tenancy in place of the wide spread practice of hiring out bare land for fixed rent which according to some *Fuqaha* (theologians), is formally equivalent to *ribah*. Furthermore, there is, the explicit Islamic position that land not cultivated for three consecutive years should be taken away by the State, without paying any compensation to their owners, and given to those who can cultivate it.” (*An Agenda for Islamic Economic Reforms*, mimeographed report prepared by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad).

Needless to say no such radical land reforms are cultivated by the Zia regime. Its Islamization programme does not go beyond imposing certain Islamic punishments for theft and adultery and in the economic field beyond establishing interest-free banks which any way do not harm powerful vested interest responsible for perpetuating poverty. This clearly betrays the class character of the Zia regime. The other Islamic regimes have been no less than guilty in this respect.

As far as the Islamic value-system is concerned, one will have to give altogether a new interpretation to the idea of trusteeship of wealth. If an individual possessor of wealth is considered as its trustee, the desired result is not obtained. It becomes very difficult to demarcate between the rights of a possessor and an owner. In fact the possessors and owners can and do exercise virtually all the rights of owners. It is a well known fact that in high taxation economies, trusts are created by the rich and the wealthy, not to dispense benefits to the needy but to avoid taxes. They, at the same time, continue to exercise all the rights of ownership by retaining their control over the trusts. The government has to further legislate to curb such malpractices.

It would thus be seen that the concept of individual trusteeship of wealth is not adequate to meet the requirements of judicious distribution of social wealth in the society. The problem can be adequately grappled with only *if the society as a whole is treated as a trustee of Allah* and the social wealth is owned by it, including the means of production, in an industrial economy. The society as a whole should hold social wealth in good trust and develop and spend it in keeping with the objectives laid down by Allah. There is nothing wrong even if this happens to be in conformity to the socialist doctrine of social ownership of means of production. The Prophet is reported to have said that "Wisdom is the lost property of the faithful; he should acquire it whatever he finds it"

Another important dimension of social trusteeship of wealth is ecological in nature. The capitalist development, due to its greed for profit and accumulation, often ignores ecological considerations while ruthlessly exploiting natural resources. Ecology must be treated seriously while working out the strategy of economic development. Also, the imperialist countries have shown very scant regard for ecology in the third world in their greed to exploit it for keeping their standards of living very high. If the natural resources and means of production are controlled by the society as a whole, it would not be possible to do so. Yet another dimension of the problem is intergenerational use of the natural resources. The society must hold natural resources in trust for the coming generations

too. They should not be exhausted for maintaining high standards of a few generations only. This is precisely what is happening with the oil resources of the Arab world. The ruling classes in the Arab world are selling millions of barrels of oil every year to the industrialised world of the west and themselves appropriating the revenues earned. The life styles of these ruling classes are becoming almost legendary. An average family in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) owns four cars.

The institution of social trusteeship would ensure that coming generations are not deprived of the benefits of natural wealth. The oil resources of the Arabs, it is estimated by the noted economists like Samir Amin, may be exhausted within 30 years, if oil production is not curtailed. One must also bear another fact in mind that those who talk of the concept of Islamic *ummah* and reject the concept of nation-state are least inclined to share their wealth with the poorer Islamic nations like Bangladesh which is one of the poorest nation in the world. Thus Islamic *ummah* remains purely religious concept which is exploited politically by the rulers of the Islamic world but refuse to dispense economic benefits to the poor and needy of the *ummah* in other countries, symbolic financial aids apart.

One of the most fundamental doctrines of Islam is *tawhid* (unity of God). Traditional theologians have mostly concerned themselves to explaining its religious aspects. The socio-economic aspects of their far-reaching doctrine have not received any serious attention so far. Unity of God should not be treated merely as a theological concept but also a sociological concept. It is precisely for this reason that the Quran opposed all distinctions based on tribes, races and nations and established the brotherhood of faithfuls. Also, divisions in a society are not merely ethnic in nature, they are also economic. They are termed as class divisions in the economic terminology. The latter divisions cause serious tensions and conflict in the society and no meaningful unity can be achieved if these divisions persist and keep on widening. If the divine unity reflects social unity—and it should, as per the Quranic spirit—then the *ta'ahiai iqtisadiyat* (what could be roughly termed as Islamic economics) must minimize these

economic disparities. Only a society free of ethnic, national, linguistic and class divisions can be an ideal *tawhidi* society.

I would also like to emphasize here that social situations are normally highly complex and human behaviour is not motivated by ideals alone but is governed by social situation also. Any theory which fails to take this fact into account cannot come to grips with social and human realities. Whatever the ideals, theological or metaphysical, ethnic, national and class divisions cannot be washed away very easily. The Quran is also fully aware of these social complexities and declares: "Had Allah willed, He could have made them one community, but Allah bringeth whom He will into His mercy. And the wrongdoers have no friend nor helper." (42:8)

This is very significant verse. It clearly implies the prevailing ethnic and other divisions and tensions and the problems of bringing about unity. "Had Allah willed He could have made them one community" is quite meaningful statement, i.e., if only ideal could bring about unity, they could have become one community but Allah guides His servants and leaves them with their social realities (of their own making) and to desire His mercy. Thus it is for the human beings to take initiative and seek His mercy i.e. strive to create a society free of these divisions and ensuring unity. Only those who try to mitigate these divisions and tensions caused by them deserve His mercy. Those who cause these divisions to persist and tensions to be aggravated are wrong-doers and "wrong-doers have no friend nor helper". Thus the Quran's verdict is clear: it is not Allah's responsibility to forge unity and make them one community; it is for human beings, under His guidance, to strive to achieve this objective by minimizing these divisions and thus deserve His mercy. If they cause these divisions to persist they will face the consequences and will have no friends and helpers.

The question of property and poverty should also be looked into in this light. The right of property is not absolute, but neither can it be easily done away with. It poses numerous problems. The existing class divisions are very sharp. Concentration of property in a few hands undoubtedly aggravates the problem of poverty among the masses but abolition of right to property can also not be achieved in one go. One may have

to evolve, through trial and error, in right spirit and inspired by one's ideals, solutions to this problem in keeping with one's situation. Neither the abolition of right to property right away nor retaining it as absolute one can meet all possible situations. Both the solutions being extreme, do not take entire complexity of social situation into account. Extreme solutions are workable only in extreme situations, not in existing 'normal' situations.

Sudden abolition of right to property can throw up very complex problems severely affecting the economy. Immediately after the October Revolution in Russia severe restrictions on right to property were applied but after the days of war communism—extreme situation—a new economic policy (NEP) had to be adopted reversing some of these curbs. The economy would have otherwise been severely affected. Even on the question of the pace of collectivization there was bitter controversy among the Bolsheviks. Also, Mao Ze Dong's advocacy of establishing communes in one go met with severe resistance from other leaders and created serious economic as well as political problems. After his death the new leadership reversed many of these measures and permitted, under the label of modernization, restoration of private plots on limited scale and also adopted 'responsibility' system both in fields and factories in order to boost production.

Thus it would be seen that the question of poverty can not be settled in a simplistic way. From this one should not conclude, as opponents of socialism often do, that tampering with the right to own property is against human nature and that there would be no incentive for production without it. All I intend to emphasize here is that much would depend on the prevailing situation. It is for this reason that the Quran neither upholds right to property as sacrosanct nor rejects it altogether. While opposing exploitation and oppression and emphasizing socio-economic justice in no uncertain terms, it leaves concrete modalities of individual and social properties to be worked out in concrete situation.

It would be seen from the foregoing discussion that *adl* (justice) is the cornerstone of an economy based on Islamic values. To realize this concretely in a modern industrial

economy it is not enough to establish interest free banks, collect *zakah* and *ushr* (on agricultural income) and emphasize charity. These measures are not enough to meet the challenge of poverty and establish social justice, important though they are. The socio-economic institutions will have to be re-fashioned in order to establish distributive justice. The first important requirement is that one will have to view the problem in the context of totality of economy, not in piecemeal fashion. Production in modern economy is as important as distributive justice.

It has been argued that profit motive leads to maximizing of production and it also constitutes a just reward for the entrepreneur. And that just reward is in keeping with the Islamic principle. Those who know the working of modern industrial economy and its scale of operation would hardly be taken in by such arguments which used to be advanced in 19th century. Giant corporations and multinationals are not owned by an individual entrepreneur and his work ethics and his profit motive as was the case in the early stages of capitalism. These giant corporations are owned and manipulated by the powerful groups of super rich through the mechanism of buying controlling shares. The huge amounts of profit are pocketed by those who skillfully maneuver these controlling shares. The profit thus accrued is neither the result of hard work, nor that of proportionate investment. Such a profit is, therefore a result of speculation on the stock exchange and is *haram* (illegitimate), prohibited by Islam. It should also be borne in mind that the profit obtained through commercial exchange, in which the individual owner and investor plays personal role through direct operations is not comparable with the profit obtained through production by workers and appropriated by remote entrepreneurs who do not play any direct role in its generation.

In a mercantile economy on the other hand profit is generated (rather distributed) through commercial transactions carried out by the investor himself. The prophet was faced with this situation in Meccan mercantile economy and it was the profit of this sort which was legitimized with a proviso that

no speculation or other forms of malpractices like shortweighting, short-measuring or advance trading are not resorted. Thus the two categories of profits should not be confused together.

Here we would like to throw some light on the meaning and concept of *riha'* itself. *Riha'* should not be understood in the context of modern industrial economy only as interest; its scope should be widened to include all the exploitative practices. Industrial profit would also fall in this category. Thus abolition of *riha'* should mean banning all exploitative practices including the profit earned by large scale modern industrial establishments. It is only then that the workers and other weaker sections of society would benefit. It is also a point to be noted that free enterprise-oriented industries in their hunt for profit are more interested in producing consumer goods for upper classes including consumer durables rather than wage-goods for the workers and other weaker sections which have much low profitability.

It becomes the responsibility of the society as a whole or the state to produce and supply such goods to the weaker sections of the society. Needless to say this role can be effectively played by the nationalized sector. Large-scale industries will have to be nationalized both for curbing unethical consumerism as well as for establishing social justice, a cornerstone of an Islamic society.

Sikhism and Human Liberation

Gurbhagat Singh

Sikhism is not a religion if the word means only “one of the systems of faith and worship” or just “a personal awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being.”¹ It is a way of life, a cultural system that enlightens about living as liberated beings. The notion of personal freedom did exist in the form of *moksha* in Hinduism and as *nirvana* in Buddhism, but it bypassed the mediating structures that enforce and confirm freedom and change it into liberation. A person can be personally or individually free and still remain unliberated.

Freedom, or “emancipation” in the Upanishads, is the attainment of knowledge. That is, of knowing or beholding the “golden” author of the word, as the *Mundaka* upanishad says. Knowing and becoming one with Brahma, is the disappearance of passion: *Shanti*.² It is a state of complete identity, as elaborated in the *Chandogya* upanishad doctrine of “Thou art That”. Later on, as A.B. Keith has rightly suggested, the Vedanta developed this notion of emancipated individual into the notion of *Jivan Mukta*, an individual who obtains release in perfection only in death although he is released in life by his attainment of knowledge.³ In simple words, the notion of freedom or emancipation in the Hindu religious and philosophical tradition is confined to a kind of individual and personal knowing and thereby coming to a point where all

emotions cease. The emancipated person attains to an altered state of consciousness that is close to "dreamless sleep". Although Buddha, in contradistinction with the Hindu doctrine of Atma-Brama, elaborated his path to *nirvana*, through *anatta* or not-atma, yet his way, as a scholar of Buddhism, G.C. Pande, has also observed, "is really the way of Awakening."⁴ not in disaccord with the Upanishads. The nirvanic state is preceded by the spiritual progress divided into *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna*. Finally the mendicant comes to the "peaceful state" which according to *The Dhammapada* is "the cessation of natural existence and happiness. "By realizing this state, the enlightened being "illuminates this world like the moon freed from a cloud."⁵ Later, in the 2nd century A.D., Nagarjuna, perhaps the greatest interpreter of Buddhism, explained this luminous state of *nirvana* as *shunyata*, void, non-being or realization of the co-dependence of the world: *Pratityasamutpada*. The co-dependent knowing that included both understanding and relativist realization of the world, had many possibilities but still it remained at the level of consciousness.

The individual-personal and de-individual-impersonal knowing of Hinduism and Buddhism, are still a kind of subjective way of attaining to *nirvana*, even if that "subject" is not to be understood in the sense of the alienated or dichotomous subject of the Western Platonic-Cartesian tradition.

The Sikh gurus are very clear about the various levels of liberation. To them, transformation of the subject's consciousness is only one level although a vital one. For full liberation, change has to occur at several levels. To use the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, the author of *Theology of Liberation*, these levels are "part of a single salvific process."⁶

The Sikh gurus also understood the problematic of medieval Indian society in not having an up-coming middle class that could organize itself into a revolutionary group to overthrow the mode in which all production centred around the Sultan and his supportive small sections. In Europe the qualitative change could occur because the middle class was aided by the new science, related ideology and educational institutions developed by the king and nobility themselves. The Sikh

gurus themselves were from the trading middle class conscious of its limited growth within that Sultan-centred system, yet they were basically stimulated by the plight of the peasantry that especially under the Mughals was ruthlessly exploited, to the extent of losing its two-third produce to the Sultanate and its revenue officials. And above this, the peasant did not have rights to his land.

In the absence of a potential revolutionary middle class that could develop an ideology around a new production system, the only alternative possibility in the Mughal period was to evolve a counter-ideology within the "medieval" or God-centred framework for a group that was to be a mixture of trading sections and peasant although the latter were expected to dominate due to their sheer number and being on the lowest rung, both hierarchically and economically

The counter-ideology that the gurus evolved several generations, centred around semiotic change. In simple words, they tried to alter certain key signs which could re-mould the consciousness of deprived sections. The most prominent and affective sign that largely determined the universe for the contemporary subjects was "God." His unitarian, orderly and incredibly demanding personality touching disciplinarian savagery as projected by the priesthood helping the Mughal emperors aided the absolutist system in keeping its firm control on the masses. The gurus adequately understood how the theological metaphor or sign could be used to shape the unconscious of the people to accept the Sultan-controlled or Emperor-centred system in which individuals and their concerns did not matter much. Alongwith this theological sign, God, stemming from the Judaic-Christian or Islamic sources and fully exploited by the ruling hierarchy, was another semiotic sub-system that the Brahmanical priesthood used. That was an *avtar* or a god like Krishna enjoying free play. Or a Rama, a supporter of the caste hierarchy, destroying a Ravana, a scholar with many heads, mainly for being outside the Aryan caste hierarchy and for that reason a demon deserving annihilation. Both the signs, the one used by the Mughal priesthood and the other used by the Brahmanical priesthood, helped in moulding the conscious and unconscious of the

people to a multi-layered subjectness. These two signs, therefore, needed to be altered or replaced by the one or ones that would de-subject or liberate.

The gurus developed the *de-subjecting* sign, God. Its first liberative feature is that it gets new *signifieds* or psychological imprints that could make the sign distant from any identity with temporal kings. The God of the Sikh gurus is “the true emperor” (*sach'a padshah*).⁷ His rule never ends. His administrative assistants are those who have attained to the state of “cosmic equipoise” (*sahaj*). In comparison with Him, Guru Nanak says, “all temporal kings, their subjects and set-ups are false.”⁸ He contains in Himself all powers and attributes of the gods like Siva, Mahesh, etc.⁹ No Veda, Purana, or any conceptual-philosophical system (*sastra*) is above Him.¹⁰ He remains in an eternal state of tranceful meditation (*tari*). He is the archetypal yogi. Apart from making God the true king in contrast with the false temporal kings, and the Supreme Yogi in contrast with the sectarian yogis fragmenting the people's mind, the gurus also made Him a *rasia*, an enjoyer, who participates in the beings of his followers. The fifth guru, Arjun Dev, in a hymn, says that “The Most Radiant has graced my bed and my mind has absorbed into His bliss”¹¹ This God is not just an abstraction. His thought has not only to be grasped philosophically but also to be realized existentially. This bodily-existential relish of God connects the gurus with the non-Aryan *dehvadin* tradition of *Carvaka*. The Vedantic system elaborating Brahma as pure and non-dualistic consciousness is different from this bodily-existential emphasis of the gurus.

They wanted to create a new psycho-biology, an altered response system, a radically modified unconscious that would respond to the “order” of the “true,” “blissful” lover and yogi; the supreme power that is beyond thought and structuration, beyond the “blood-sucking kings.”¹² To experience this God means to the gurus to de-condition oneself, to de-subject from the ideology of the ruling imperial class. Changing the mind and body through the altered sign was their strategy to produce a new person. The gurus understood this well that all ruling elites subject through signs and metaphors. In our

times, Foucault, Guattari and Deleuze have very vitally drawn our attention to the ways ideologies are inscribed on the “bodies” or the psycho-biology of the ruled. Liberation is not possible without undertaking the job of deinscribing, which means organizing counter-strategies, both semiotic and socio-political. The true, yogic and bliss-giving God of the Sikh gurus is counter-strategic to demolish the image of an imperial God or of the Sultanate that was oppressive and exploitative.

Another change that the gurus introduced in this theological sign to make it de-inscriptive was in the form of giving it signifieds related to militarization and historicization. In simple words, the God as elaborated by the gurus is combative. He kills demons (*asuras*),¹³ and punishes “egotists,” i.e., the kings, landlords, and all administrative officials who were “suckers” and ruthless in those days. This God is incredibly assertive and protects his devotees (*bhaktas*), the persons who have realized Him as combative and blissful. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh who baptized and militarized the Sikhs in 1699 A.D. at Anandpur begins his *Bachittra Natak* (The Resplendent Drama) by saluting God as the most deadly Sword: “It reduces enemy battalions into pieces. Its power overcomes the battlefield. It is so indestructible that it eternally flashes like the sun, and burns like a self-ignited flame.”¹⁴

The gurus project this demon-wrecking militancy of God in their specific historical context in which they were engaged to transform the society. The tenth guru, in the text cited above, invokes this militancy to narrate the battles that he himself had fought against the rajas of the Shivalik hills. The historicized militancy empowers this sign to yield a new signification alongwith engendering an appropriate psycho-biological energy that not only prepares to understand the dialectical field, but also to seize it to conquer. Charles Morris, one of the founders of modern semiotics is on record for acknowledging this sort of power of signs. He terms it “appropriative” and “consummatory.”¹⁵

By altering the theological sign with the signifieds related to aesthetics and historiosophic militancy, the Sikh gurus aimed at creating a person who could both enrich and enlarge

his/her being and also intervene in history. To them, transforming the society or history also meant transforming the I. Such altered beings were named by them as “gurmukhs” (mouth-pieces of the guru) or saint-soldiers. Positioned in historical specificity and the most extended consciousness of the divine, these *gurmukhs* were capable of communicating *Sabda*, the realized energy of the life-system. And this communication was not only to be interpersonal but also communitarian and institutional. This kind of person who alters by altering himself has been called “historical bloc” by Gramsci. James Joll explains this notion as follows: “By this phrase he (Gramsci) he was trying to describe the moment when both objective and subjective forces combine to produce a situation of revolutionary change, the moment when the economic structure of the old order was collapsing but when there also were people with the will, determination and historical insight to take advantage of this.”¹⁶

The *gurmukh* or the ideal, conscious person, defined by the Sikh gurus, is both liberated and liberating. By God’s grace he gets to the “door of liberation”, says Guru Nanak in his *Japuji*. But the most vital point to be understood about this person is that he or she remains in cosmic equipoise (*sahaj*). He is enlightened and he meditates on God’s *Nam* that is crudely translated as Name, but actually means His essence that comes into consciousness or whole being through various signifiers or sound impressions of the mind. Thus the radiance and balance that this *Nam* or various signifiers give are no different from participating in history with an enlightened consciousness. If the essence of God is related to the signifieds of aesthetic and historiosophic militancy, then, remaining with or in Him can lead only to historical action with an extended sense of beauty and its relish.

Such a *gurmukh*, the gurus place in dialectic with the negative person: *manmukh*. As compared to the Sikh guru’s hero: *gurmukh*, this negative person is (i) an egotist like the kings, state officials or those who have no control over their greed for money and property, always engaged in petty quarrels;¹⁷ (ii) a betrayer (*lun haram*) who salutes in slavery;¹⁸ (iii) an indulgent who cannot discipline himself in sex, anger;¹⁹

(iv) an enemy of saints or *gurmukhs*;²⁰ and finally, (v) a dualist incapable of experiencing the aesthetic and divine relish.²¹

It is obvious that the *manmukh*, in the guru's system, with all these characteristics mentioned above, cannot meditate on God who is aesthetic and historiosophically militant, and for that reason he is unauthentic to intervene in history. For this intervention, integration with truth which in the gurus' writings means identity with *Nam* or the aesthetic and historiosophic militant essence of the theo-being as elaborated already, is necessary. "The *manmukh*, according to Guru Nanak, "disintegrates in the cosmic cycle and the *gurmukh* remains absorbed into Truth."²² The notion of integration or disintegration is not just psychological in the *Adi Granth*, but socio-political and cosmic simultaneously.

Retaining authenticity or the capability to intervene historically, means to the gurus losing the sense of human dignity, a sense of human honour. The word used is "Pat."²³ It rather surprises that the gurus in those times identified the sense of self-respect in a human being with one's capability of absorbing oneself into a large consciousness, with the theological, aesthetic and transformative aspects of God, and then also with aware action in history.

In the dialectic that the gurus build up between the *gurmukh* and the *manmukh*, they elevate the former and call him "jivan mukta" or liberated from this life of cycles. He not only meets the Lord in his "palace" but also celebrates the experience of the Unstruck Melody: the highest experiential/deep consciousness state as accepted by the yogic systems when the experienter attains to a large and existential consciousness. It is a new ecstatic and participative understanding of life. But the *gurmukh* does not keep the attainment to himself, he also shares. According to the third guru, Amar Das, "a *gurmukh* always communicates searchfully from his mind, and keeps his concentration on the *Nam*."²⁴

A very vital aspect of the Sikh system is that the intervening hero does not meet his God simply in his individual consciousness, but in the community, called *Sadh Sangat* which literally means the community of saints. Guru Arjun Dev, in one of his hymns says: "The One who dwells in the interiors of the

saint-community is the True.”²⁵ At another place the same guru says: “The transcendental masters of the interior can help me in attaining to an insight, but that changes into celebration with the Most Radiant only when one seeks integration with the community.”²⁶ The *gurmukh*, the gurus’ positive transformational hero, is mediated by this collective wisdom. The aesthetics and historiosophic militancy of God that he experiences to enlarge himself and intervene are not products of his own consciousness, they come from the experience and understanding of the community. For that reason, the *gurmukh*’s consciousness and action are not subjective. They belong in the category of objectivity even if accompanied by the internal power and concentration. But to be more appropriate, if we can get out of the Western dichotomous terms: subjectivity and objectivity, we can say that this mediated consciousness of the intervening hero is a synthetic and personalized external action in which both self and the other go through change and establish a mutualistic and enriching relationship. The hero who is enlightened to act both through his own effort and mediation by the community, cannot side track. When he or she interprets history or ‘blasts open’ its continuum, to use an expression from Walter Benjamin, the entry that he/she makes will remain within the principle of cosmic equipoise (*sahaj*).

The *gurmukh* or the liberation seeking person, as a part of the saint-community, experiences joy or something close to what the French word “jouissance” conveys. Both Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva use it for a kind of joy that involves the body or sucking senses in play or action. Although the *gurmukh*’s relish or “rasa” is larger and transcendental in a special way, still it is close to “jouissance” due to its participatory and intense character. The first guru, Nanak Dev, says that in association with the saint-community, if one celebrates or frolics, it does not lead to any repentance,²⁷ because the whole activity is not deviant, it is only an aspect of the divine who lives with the community. A special feature of this *gurmukh* and his relationship with the community is that it does not flourish in philosophical abstraction separated from joy and beauty. Heidegger is sore about the disjunction between the path of philosophical abstraction and aesthetics in

the West. Even Indian Vedanta had lost that integrity. The Sikh gurus kept the relationship between the *gurmukh* and the community not that of a narrow pragmatic but of transaesthetics and relish. The signs *gurmukh* and *sadh sangat* (saint-community), therefore, cannot be understood with the usual "religious" signifieds in the Western disjunctive sense of Heidegger. Rather, the Sikh hero and his community are closer to Herbert Marcuse's notion of a "revolutionary" who fills out his senses with joy and beauty, and then acts significantly. His intervention acquires a different character—different from the one who has only fed himself on abstraction and philosophy.

Boris Pasternak's main argument in his nobel-prize winning novel *Doctor Zhivago* is that a revolution which comes through blood-shed, without existential richness of the revolutionaries, leads to certain reflexes that are hard to check. The passionate and cosmic relationship of Lara and Doctor Zhivago in which both love each other as extended realities is what a revolutionary needs to transform the whole revolutionary enterprise into a humane affair.

The Sikh revolutionary, a *gurmukh*, has to humanize himself/herself through love. Guru Gobind Singh says: "only those who love meet God." He calls his revolutionary warfare a "play of love." Love in Sikhism is multi-dimensional. It includes relationships among men, women, community, history, and God. No wonder the metaphor of love is the most predominant one in the writings of all the gurus.

The Sikh contribution to the international theory of revolution is that it can be accomplished and fully realized only by those who have first filled themselves out with love and have relished the divine beauty which means the principle of higher harmony and equilibrium passing through conflict and war. The Sikh revolutionary that way is a cosmic intensifier of this principle. He or she cannot be waylaid by alienated selfhood, senses or intellectual abstraction. Alienation is not the product of technocratic and commodity producing capitalism alone, it also existed in the Sultanate or Emperor-centred medieval Indian society in which despite tribal associations, the common people did not participate

in the political processes of life. The social and economic processes were given, without any room for individual and personal fulfilment. By evolving the idea of *Sangat* that becomes the guru and enables the *gurmukh* to utter *Sabda* or experientially mediate on the essences of life including the aesthetic and militant features of God, the gurus build up a way of de-alienating and integrating the individual on way to be *gurmukh*.

The major point made so far is that the Sikh thought and practice are neither a mere feeling-oriented mysticism, nor a dogmatic kind of theological system, "systematic theology" as Paul Tillich will say, they are *dharma* in the largest Buddhist sense. The vital signs that that Sikhism has shaped : God, Sangat, Gurmukh, Manmukh, have new signifieds. They are all centred around aesthetics, militancy and change. They transmit a consciousness of multidimensional liberation and lead towards structural changes. Both content and the form of these signs were different. The new signified modified the signifiers also. The God with aesthetic, yogic and militant characteristics, and especially in relation to the other radically modified signs is different from the God used by the priesthood helping the Mughal Sultans, and from the Brahma and other *puranic* gods used by the Brahmanic priesthood to fragment and subdue the masses.

The Sikh signs, thus, re-order the universe. They create new relationships. The questions posed by them and the answers suggested are different from the contemporary imperial and Brahmanic systems. To use the term of Thomas A. Kuhn, the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the Sikh thought and practice brought about a "paradigmatic" change that occurs according to him at the moment of a crisis. A scientific revolution according to him, is accompanied by a paradigmatic re-ordering. For the entire scientific community a new way of asking and answering questions is developed because the old one has ceased to do its job. The Sikh semiotic, that way had a revolutionary stance. Although it used the available concepts and categories, yet it re-related them in new contexts and changed their content and form. The intentions of the Sikh semiotic are hardly "theological"

in the accepted sense of the word, they are ultra-liberative. The epistemic cut that this semiotic makes, enables it to alter "the historical perspective of the community that shares it."²⁸ In fact it has altered the neural processes of the Sikhs. By re-educating them, it has prepared them to respond to the world differently. No wonder that in a Sikh, who is raised on the *bani* (meta-poetry) of the *Adi Granth*, the *Dasam Granth*, and on the related lore and institutions, aesthetics, militancy and the passion for change get combined. An authentic Sikh, saturated with the Sikh and semiotic, can only be a non-sense revolutionary whose being is filled with beauty: the conception of the best that is and a relishful and utopian desire to realize the possible. He or she will not be content without victory. Guru Gobind Singh, in a hymn, prays to God: "Bless me to be fearless in the battlefield and be a victor with my ardent will."

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Religion and Socialism

Frederic Hastings Smyth

Merely to write the above title is to fly in the face of the religious concepts of a great many people. Because, in the minds of many who count themselves as “religious,” only that which is included in the area of a “spiritual” relationship with God, which concerns man’s eternal, as distinct from his temporal, destiny, and which is therefore indifferent to human judgments (or tastes) in the political and economic ordering of this present life on earth, can be properly allotted to the domain of religion. It is obvious, therefore, that before we proceed we must make clear what we mean by “religion.”

In what follows, the religion of which we speak will be that which derives from the Hebrew-Christian tradition. And this religion has from the beginning invariably concerned itself with the affairs of this life. Judeo-Christian religion is this-worldly rather than next-worldly.

The ancient Jewish community of Palestine, highly conscious of its social unity in a kinship or “brotherhood,” lived under a

With the rise of liberation theology in the 1970s and 1980s, the question of religion and the Left has formed a central topic of discussion and debate in MR, most notably in a July-August 1984 double issue devoted to the question. This article by Frederic Hastings Smyth, an Episcopalian and author of *Manhood into God*, was the first piece on the topic in *Monthly Review*, published in the July 1949 issue.

code of communal law full of economic legislation related religiously to the will of the God of Israel. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example, condemns, under high religious sanction, the exaction of interest on loans of either money or goods; it forbids the grabbing of a neighbor's land by shifting the markings of a drawn boundary it confirms an older law freeing slaves after a fixed period of service; it makes elaborate provision for periodical redistribution of lands in such wise as to prevent the growth of a permanent landed aristocracy and the correlative formation of a dispossessed tenantry or share-cropper class. All such religious laws are intended to legislate, within the political and economic life of this world, a set of human relationship proper to men living in a social unity which can, with correctness and meaningfulness, be described as a "brotherhood." They are founded upon the clearly seen truth that men can be spiritually "brotherly" only within a community so organized and governed that "brotherliness" in material relationship is enforced by the authority of constitutional community law. And this law in all its carefully detailed prescriptions, is gathered together in its great Summary which inseparably links all love of God to a regard for one's fellow men ("neighbours") equal at least to one's regard for oneself. The Founder of Christianity, far from denying this central commandment of the Jewish tradition, confirmed it; but he expanded the obligation to the achievement of human community beyond its historic confines in the Hebrew Nation, to embrace all men of every race and every nation.

Therefore, the religion of the Judeo-Christian tradition is by no means exclusively next-worldly in its immediate emphasis. From earliest Old Testament times, this religion has not hesitated to "meddle" or "tamper" as some people today would put it, with both politics and economics in order that the principles of "brotherhood" may be realized in the basic order of the human social structure. The very kernel of this religion is to aim at the realization of a communally structured way of life such that individualistic self-seeking shall be replaced and dominated by a system of cooperative human relationships.

In other words, in our religious tradition, no moral or

ethical principles are ever put forth as if within an environmental vacuum. And still less, by far do we ever presuppose that the social structure of man's environment shall make it categorically *impossible* to put religious principles into everyday practice. On the contrary, when we teach men that they should tell the truth, we presuppose an economic structure such that truth-telling will gain its due social and economic advantage in practical business and community esteem. When we teach men that they ought to give freely of their best ideas and skills for the advantage of their fellows, we presuppose a society so ordered in distributive justice that those making such contributions shall unfailingly have their due share of whatever social amenities and wealth may subsequently accrue. In brief, when we teach men that they ought to "love one another," we presuppose a social setup in which communal behavior - traditionally known as "brotherly love" - shall be constitutionally and legally enshrined. We presuppose a social structure so ordered that, when individuals do actually take their religious precepts seriously and seek to "lose their lives" in the service of their fellow men, do seek to be completely and openly truthful, do seek no material advantages either at the expense of or to the impoverishment of their fellows, they themselves will not be penalized for their so-called "self sacrificing" generosity, but will share justly in the resulting common good. In "losing their lives" they will genuinely "find them."

It follows that the religious approach to the economic and social problems presented by our developed capitalism is not so much immediately one of moral leadership and of prophetic exhortation (although these can certainly not be absent), as it is one of scientific guidance and of social engineering for the achievement of an order such that religious principles can, at least, be put into practice in every department of life by all who are determined to do so. This does not, of course, mean that all men without exception must be motivated by religious conviction. But it does mean that those who are so motivated must not be flatly impeded, as they are now, by the objective realities of our contemporary capitalist society.

That such impediments now exist can hardly be other than obvious to any thoughtful person. It is absurd, for example,

to exhort people to be consistently truthful (an undoubted element in treating others like "brothers") while at the same time permitting our sons and daughters to become advertising agents, radio announcers, or even travelling salesmen within a competitive capitalist structure; for in these areas of activity thoroughgoing truthfulness is penalized, not rewarded. Thus, for "religious" people with "scruples," the practical opportunities for unpenalized truth-telling are narrowed to such relatively unimportant occasions as those of mealtime pleasantries and other non-business interchanges with intimates who will not "give us away" to an outer world which, because of its basic structure, awards profits to individuals in proportion to their skill in manipulating untruths.

It is by virtue of the religious requirement that an economic environment be achieved which will make "brotherly" behaviour possible at every level of activity, that religiously motivated people must now join hands with scientific socialists for the replacement of our competitive, self-seeking economy -- an economy which in its very constitution exalts individualist profit-making above every other consideration -- by one which seeks to make all production cooperative, one which distributes the profits of industry not on the basis of the private ownership of wealth but on the basis of the needs of all the members of the producing community considered as a whole. Socialism, thus defined, is "brotherly behavior" made socially constitutional.

There are those who teach that "unselfish" self-giving is sufficiently possible even now within our present capitalist society. Those who believe this belong to that school of thought which imagines that our present economic order--and for that matter, any human order whatever--will be "good" if men as individuals are "good" within it. Now while it is certainly true that no economic order, regardless of how well adapted it may be for the satisfaction of religious motivations, will itself be "good" unless individuals are also "good" within it, it does not follow that individual moral integrity can reform or revise a bad economic order. On the contrary, really consistent religious behaviour within a capitalist order is more likely to destroy it than to improve it. Thus, religious virtues

within a social structure which constitutionally contradicts them, are not palliative, but revolutionary.

This possibility of flat contradiction between the behaviour patterns enforced by an economic structure and the moral behavior demanded by religious conscience is neither generally nor sufficiently perceived. Even the late William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, clear-sighted as he usually was, drew from the fact that "commerce is one of the factors which brings nations together," the conclusion that "whether in doing so it promotes goodwill or ill, depends on whether we conduct it right or sinfully." Now, this seems to be correct as a generalization; but if applied to present practice it would take us much further than most people who accept this kind of statement usually realize. Dr. Temple continued, saying, "If you treat as competition for profit what is really cooperation for public service, something is likely to go wrong; but if we treat it for what it is, a great system of cooperation for the general benefit, it will generate goodwill. But if we are self-centered—which is the source of sin—and attend chiefly to our share of our interest in it, it is bound to go wrong in its working and to promote rivalries and enmities."

This type of reasoning, often repeated and assuming many forms, overlooks an obvious difficulty. Unfortunately, our present economic system is so constituted that *unless* it is "conducted for private profit," precisely then something is not only "likely," but bound to "go wrong." Our American "way of life," from its foundation up, is so organized that if individuals or groups in significant numbers were suddenly to turn "good," in the sense of conducting their business on the principle of "cooperation," if they consistently behaved as if their only intention were to give themselves in every respect to society, rather than primarily to make a profit, their own enterprises and finally the entire system would collapse. Economic chaos would ensue. Our economy works exactly the other way round; the capitalist slogan has to be: "take care of the profits and communal cooperation will take care of itself." Thus in an anti-religious economy, religiously motivated people are compelled to behave in everyday practice in

anti-religious ways; or they are compelled to become revolutionary menaces to the contradictory environmental economy.

Socialism offers a rational escape from this irrational dilemma; for in the socialist economy, individuals can be motivated by a desire to produce the good and useful things which man's intelligence now enables him to shape from the material resources of creation, not for individual profit, but for the use of the entire community. Socialism makes no paradoxically heroic demands of "unselfishness" upon ordinary individuals; on the contrary, it is an economy so constituted that it will bestow its advantages and rewards upon those who seek to "lose themselves" in the avenues of corporate self-giving which it opens to all. It is an economy in which individuals actually stand to receive most when they behave least as competitively acquisitive beings. In this way, socialism present a scientifically realistic answer to the religious dilemma forced upon us by the nature of capitalism. It is that very "unselfishness" now, all too contradictorally extolled by religious moralists, enshrined for the benefit of everyone in the economic constitution of a social mode of production. A motivation desired by the religious man can thus be made productive in all the practical relationships of life; for socialism permits seeking the good of the whole as a primary aim, while at the same time benefit to the individual follows as a kind of morally secondary, but nonetheless logical, result. Such an economic order can satisfy the religious conscience without at the same time making demands of "unselfishness" so fantastically exaggerated as to overpass the bounds of proper reason. For although it is true that in moments of crisis, the individual, like the soldier in battle, is asked to dismiss all notion of personal reward, such conditions are not looked upon as permanently desirable.

It is true that working to establish a socialist system may, in the immediate present, call for extraordinary sacrifices; but the Law of the Hebrew religion was designed to provide economic and social conditions within which the man who obeyed religious precepts there set forth might see the time when "his generation should be blessed," and riches and plenteousness would be in his house." And when the Apostle

Peter said to Jesus that he and his companions, for the sake of their common struggle and propaganda "had left everything and followed him, what should they have therefore?" the answer was not at all that such an enquiry was religiously irrelevant and somehow showed a morally low point of view, but rather that it was a rational enquiry, and the encouraging reply came : "Everyone who has left houses or father or mother or children or lands for me will receive an hundred-fold : and there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the achievement of the kingdom of God [the Biblical name for a social order corresponding constitutionally to the will of God] who will not receive manifold more in this very time." Thus socialism is the contemporary way of following the injunction of Jesus of Nazareth to "seek first a social order of Justice"—to which he added the encouraging assurance that clothing, food, good housing and other amenities of life must then, in the very nature of the situation so achieved, "be added unto us" as logical and therefore necessary consequences. For, in diametric opposition to the capitalist slogan just suggested, that of socialism is "take care of continuing communal cooperation and the profits will take care of themselves." The capitalist approach is fairly obviously failing, even on its own terms; the socialist approach gives every indication that it both can and will fulfill its promise.

Another, and perhaps a more specifically religious, criticism which must be levelled at capitalism is that of its wanton wastefulness. A religious man necessarily entertains a deep respect for all material things, as coming from the God he worships and as being part of His creation. A religious man must therefore aim at a careful and well-considered use of this creation, aiming at the conservation of its resources which ought to be exploited for their constructive usefulness and for the benefit of man. But we today, in violent contradiction of this religious care, live in a system of waste beyond comparison. In fact, waste might be called the keystone of the structure of our material existence. Historically, our competitive capitalism, developing over five or six centuries past, has raped God's creation for man's self-regarding profit rather than

exploited it intelligently for human use. Nobody who has travelled thoughtfully over our own country but must be saddened by our ruthlessly slashed forests in many an old lumbering area : by the blackened and blighted countryside and streams of our coal mining districts; by our western bad lands, with their fertile top-soil lost beyond recall because of avaricious and careless use; by our "dust bowl" caused by profit-mongering grain planting during the first world war. All these desolations are but the stigmata of human activity without thought for humanity and its future; without any thought, in fact, beyond the quickly amassed profit for a small minority, and then but for a few fleeting years.

But the evil goes deeper. We even produce for the sake of waste! It is our very aim and purpose to have all our manufactured goods used up as soon as possible, to get them worn out or tossed away long before they have ceased to have utility. One need not multiply examples of this waste thus carefully contrived and socially engineered by the meretricious advertising propaganda showered upon us through every avenue of public expression. The great thing is to get everyone to buy, and then to buy more and more; to buy more and to throw away; to buy beyond all rational need and the possibility of constructive use.

But even these methods of waste do not suffice to drain away what are so quaintly called the products of "over-production" made possible by present day techniques. We are compelled from time to time during periods of peace to resort to government support of prices, while many of our citizens cannot buy sufficiently for their needs even at lower prices; and we resort to government subsidy of waste and destruction, especially of foodstuffs, in order to prevent the ruin of our producing farmers and to keep them abreast of other business in the mad scramble for profits. All of this is accompanied by human waste, by so-called "depression" unemployment and the profane discarding of many of our best resources in human being themselves.

At last the problem of "over-production" which wipes out capitalist profits becomes insoluble on a domestic basis and within the framework of international peace. No peacetime

waste can be contrived, either through propaganda or subsidy which will solve it. Nations which come to this final crisis do not immediately make open declaration of the sinister plans now deeply maturing for further waste and destruction of their "surplus" manufactured and agricultural goods. At first they begin to lend money abroad that other more depressed nations may buy these "surplus" products and drain them away. This can be achieved sometimes through private loans, as after the First World War; or through "Marshall Plans" and E.R.P. bounties, as at present. But finally even these means cannot suffice. Loans and gifts for economic "recovery" slip logically over into rearmament programs both at home and abroad—always, of course, avowedly for the "preservation of peace." Then the time comes when the capitalist world goes in for waste on the grandest and most satanic scale, with bombs and fire, that a new cycle of profit-making and inflationary production may start another irrational competitive rush.

To a religious man, this is a grave sacrilege. All intelligent men, whether or not they profess any explicit religious faith, must grieve over the dreadful sacrilege of such waste. But religious men ought to be filled with a contrite fear at this ghastly spectacle of man's desecration of God's created world a world given for man's welfare and not to be exhausted for the competitive profit of a few, nor ruined in the cause of man's subsequent self-destruction.

There is ground for rejoicing that what is probably an entirely new factor has entered the contemporary religious scene. For the first time in history it now dawns upon the religious consciousness that what is called sin does not reside exclusively in the selfish wrong-headedness and perverted wills of individual men. Sin can be enshrined in a social structure, as in our present one, in a way which can vitiate the best intentions of the very saints themselves. Our religious forebears never clearly comprehended this truth, although the laws and precepts of their religion had from the beginning pointed the way to it. This lack of understanding has had disastrous results; for it has caused religious people to come to terms with evil economic arrangements looked upon as somehow

fixed and humanly unalterable, perhaps even thought to be sent from God! One way out of this difficulty has been to turn "religion" into mere individualist and private piety and to make its concern a next-worldly one utterly foreign to the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the modern development of scientific socialism opens a new door of hope to all religious people. The fresh and well-grounded assurance that, as Karl Marx put it, men can have a rational part in making their own history, shows us that we need no longer "adjust" ourselves as best we may to an anti-brotherly economic system, but can, instead, mold it, to the end that future history may approach nearer to the requirements of our own basic religious motivations. This is the vast contribution which socialist economics is currently making to the cause of religion.

And in return for this, the religious man can affirm, to the hope of humanity and the confusion of cynical skeptics, that human nature at its most rational is basically cooperative. However much men's motivations have been misguided and perverted in a non-cooperative (i.e. non-brotherly) and irrational competitiveness, we will come to our full stature as truly rational and truly human beings, will do our finest work and live our most productive lives, when a socialist structure permits us to lay aside an imposed jungle mentality and to realize unimpeded our properly cooperative social selves.

Problems of Dalit Liberation

A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel

This paper is divided into three parts :

1. First of all, I should make it clear why I talk on Dalit history and culture. How is it relevant to the Dalit movement?
2. Secondly, if it is relevant to the Dalit movement, what is the problem Dalits have with their history and with their culture.
3. Finally, how the Dalit movement respond to the challenges Dalits face with regard to their history and culture. An historical perspective.

The question of Dalit history and culture is relevant and important to the Dalit movement because it is intrinsically connected with the problem of their development.

My paper is not on their development, but let me explain the nature of their development so that I can go into the main problem of their history and culture in the second point of my paper.

The Government's own Sixth Five-Year Plan document for 1980-85 admits :

Three decades of development have not had the desired impact on these socially, economically and educationally

handicapped groups. Their problems cannot be resolved through the percolation of general economic growth. The majority of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who form one-quarter of the population, are below the poverty line...Continuing to pursue traditional occupations, they are unable to participate fully in the process of modernization. The practice of untouchability against Scheduled Castes is a special handicap for them, and even the few educated groups amongst them are unable to compete for job opportunities created while Scheduled Tribes still remain outside the mainstream of development mainly because of their relative isolation and their exploitation by outside agencies.¹

If this is the picture of their economic development, what about their social life? Every year atrocities against Scheduled Castes have been mounting and the "Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1977-1978" admits that the Scheduled Castes in many parts of the country "... are humiliated, insulted manhandled, assaulted, burnt alive, tortured and their womenfolk molested. Their miseries are aggravated when they are boycotted socially and economically."² "The atrocities were acquiring the dimension of organised aggressiveness on the part of the perpetrators and were drifting towards a class war."³ The situation has only aggravated in recent years.

How does Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976, which made discrimination against Scheduled Castes more stringent than the earlier Untouchability Offences Act, 1955 work? The report of the Commissioner notes that :

The district authorities, who are charged with the responsibility of enforcement of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976, have not lived up to the obligations enjoined upon them to protect the civil rights of the weaker sections. No one familiar with the social climate in the rural areas would assert that there has been a decline in real terms.⁴

The evaluation reports of the PCR cases of the Special Component Plan and other benefits for Scheduled Castes

traces their ineffectiveness to the indifferent, often hostile caste prejudices of the police, the magistrates and the bureaucrats in the Govt. departments, coupled with vested economic muscle power of the dominant caste-class groups.⁵

These reports, along with an assessment of the functioning of Scheduled Caste MLAs and MPs; the way political parties handle a committed political leader, a govt. officer or a police official, the hardening attitude of the caste people where the Dalits assert their rights, the prevention of awareness building among them under communal politics, the caste wars in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Bihar, more or less complete the picture of the development of the Dalits. Why the situation of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes is so grim and hopeless despite the fact that India is the world's tenth industrial power, is the question.

A scholar who studied Indian civilization from the point of view of the oppressed writes ; "The freedom that came to Independent India with the institutions it gave itself were alien freedoms better suited to another civilization; in India they remained separate from the *internal organisation of the country, its beliefs and antique restrictions.*"⁶

In other words, what he says is that there is cultural contradiction in our situation, namely the modernity we have accepted through our Constitution, the laws we enacted and the institutions we created :

1. conflicts with our traditional ethos, namely the internal organisation of the country which is caste : institutionalised inequality—a cultural product of our civilization;
2. conflicts with certain beliefs of ours and antique restrictions;
3. conflict with our traditional laws and conventions.

In other words, the various groups that make our society do not share a common sum of meanings, expectations and understandings. There is no unity of values in our society.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar⁷, Mahatma Phoolley and Periar Ramaswamy understood this cultural contradiction in our

society and all three had tremendously contributed to the progress and development of the Scheduled Castes and other backward sections of our people and the struggles of these sections still move on these early foundations. On the other hand, Gandhi did not admit this cultural contradiction, he romanticised Indian cultural heritage and advocated the integration of Dalits within Hinduism. It has totally failed.⁸

Therefore the logical conclusion of this part is that *problems of Dalit development have to be traced to the traditional cultural ethos of this country* in which Dalits are caught up. This is the reason why we need to look into the nature of Dalit history and culture.

What then is the nature of Dalit history and culture?

Pupul Jayakar in her book, *The Earthen Drum*, an outstanding study of the Ritual Arts of Rural India, writes: "These arts are an inheritance that *predate the nomadic male-oriented Vedic Aryan invasions around 1750 B.C.*"⁹ She traces a number of ritual symbols and art forms to *Indus Valley*¹⁰ and identifies their presence in the folk tradition of Dalits and Tribals and some of which got assimilated in the classical tradition of the Hindus. In other words, what she says is that *the history and culture of the Dalits and Tribals begin with the Indus civilization.*

How then are the Indus civilization, and later Hindu civilization which begins with the Vedas, are connected? What happened to the Indus civilization, its people and culture and arts with the emergence of the new civilization?

Prof. T. Burrow, the late Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, a meticulous scholar and a world renowned authority on Avesta, Sanskrit and Dravidian linguistics, writing on the word *arma* a non-aryan word found in early Vedic Sanskrit, notes:

...this term does in fact refer to the ruined sites of the pre-Aryan Indus civilization...This is in agreement with the fact that material remains of Indus civilization have

been located in abundance throughout the territory occupied by the Vedic Indians subsequent to its downfall... The theory has been put forward that the ruins in question were the ruins of cities belonging to the pre-Aryan Indus civilization. The reason is that from what we know of ancient Indian history and archaeology we must in any case assume that the Vedic Indians lived in a country abounding in such ruins, and consequently when ruins are referred to in the Vedic literature, the natural conclusion is that they must be of this origin. It is in fact difficult to imagine what other ruins could possibly be referred to, the archaeological facts being what they are. Further proof of this theory can be provided by citing the following verse from Taittiriya Brahmana (II.4.6.8) which contains a concise historical statement to this effect :

*yesam ime purve armasa asan
ayupah, sadma vibhrta puruni
vaisvanara tvaya te huttah
prthivim anyam abhi tasthur janasah.*

‘The people to whom these ruined sites, lacking posts, formerly belonged, these many settlements widely distributed, they, O Vaisvanara, having been expelled by thee, have migrated to another land.’

This is a very clear statement. In the country occupied by the Vedic Indians at the very early period when this verse was composed there were many ruined sites which had been destroyed by fire, and whose original inhabitants had in consequence abandoned them and migrated elsewhere. These inhabitants were the predecessors of the Aryans and the latter were responsible for their defeat and expulsion. So much is clear from the sentence immediately preceding in which this context is obliquely referred to in mythological guise; *atheme manthan amrtam asurah, vaisvanaram ksetrajityaya devah*. “Then these *Asuras* churned *amrte*, but the gods (*Agni*) Vaisvanara, for the conquest of territory.”

References to the strife between the gods and *asuras* are

of course innumerable, but here the use of the term *Ksetrajitya* can only refer to the conquests of the Aryan peoples themselves, and the repetition of Vaisvanara in the verse immediately following shows that this also is to be viewed in the light of the conquest of territory by the Aryans. In the Rgveda references to the function of Agni as a destroyer of cities belonging to the pre-Aryan inhabitants are common and for this the following verse can serve as an example (RV. vii, 5, 3) :

*tvad bhiya visa ayann asiknir
asamana jahatir bhojanani
Vaisvanara Purave sosucanah
puro yad Agne darayann adideh.*

“Through fear of thee the dark coloured inhabitants fled, not waiting for battle, abandoning their possessions, when O Vaisvanara, burning brightly for Puru, and destroying the cities thou didst shine, O Agni.”

Reading this in connection with the passage quoted above from the Taittiriya Brahmana we get a complete and unambiguous statement of a historical event, namely the conquest by the Vedic Aryans of the territory previously occupied by the Indus people, the destruction of their cities which for long, under the name arma, remained familiar features of the landscape, and the flight and emigration of a considerable section of the original inhabitants.”¹¹

Prof. Burrow’s thesis is that

- (a) Vedic Aryans destroyed the Indus Valley Civilization;
- (b) The historical facts are narrated in mythological guise;
- (c) City of Vailasthanaka mentioned in the Rig Veda is the city of Mohanjo-Daro.

Malati Shendge, a Maharashtrian scholar in the Jawaharlal Nehru University, in her recent brilliant work, *The Civilized Demons : The Harappans in Rig Veda*, takes the Burrows thesis further. On the basis of an enormous amount of library and

archaeological evidence gathered from Indus, Vedic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Assyrian sources she demonstrates that :

1. The peoples whom the Aryans called Asuras, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Pisacas were real people in Indus Valley, not mythological beings.
2. Dasas¹² and Panis¹³ have not lost their human identity even in the Vedas and Brahmanas.
3. Indra and Vishnu were human leaders of the Aryans in their war with the non-Aryans.
4. Transfer of allegiance by some of the old pre-Aryan priesthood and possibly rulers to the conquering Aryans, that is, they made a deal with the opposition. A view supported by D.D. Kosambi, O.K. Ghosh, Sharad Patil and Prabhati Mukherji.
5. The Aryan leaders and their non Aryan accomplices became gods and sages while their opponents became evil spirits and mythological beings.
6. As the stories of war became themes of religious celebration and ritual in the vedas and Brahmanas it was pointed as a struggle between good and evil.

The process of mythologisation of the conflicts of the victorious groups with other native elements continued in Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas.¹⁴ In the process such beliefs and religious symbols of various tribal groups got assimilated into these literary works. They *betray their original sources as even today some of the tribal groups remain independent with similar symbols and practices*, as demonstrated by D.D. Kosambi, P. Jayakar and R. Lannoy among others.

As the civilization was led by a priestly class, historical consciousness was totally lost. Their sole concern was to bring about a hierarchical harmony and unity under their authority. There was always a willingness to compromise with the beliefs and practices of subjugated groups, provided their priestly power and economic interests were not challenged.¹⁵

In short, the *nature of the historical contact between the*

two civilizations was one of subjugation of the older by the new. Let me now give some clear examples of the cultural subjugation with respect to Dalits.

The legend of Durga and Mahishasura—Jogubai and her Mhatoba husband in Maharashtra region, the legend of Dayamava, Durgamava and her Holey a husband and his mother Matangi in Karnataka region, the legend of Pedamma-Mariamamma and Dundubi-Potturaju—the lord of the buffaloes (Malas) in the Andhra region, the legend of Renuka with Paraya woman's body and Brahmin woman's head after she was beheaded by her son, Parasurama at the command of Jamadagni Tamil, Kerala region, all indicate a common episode.

The goddess is made to appear with Brahminical association. The buffalo demon is a Dalit. He is either killed in battle or burnt alive or defeated. But he is also said to be her husband. In some versions he is buffalo king Potturaju. The symbol is the same as we find in Mohanjo-Daro seals. Has the myth its origin and history Mohanjo-Daro? Does it indicate the priestess of the great mother goddess in Mohanjo-Daro changing sides? But in any case it symbolizes the cultural enslavement of the Dalits. These stories are not just fables but parameters of festivals, ritual observances and social relations between caste groups in our villages and towns. According to Louis Dumont, the French Sociologist, "Divinity is a relation between ranked opposites."¹⁶ Says Prof. C.J. Fuller, London School of Economics and Political Science, "The Hindu Construction of the divine surely has few parallels in its power to symbolize and legitimate a hierarchical social order."¹⁷

The internal cultural imperialism manifests in many other ways and extends to other levels of life. For instance outstanding Dalit individuals such as poets, sages are absorbed into the dominant stream through myths of micegeneration. Father was a Brahmin, mother was a chandalwoman or something of the sort.

We have also many myths that people were born to be *Sudra* or *Chandala* for some evil doings. The traditional law books teach people to stick to their *Kuladharmā*.

Even protest movements, literature, individuals are absorbed into the system. Take the example of the Pottam Teyyam song. The Pulaya version of it is a vehement indictment of the Brahminical beliefs, customs and practices. The cause for human equality and dignity is argued on rational and humanistic grounds. But then there is another version used in Nair temples in which Potten becomes Chandala Siva and absorbed into the system. In fact, Siva, a transformation of Ithyphallic figure of Mohanjo-Daro, who was unacceptable till about 4th century A.D. in many circles, was the vehicle of absorption of all tribal and Dalit gods because the original figure belong to them.¹⁸ 'Durga Katyayani, the dark fierce aboriginal goddess of earth and forest grove' absorbs all local goddesses because they have the same origin.¹⁹ Papul Jayakar writes :

Aboriginal gods are adopted by the great tradition, genealogies created, homelands altered. Ayanar, originally a god of the tribal Savaras, a forest god with the sign of a peacock, appears in the *Paranas* as the Son of Siva as the *yogi* and Vishnu as Mohini, the incandescent temptress who awakens and seduces the great god, seated silent in meditation. Out of the seed of Siva the *god of the Autochthones*, conceived on the *body of the Aryan godhead* (Vishnu), is born Sasta, *Hariharputra*, the protective deity of the village people of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, whose shrine at Sabarimalai in Kerala retains in its name its primitive Sabare origins."²⁰

"Gods take form out of the fusion of the deities of the autochthones with the Aryan divinities."²¹ But this cultural imperialism does not remain at the level of meaning and symbols alone. Many places previously belonging to Buddhist²², Dalits²³ and Tribals²⁴ are now under Brahmin control. Many of these places have legends connecting them with Dalits and Tribals. In some places Dalits and Tribals also have special ritual rights. In others, Dalits and tribals are more devoted to a special shrine in the vicinity of the main shrine. But in most cases the earlier anicone stones of the Dalits and tribals are covered with new masks of gods and goddesses or new idols are established over the previous ones.

This cultural imperialism would not have been bad at all if priesthood was not reserved to an exclusive group of Brahmins by birth and kept the Tribals, Dalits, backward groups and women excluded. This cultural imperialism would have been perfectly legitimate if the old shrines and gods remained with the concerned group.

In short, there is an enormous amount of cultural conflict and clash and eventual subordination of Dalits and tribals if we study our religious myths, symbols and festivals. Therefore the problem Dalits and Tribals face in relation to their history and culture is cultural and religious subjugation, past and present, which couples with their economic subordination strengthens the traditional structure of institutionalised inequality—'caste'.

Therefore the challenge they face is to develop a material and rational historical consciousness in the place of mythological consciousness. "A highly complex and multi-racial society had far too long sought to maintain unity on a substructure of myth. An *All-embracing consciousness could not develop so long as the mythic substructure was not replaced by a firm sense of history.*"²⁵

I should emphasize here that their enemy is not Aryans as some Dalits tend to think though Aryans as a race, were responsible for the destruction of the Indus Civilization.²⁶ The Aryan-led Hindu civilization is a composite civilization both in terms of its racial elements and cultural components. Brahmins²⁷ are made up of a number of racial elements and so are the Dalits, though some racial streams are more pronounced in certain regions and in certain groups. The problem is one of the victorious Aryan-led civilization with absolute power in a dominant class and the vanquished without power within an enslaved cultural symbol system. The problems is not racial.

In this historical process many ethnic groups became caste in the sense of *Jati*, according to the economic resources at their command and the nature of their relationship with the ruling cultural group.²⁸ Primaeval tribal cultural features and sentiments and their refusal or inability to enter into higher forms of production may have also contributed to this process.²⁹

How do Dalits respond to their historical and cultural subjugation in their movement?

A Dalit poet from Maharashtra sings:

I reject your culture
I reject your Parmeshwar Centred traditions
I reject your religion-based literature.³⁰

Dalit Sangharsh Samiti's slogan in Karnataka is *Jati bidi, Matu bidi, Manavatege Jiva Kodi*—reject caste, reject religion give life to your humanity.

Voice of the Weak—a Tabloid of Toiling people, published from Delhi reports:

The All India Federation of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Backward Caste and Minorities Employees Welfare Associations (SCEWASTAMB) decided to call upon the SCs/STs and BCs to discard Hinduism and boycott Hindu temples. This was decided in the massive gathering of thousands of delegates attending the 15th special conference of the Federation held here (Jaipur) on October 8 and 9, 1988. The All-India Conference resolved that SCs and STs are not Hindus . . . that they are having their own religion . . . The matter was closely examined from historical, sociological and anthropological perspectives.³¹

Dalit intellectuals and leaders now realise that the consciousness of their masses shaped by vedic and puranic myths is a false consciousness serving the interests of the dominant castes and classes. A consciousness based on true history has to be formed to strengthen their identity and bring about their liberation and a new civilization for the whole country.

This counter cultural awakening among the Dalits against Hindu culture is inspired by the writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phoolley and Periar Ramaswamy. But it has a long historical tradition, though weak and folk, going back to the great Buddha who taught:

Not by birth does one become an outcaste
 Not by birth does one become a Brahmana,
 By deeds one becomes an outcaste
 By deeds one becomes a Brahmana.³²

The Buddhist account of the king as *Mahasammata* the Great Elect is also by 'contract' in opposition to the Hindu idea of elements of divinity in the appointment of the king.³³

Jainism, Ajivika faith and the ascetic tradition in Hindu civilization itself belong to this counter cultural stream which stand in continuity with the Indus civilization as against the dominant vedic Brahminic civilization. Tirukural of Tiruvalluvar, Tiruvagam of Manikka Vasagar, the long line of Siddhar (Cittar) saints all alive and vibrant belong to this anti-brahminical stream. Listen to the emphatic and blunt voice of Pambatti Cittar, a Dalit:

The Four Vedas, six kinds of Shastras,
 The many Tantras and Puranas,
 The Agamas which speak of the arts,
 And various kinds of other books
 Are of no use; just in vain
 So dance snake, dance!
 In a statue of stone whanged with a chisel
 D'ye think there's understanding?
 D'ye think the idiots of the world
 Have any understanding?
 Will a flaw in a pan go away
 If you rub it with tamarind?
 Ignorance won't go away from the idiots
 So dance snake, dance!³⁴
 We'll set fire to divisions of caste,
 We'll debate philosophical question in the market place,
 We'll have dealings with despised households,
 We'll go around in different paths.³⁵

The rejection is the same as in the modern Dalit poets. It is this folk tradition, folk songs, proverbs, myths, innumerable movements from among the Dalits and tribals³⁶ which has

accepted the modern political ideas of equality, fraternity and justice.

The task is a political challenge to translate these ideas to cultural and economic life of the people. I was glad when the Left-Government appointed a backward caste man as priest in a temple in Quilon District. I hope that they will persist in this move and extend it to Dalits and women. The universal dignity of human beings cannot be defended without accepting the universal priesthood of all people. Earlier the DMK government had tried this but our supreme court nullified it as *ultra vires*. It speaks of their constitutional vision. *Homo hierarchicus* will not become *homo democratius* without profound socio-political and religious changes. This is the reason why Ambedkar said that untouchability was a question of power though he was conscious of the fact that it was an attitude of mind on the part of caste people to be changed through a conversion of heart as Gandhi believed.

Notes

1. Sixth Plan Document 1980-85, Govt. of India, Planning Commission, p. 417.

Dalits' economic situation in Kerala: P. Sivanandan of the Centre for Development Studies sums up the economic emancipation of the Dalits in this decade in the following words:

"The sum up in the foregoing appraisal of the major economic programmes initiated for the upliftment of the Dalit population in Kerala, we note that the effective gains accrued to them are *quite marginal*. In all aspects of *land allotment, employment generation and asset creation in the agricultural sector, the Dalits do not seem to get their due share of benefits*. Programmes for diversification of occupations in other sectors are also quite *ineffective*. In short, inspite of a large number of developmental schemes for the overall economic advancement of the Dalit, they remain to be emancipated. Economic emancipation would still be harder than the social or political".—Centre for Development Studies, Ulloor, Trivandrum: 11. Paper presented in a Consultation on "Dalits and the Left Movement" at Trivandrum, Aug, 1988.

Cfr. This author's papers, published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, and *Social Scientist*.

Cfr. Dr. Babu Vijayanath; *Report of the Commission on the Socio-Economic Conditions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1982*.

2. *Report of the Commissioner for SC & ST, 1978-1979*, p. 119.
3. *Commissioner's Report 1978-79*, p. 231.
4. *Commissioner's Report, 1977-78*, p. 3.

For a recent report on the "Nature, Extent and Limitations of Protection of Civil Rights and the kind of problems district authorities face in Southern States, I draw your attention to the report presented by Shri Syed Abid Ali, I.P.S., the present head of Civil Rights Enforcement Cell in Karnataka, at a seminar in 1988 in Bangalore.

5. Cfr. V.R. Krishna Iyer, *Justice in Words and Injustice in Deeds for the Depressed Classes*. Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.
6. V.S. Naipaul. *A Wounded Civilization*, 1977, p. 157.
7. "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it a social democracy. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth, as against many who live in abject poverty".
"On 26th Jan, 1950, we are going to enter into a *life of contradictions*. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality." B.R. Ambedkar's summary statement to the Constituent Assembly on 25 Nov, 1949.
8. A survey conducted in 1985 in Kerala by A.K. Vakil found that out of 68 village temples none are accessible to Dalits. If the relations between Dalit and caste people are so bad in Kerala, the situation is much worse, according to Vakil's study, in other parts of the country like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, etc., where the exclusion of Dalits by caste people extends not only to their temples but also to village wells, hotels, barbers and washermen.

For full details, cfr. A.K. Vakil, *Reservation Policy and the Scheduled Castes in India* New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1985. cfr. Also Swami Anand Thirth, *Untouchability—Gandhian Solution on Trial*, by A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, published for the CISRS. Bangalore, by the I.S.P.C.K., Delhi, 1987.

The result is that Dalit call 'Gandhism': 'Adhastithante Adima Changala' by T.K. Warayan a Dalit author, Trivandrum.

9. Pupul Jayakar, *The Earthen Drum*, National Museum, New Delhi.
10. *Mohenjo-Daro-Harappa*;
The latest archaeological discoveries at the site of *Mohargarh* allow the history of sedentary life in the greater Indus Valley to be pushed back as early as the 8th millennium B.C. At *Mehargarh*, the transition from the aceramic to the ceramic neolithic took place in the early 6th millenium B.C. Rectangular compartmented mudbrick structures apparently served as community granaries,

indicating a kind of centralised villages economy. Trade connections, period of prosperity 2400-2100 B.C. *More than 1000 Indus sites are known, area one million square kilometres.* Copper, stonage or chalcolithic period—stone dominated the period—copper started to appear—potter's wheel—mastered technique of firing—stock-piling in small stone rooms—single family units, seal cutting, metal working, pottery production. It was long supposed that the Indus civilization emerged as a result of an impulse from Mesopotamia and not from an immediate precursor on the sub-continent itself.

In the 1930s however traces of an earlier settlement were found under the mature Harappan occupation levels in a site in lower Sind. Together with further discoveries made in 1950s at the site of Koti Diji on the left bank of the Indus, opposite Mohenjo-Daro, this evidence did much to clarify the general development context. Here at Kot Diji, under an occupational stratum assigned to the mature Harappan period, older material from the beginning of third millennium was found, apparently belong to an earlier settlement. Pre-Harappan: Open question—Professor Dr. M. Jansen, For Schungs Project, Mohanjo-Daro, Schinkelstr. 5100 AACHEN, West Germany.

11. *Journal of Indian History*, University of Kerala, Trivandrum, Vol. XLI; 1963, pp. 163-164.
12. Originally *dasa* or *dasyu* applies to a 'hostile' non-Aryan people. They had the special colour (*varna*, later to mean caste also), namely black (Krishna) which distinguished them from the Aryans, and hence can only refer to their darker complexion, as contrasted with the lighter skin colour of the newcomers. Only after repeated conquest does the word *dasa* come to mean slave or helot (just as 'slave' and 'helot' both derive from ethnic names), a member of the Sudra caste, servant; or in the form *dasyu*, 'robber' or 'brigand'.
13. *Pani*—the main non-Aryan people specially named, though not very often, were the Panis.
(D.D. Kosambi, "*The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*", Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987, p. 80-81)
14. "The Epics reflect the process of socio-cultural assimilation. The *Ramayana* deals with the conflict of the Aryans with the then natives of India and the latter's Aryantization. The *Mahabharata* accommodated the beliefs and teachings of the various tribes, and was the first major literary creation to be attractive to all the peoples of India".—Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*; p. 178.
15. The essential connection between the two is supported by a number of scholars including D.D. Kosambi, Romila Thapar on archaeological, linguistic and religio-cultural grounds.

16. A structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamilnadu: Ayanar, the Lord in 'Religion, Politics and History in India, Mouton Pub. 1970.
17. C.J. Fuller, 'The Hindu Pantheon and' the Legitimation of Hierarchy, Curl Prize Essay 1987, pub. MAN, Vol. 23, No. 1, March 1988. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.
18. "Siva is more ancient than the Vedic gods. As late as the 3rd and 4th century A.D. in Mahamayuri Mantra and Grhya Sutras, Siva and Skanda are described Yakshas to be propitiated beyond village walls. Memories of the autochthonous origins of Siva survive in archaic customs and taboos: till recent times married women in the Punjab hills were not permitted to worship images of Siva, Skanda and Sakti . . .
 . . . In Madhya Pradesh one of his names is Gaura; the word in Sanskrit for the male buffalo . . .
 . . . most Puranas contain the legend which explains the adoption of the heretical worship of the phallus into the Brahmanical theology . . . In early Puranic lore Siva does not conform to the ways of the Vedas. His is not the way of ritual sacrifice. He frequents cemeteries accompanied by ghosts and demons . . .
 . . . Through the centuries the myths and image of the serpent crested god change, he is absorbed into the Brahmanic pantheon and becomes one with Rudra. the fiery god of the Vedas . . .
 Many tribal legends associate Mahadeva with the origin of mankind. For example Bhils, the Chenchus of Andhra and the Gonds. Pupul Jayakar, *op. cit.*, pp. 206 and 207. Cfr. also preface p. x.
19. "Durga Katyayani, the dark fierce aboriginal goddess of earth and forest grove, is eulogized in the Devi Upanishad, when the Puranic male gods sing her praises in verses derived from the sacred Gayatri."—Pupul Jayakar, *The Earthen Drum*, Preface, p. X.
 Cfr. Gustav Oppert, *The Original Inhabitants of Bharat Varsh*, p. 17.
20. *Ibid.*, preface p. X
21. *Ibid.* p. 3.
22. "D. D. Kosambi in *Myth and Reality* has unravelled, with rare insight, empirical evidence to show that the sites in Maharashtra, of the local Grama Devas, the village Mothers and their cults are identical with the sites on Western Ghats where the Buddhist monks built their stupas. The goddess Yami has a shallow relief image carved into the Bedsa Vihara cave and animal sacrifices are offered to her at the time of Navaratra, the nine-day festival to the Mother"—P. Jayakar, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
 In southern states there are many sites of the same nature and in some places Buddhist images are found broken near the temples,

for example in Bharanikavu, Karamadi, Mavelikara in Alleppey District.

23. Peruviruttimala in Quilon district is a recent well-known case of alienation. (for details, cfr. A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel "The Religious Resources of the Dalits in the Context of their Struggle (An overview of the Kerala Scene)" in *Essays in Celebration of the CISRS Silver Jubilee*, Edited by Saral K. Chatterji). The Kerala picture of Brahminical subjugation is described by Kesavan Veluthat in the following words:

"From the age of the Sangam, when the earliest brahman settlement in Kerala was established, to the close of the eighth century when the land was almost covered with a network of brahman settlements, Kerala was a crucible of social transformation. The establishment of the first 'Hindu' monarchy early in the ninth century was the culmination of the 'Aryanising' forces introduced through the agency of the brahman settlements, at work. Under the later Cerra kingdom, the brahman settlements consolidated their position in this part of the country, so much so that the land was hailed to be *brahmakshetra* or the land of Brahman rule created and donated to Brahmins by Parasurama himself.....

The Brahmins, who had become the superior elements in society captured the apex of the feudal pyramid and they were thus able to dictate the pattern of socio-cultural developments in this part of the country.' Kesavan Valuthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, (historical studies), Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, 1978, Introduction, p. 10.

K. Santha, a research scholar has found a number of temples in Quilon District with legends associating them with Dalits together with special rights. *Ooranma avakasam* for them.

24. At Jagannath Puri in Orissa the tribal Savaras have *free entry to the Garbha Grhe*, the sanctum, where the *Savara Deity Nilbandha*, the blue god, is *worshipped as Jagannath*, the Lord of the world and at the temple of Sri Sailam in Andhra Pradesh the tribal Chenchus are the main attendants of the Siva shrine, pulling the chariot of the Great God. The Siva of Sri Sailam in Andhra Pradesh is named *Chenchu Malliah*, the Lord of the Chenchus, establishing his *autochthonous origins*. At the ancient Guruvayur temple in Kerala, there is a very small Sakti shrine beyond the temple walls. The shrine consists of four walls around an Asoka tree at the base of which an *aniconic stone* as the Goddess is installed. The shrine is open to the sky and is believed to be *of great antiquity*. Nair women circumambulate the tree and shrine before they enter the precincts of the Guruvayur *Krishna temple*—P. Jayakar, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

25. (i) Richard Lannoy, *the Speaking Tree* Oxford University Press, p. 76.

- (ii) The mythological tendency in our civilization is desperate that D.D. Kosambi writes, "The element of consistency and logic is unfortunately all too rare in such thinkings which never faces reality or, gives a clear record of single facts : Cultural Civilization of Ancient India in Historical outline, p. 50.
- (iii) "Even the date of the Mauryan Empire could only be fixed finally because of Greek and Persian records" *Social Ferment in India*, p. 22.
26. "The use of the Aryan-Dravidian ethnic dichotomy in the analysis of modern Indian ethnic composition has no scientific basis except in a linguistic sense. The Aryanization of the Dravidian peninsula was a very gradual process which did not get underway until the Mauryan period and was facilitated by the Satavahana colonization of the Deccan in the last century B.C.
27. From the very holy lake of Pushkar in Rajasthan the Bhopat Brahmins seem to have been Beldars or labourers who wielded a spade. Manipuri Brahmins of Mongoloid descent. "History recorded innumerable instances of people in India who became Brahmins from Kshatriyas and Vaishyas ; some even from aboriginal tribes". Rajasthan District Gazetteer for Ajmer. Cfr. Alexander George, op. cit., p. 9.
28. Prabhati Mukherji.
29. D.D. Kosambi.
30. V.L. Kalekar, quoted in Barbara Joshi, *Untouchable : Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1986, p. 83.
31. *Voice of the Weak—A Tabloid of Toiling People*, Vol. 6 No. 6, Uct. 1988, Baput Bhavan, Bat Nagar, Karol Bagh, New Delhi.
32. Vasalasutta, 21.
33. Romila Thapar, *Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium B.C. in North India, in Ancient Indian Social History*, Orient Longman, 1978, p. 46.
34. Pambatti Cittar, in David Buck *Dance, Oh Snake! Dance!* pp. 107-109.
35. Cittar gnanakkovai, Pambatti Cittar, verse 123.
36. It is not possible to go into this culture and movements in some detail atleast in this paper.

Appendix

The following is the summary of the discussion in the consultation held by EATWOT in Madras from 27 February to 1 March 1989.

AN INDIAN SEARCH FOR A SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION

Introduction

The search for a spirituality of liberation is part of an ongoing concern of EATWOT and other groups who are committed to evolving a theology that is integral to the struggles of the poor in the Third World. It is often pointed out that poverty and religiousness are the two dominant characteristics of the Asian reality and the inter-relationship between these should receive serious attention in our liberation movements and in theological reflection in Asia. Visible structures of religion—its rituals and institutions—and the spirituality or spiritualities that are embedded in them exercise a powerful influence over the poor in Asia. How far is this influence oppressive or liberative? This is a question that is constantly being raised.

In India with its rich heritage of religion and culture there is a bewildering variety of spiritualities. What role do they play in the movements for liberation? What forms of spirituality have been and continue to be used to legitimize the dominance of upper castes/classes over the masses? Is there a spirituality that is germane to the life and experience of the poor in our villages and slums? Are there new forms of

spirituality that are emerging out of people's movement? In short, in what sense can we speak of a spirituality of liberation in the Indian context?

This and other related questions were the basis of a Consultation organized by the Indian regional committee of EATWOT from 27 February—March 2, 1989 in Madras. About 16 participants from all over India attended. Presentations were made on the following issues : An Indian search for a spirituality of liberation; Tribal identity—liberation potential; Islamic struggles for minority rights; The Dalit context for a spirituality of liberation; An understanding of Tukaram as a liberation poet; The spirituality of women's struggles for liberation and The Liberation motif in the People's Union for Civil Liberties—a Human Rights experience.

The following statement incorporates the main findings of the Consultation.

The Indian Context

We meet at a time when the victims of the Bhopal Gas Disaster of 1984, are demonstrating in front of the Supreme Court in Delhi against the Indian government's total sell-out to the Union Carbide Factory of USA. (The Indian Government has agreed to a settlement of a paltry 470 million US dollars from Union Carbide and they failed to set a code of ethics and safety measures for multi-national investment in India). It is estimated that more than twenty thousand people died and many thousands more are maimed for life when the deadly MIC gas leaked out of the factory and snuffed life out of Bhopal in December 1984. Bhopal is a grim reminder of the devastating effects of a euro-centric industrial model of development that has become the model for the world. It is a model of development which is capitalist in orientation built on the maximisation of profits and the compulsions of market forces. This development model is built on the deprecation of the earth and its resources.

The imposition of this model of development and 200 years of British colonial rule in India have led to the destruction

of traditional economies and the people's arts and crafts, and their way of life and livelihood. Capitalist forces have been unleashed initiating a process by which internal resources have been made subservient to the industrial expansionist interests of the west. This model of development is built on a social structure, the main bulwork of which is caste feudalism. Forty odd years of Independence from British rule has only witnessed further pauperization of the people. The numbers below the poverty line are increasing by leaps and bounds and every year we hear reports of men, women and children dying starvation deaths. In the face of this horrific spectre of starvation we continue to spend our scarce resources on missile testing ranges, big dams and nuclear plants. The people who are largely the victims of this development model are displaced dalits and tribals. The imposition of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy has failed to take into account the cultural and ethnic diversities of our country and this has resulted in the lack of political power and representation for the various oppressed identities. Even the education system continues to keep our people enslaved and divided, perpetuating the interests of the ruling elite. Christians have played a role in promoting this kind of an education, sometimes unconsciously, as they merely continued what the missionary enterprise had set going for the colonial rulers.

While the model of development opted for has led to this rapid pauperization, increasing unemployment and alienation from the land for the toiling millions, simultaneously and as a necessary consequence a small handful enjoy grotesque levels of wealth. An inevitable component of this development model is the subjugation of India to global economic powers, heavy dependence for aid and investment and the tightening noose of external debt. This has led to the country's entanglement into the global economic network, a disastrous consequence of which is the rapid militarization and nuclearisation of the Indian society. The last two decades have also seen India emerge as a big power in the region with expansionist ambitions.

The development model has led to the undermining of the

experiences and creativity of various oppressed identities such as dalits, tribals, minorities, smaller nationalities and women. The main burden of the continuing economic crisis falls on these sections. Whenever these groups have attempted to rise and claim their legitimate rights and have struggled to preserve their identities, they have been crushed by a ruthlessly armed State. The State continuously acquires a battery of special powers, anti people laws and military strength to crush the people's aspirations and struggles. An ugly fascism masquerading as "*the Indian Nationalism*" has now been let loose on the land, which constitutes a threat to the richness of Indian civilization with its mosaic of cultures and peoples.

Unfortunately an ideology of Hindu nationhood and Brahmanical culture, as the norm, is a weapon in the hands of the State, which in turn engenders a dangerous insularity and exclusivism among the minorities. A vision of nation building has been propagated, which attempts to subsume all identities other than that of a narrow ruling stratum. This stratum consists of a small coterie of privileged castes and classes. In this situation we view the assertion of diversity and plurality as attempts at strengthening the great composite Indian civilization.

The culture of resistance

But then the culture of resistance to the forces of death has constantly re-asserted its power as people's movements have emerged and grown in independent India. Workers and peasants movements have formed the bulwork of demands for transformation of society and these have been supported and buttressed by newly emerging movements of dalits, tribals and women. The organised power of human rights and civil liberties groups and environmental and peace movements are also forces to be reckoned with. The newly emerging voices of protest and rage are rooted in the discovery of new paradigms of analysis and action as the search for a new India and a new world gains momentum. We here describe briefly just three of these movements and the spiritual dimensions they provide :—

a. *Dalit Movement*

15 per cent of the Indian population are Dalits. This new name for the oppressed people of this land, represents the aspirations of those who had been viewed as “outcastes” in the caste hierarchy. The Dalit movement has reasserted the dignity of millions of people who had been crushed to dust by the Aryan/Brahmanical Hinduism. Dalit women have been described as the “dust of the dust”, thrice oppressed and therefore clearly the least of the “little ones” in Indian society.

The nature of the emerging Dalit consciousness—ideas, feelings, experience, performance—is vital to understand how Dalits envisage their future and the common future of this country. Dalits are now aware that historically they are the indigenous people of India forming one community with the tribals. Over the centuries they lost not only their territory but were also scattered across the land, enslaved by the Brahmin priests and ruling classes and made into outcastes in a system of institutionalized inequality—is the caste system—which is a product of Brahmin civilization.

Building up of the Dalit future identity involves the task of rediscovery of their past history and heritage and its reconstruction as no identity can be built in a cultural and historical vacuum. This process of reconstruction has to begin from the known Indus civilization in India and its ancient roots. The history of conflict, alienation and cultural subjugation of Dalits by the dominant culture and its agents, is told in the language of myths, stories, hybrid religious symbols and rituals. We have also archeological and linguistic data available to reconstruct the outlines and in some cases the details of subjugation.

This process of the dalits regaining a new identity essentially is in conflict with not only material interests of the ruling caste groups but also with their cultural and religious hegemony. Therefore what is required is a spirituality that endures conflict and provides hope for the new. In Christian symbolism can this be the spirituality of the Cross.

The practitioners of this spirituality are small groups and organisations made up of Dalits and others who have taken

upon themselves the task of redeeming Dalit human dignity and their conviction that they would humanize their opponents in the process.

These groups draw on the resources of all spiritual traditions to sustain themselves as in the case of Swami Anand Thirth who remembered Jesus' words "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, then offer him your left", when he was beaten up by caste Hindus for taking Dalit children to a market place. At the same time Swami Anand Thirth found it impossible to belong to any one of the established religions with their dogmas and priests, as he believed that all religions are controlled as social institutions by the dominant caste/class groups. Dalit youth in today's movement emboldened by the Siddhar/Citter saints and prophets**, who had denounced the scriptures and vedas of established religion, draw on the symbols of ordinary folk religiousness.

In short, to experience the cruelty of untouchability and poverty of the Dalits, one needs to identify with their lot in life. But there is also a spirituality of association with the cause of the Dalits possible for members of all religious communities. This consists in creating a religious consciousness among the masses, which shows understanding towards Dalit issues and problems. Historians, social scientists and theologians, can practice this spirituality by understanding their disciplines from the perspective of the Dalits. Indian theology will have to break new ground and transform itself into becoming a theology of liberation. It has to become a theology from the underside of history informed by the perspectives of Dalits, tribals, women and creation.

b. *Women's Movement*

The present phase of the women's movement in India can

***Siddhas or Cittars in Tamil are wandering sanyasis, whose earliest forerunner Tirumular could be ascribed to the sixth century A.D. They belong to 'the Anti Brahmanical cycle' of compositions in Tamil literature. It is a living tradition. In medieval times almost all writers on medicine, astronomy, magic, alchemy, astrology, Tantra and Yoga were grouped together as Siddhas.

be traced to the early 1970's when a 14 year old girl, Mathura was raped in a police station in Maharashtra, and the Supreme Court rescinded a Maharashtra High Court decision indicting the two guilty policemen. Women took this as an opportune moment to find their organised power to challenge the more than a century old unjust rape law and the violence against women that society seems to legitimize. What began as basically a middle class urban movement focusing on what can be narrowly defined as "women's issues" spread within a decade to the rural areas—and now it is in fact rural women who form the backbone of the movement. Women, by their participation in the autonomous women's movement and in the struggles of people, have begun formulating new feminist questions and paradigms of involvement for the total transformation of Indian society. Some issues that emerge out of this quest:

1. Feminist critical involvement in liberation struggles

The deepening economic crisis, the increasing destabilisation of the government, the growing use of army, police and paramilitary forces and the lopsided "development" model— all seriously affect women's lives. Low legal status, economic and political marginalization and cultural and religious pressures erode women's self esteem. The assertiveness of fundamentalist and communalist forces constitutes an additional threat to women's independence and participation. Caste hierarchy and stratification and the dalitness of dalit women makes them particular targets for patriarchal violence and control.

Women have challenged the aurocentric—androcentric science and technology oriented model of development opted for by the planners which is based on the 'mastery' of creation and on the undermining of the experiences of those on the fringes of society—women, dalits and tribals particularly. Women's groups have struggled against the use of medical and genetic technology which abuse women's bodies and reproductive gifts. They have also supported tribals and others in their struggle against big dams or nuclear plants. They have supported the dalit movement in its search for dignity and

selfhood. They have also challenged traditionally accepted political paradigms which have not taken cultural questions of caste, religion, tribal identity and patriarchy as seriously as they should in analysis and in strategies for action.

The feminist liberation paradigm offers to the movements of people a critique in terms of leadership, decision making processes, their hierarchy of patriarchal relationships and also their very "masculine" methodologies and strategies. Thus the feminist paradigm calls for a critical involvement in liberation struggles.

2. Celebration of plurality

If we understand theological or spiritual activity in its strictest sense as reflections on or interpretations of scriptures, then women participating in such activity will be a miniscule minority in India. However, women in the secular movement transcend with ease narrow divisions of faith, caste and ideology and come together to reflect and act on issues of national importance.

While questions of female survival do tend to absorb the greatest attention in the women's movement, there is recognised need to reappropriate religion from right wing, fundamentalist groups and to discover liberation strands in all religions. This in spite of the fact that the patriarchalization of all religions has led to the diminishing of the status and dignity of women.

Any theological activity cannot be done therefore in isolation from this attempt to express the celebration of solidarity in pluralism which is the overarching characteristic of the women's movement in India. Feminist theology in India therefore seeks to reappropriate and reinterpret the Bible from the perspective of women in struggle and to give new meaning and courage to women in the midst of their violence-filled lives. A critique of traditional, patriarchal images of God and of Christology and a search for new more liberative, compassionate, healing and nurturing images assumes significance.

3. Popular religiousness

Recently an interest is being shown by feminists to explore

the popular religiousness of the people, precisely because it is a religion of the marginalised, and often it contains elements of protest which can be reenergized to become a force for social change. Feminist theologians have discovered a special significance in this because in many of them women have played an important role and they are in essence women's liberation centred—though of course they too have been distorted by patriarchal onslaughts.

Feminist spirituality

To us the life experiences of all the women who find new power in the autonomous women's movement is indeed essentially a spirituality. Women's attempts to break through the culture of silence and to transform their pain into political power is a deeply spiritual experience. The attempts to draw on creative expressions—dance, drama, poetry, music, art, story telling and folklore—to give expression to the new found consciousness and energy is spirituality. The longing to reclaim our feminity, as we would define it, and to reclaim our right to control our own reproductive capabilities *is* spirituality.

It is a spirituality that would say 'yes' to life and 'no' to forces of death. It is a life affirming, nurturing, creating spirituality—in the bleeding of blood, the cleansing and preparing for new life month after month women have drawn new power that will no longer control and stifle their creativity, but will be symbolic of the longing for a new and transformed India. In sisterhood, in communal selfhood, in solidarity with all other oppressed people, in the simplicity of the lifestyle of the movement and in their commitment to heal a wounded creation and wounded world, women are expressing a new spirituality.

c. Tribal Liberation Movements

There are about 75 million tribal people in our country spread from the North East region through the Jharkhand region and over Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra and down to South Orissa and North Andhra to Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala.

The industrial model of development, which was introduced into all parts of the country by the Indian Government, with its emphasis on individualism and profit, came as a cultural shock to the socio-economic, cultural and political structure of tribal societies. The already continuing struggles of the tribals against the onslaughts of the dominant Hindu society were aggravated by this development model which eroded the traditional way of life and livelihood of tribals, alienating them from the land and from creation and leading to their rapid pauperization.

History is replete with expressions of rebellion from tribal populations of which the Santal rebellion in 1851-52, in the last century, is the most well know. When India became independent, the tribals had great hopes of just and fair dealings from their Indian brothers and sisters. But this trust and hope was soon dashed to the ground and the tribals found their situation deteriorating from bad to worse. The five year plans and their industrially oriented focus has deeply effected tribal life. Almost all big dams, factories, hydro-electric and nuclear plants and missile testing ranges are constructed on tribal homelands, with scant regard for tribal life and culture. To the tribals the colonising of their lands is a continuing characteristic of the so called "development" efforts of the dominant groups.

This century has also witnessed some strong liberation movements for tribal identity—the most important are the liberation movements in North East India for political autonomy, the demand for a Gondwanaland in Madhya Pradesh and the Jharkhand movement in North Central India—in South Bihar, West Bengal, Northern Orissa and Eastern Madhya Pradesh.

The Jharkhand movement has emerged as the major tribal liberation movement in our history. The demand for a separate Jharkhand will cover a population of about 30 million people of which two-thirds will be tribals. The history of this movement can be traced to 1926 when a few young tribal Christians came together to reflect on the plight of their people and by 1939 the movement grew to become the Adhibhasi Mahasabha (Tribal Organization) under the leadership of an Oxford

graduate Jaipal Singh. In 1952 the people's movement became a political party i.e. the Jharkhand Party and the political demand for a separate state took shape. In the years 1952-57 the Jharkhand Party became the opposition group in the Bihar Assembly and could ensure the intensification of reservations for tribals in education and employment. With the reorganisation of Indian states in 1956 the demand for a separate Jharkhand state for the tribals was rejected and they were divided and got scattered to four states—most of them in Bihar, but some in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. This was a setback to the movement and the stability of the Party. The political situation in the nation at large, and the one party hegemony at the Centre and most of the States, added to the undermining of the Jharkhand movement. The tribals felt betrayed by their leaders and there was a weakening of the movement. But the tribal spirit for liberation was never completely destroyed.

The 1970's gave a new impetus to the Jharkhand movement with the re-assertion of the language and culture of tribals by middle class intellectuals. By 1977 the movement took on a militant posture. The demand for tribal identity was massively revived in the consciousness of the people through songs, stories, dramas etc. The recent formation of the Jharkhand Co-ordination Committee bringing together all the liberation efforts into one combined fold is another hopeful step forward. With this it has become more inclusive of all oppressed groups in the region such as the *Sadans*, who are the backward Muslims.

The long history of struggles, protests, action and reflection have taught the tribals valuable lessons. The Jharkhand movement has now become a movement of reconciliation, between the tribals and other marginalised groups in that region—*sadans* etc. In this process it has opened itself to a consciousness of the importance of including dimensions of national and human liberation. It is a liberation movement of the deep human spirit enshrined primarily in the tribal vision of life and experience. This tribal ethos has to be restored in the movement and the people—as it has become watered down due to pressures from dominant ideologies. Its most basic component

is the sustaining of the continuum of the relationship between nature—humanity—spirit which is the vital criteria for humanity's desire to be human. The egalitarian society that is basic to tribal culture has to be revitalised and promoted in this process. Community ownership of the means of production, and the use of the produce for the good of all are tribal values that need to be implemented once again. The tribal concept of equal participation of all in social and political decision making, with stress on consensus needs to be revived and used in the Jharkandi socio-economic, cultural and political life. All this implies that the demand for the creation of a Jharkhand state within the Indian nation is a vision of a unique and new form of government. The tribals believe that the establishment of the Jharkhand state is a means to restore tribal and human values—residues of which can still be found in tribal societies inspite of the onslaughts of the majority community.

The struggle for liberation in Jharkhand continues today, with much pain, as they contend against the police and military power of the dominant group. It is a counter cultural movement challenging the 'modern', scientific and technological view of life. The Jharkhandi liberation movement envisions an alternative to the presently existing lifestyle of our nation. When the dream of a Jharkhand state becomes a reality then it will be able to experiment with this new vision, undergirded by tribal historical and traditional value systems. This search is indeed an expression of the deep spirituality of tribal societies.

Towards a new spirituality

Of such movements and struggles, of such visions and dreams, spirituality is a constitutive factor. Spirituality is intrinsic to action for liberation. All women and men in our country or elsewhere who have striven and continue to strive against exploitation and oppression, and for justice, dignity, and life for all are spiritual women and men. Their stories must be told, their memory cherished, and their inspiration carried forward.

The spiritual is not a dimension added to the people's struggles and protests in order to provide motivation and sacrality. When we stand for justice and freedom and for people's right to life with dignity, we stand for those realities and values in terms of which all faiths image the Mystery of the Divine: That is why, for Jeremiah, to do justice is to "know" God. When we stand with the oppressed we stand with the one who always takes their side and acts for their liberation (Ps. 103:6). The downtrodden people with their history of hope and struggle is the *locus*, the place, of authentic encounter with God. In confronting injustice and working for a new India, a new world, where people are equal and free, and where resources are for all, there exists a profound spirituality even if it is not recognised, made explicit or named. In the New Testament story of the good Samaritan, a non-religious person's "secular" action (as distinct from religious or priestly behaviour) is commended as belonging within the realm and purposes of God. (Luke 10).

In the parable of the last judgement, Jesus interprets the unnamed depths, the "Beyond", the transcendent dimensions of deeds of justice and compassion done by people who never had named any faith. Having faith and belonging in the Realm of God consists not in recital of creeds but in the doing of God's will for this earth, on this earth. Spirituality is the people's experience that their struggle is not meaningless, that life is stronger than death, that solidarity is stronger than armed might, and that people—children, women and men—matter. It is also the experience of learning from the poor, of sharing in their blessings, and of being liberated by them.

In spite of this, spirituality has often been misrepresented and misunderstood. For many it refers to something ill defined, vague and nebulous. Or it smacks of monastery and asceticism; it is too high and ethereal, far beyond the reach of ordinary human beings and day-to-day life. It is felt to be essentially immaterial, its realm being the interior recesses of the heart, and its concerns, other-worldly. It has been defined in terms of religious acts, devotions and peities. Spirituality has thus come to be looked upon as world-negating, non-historical, non-political; hence as something private, subjective

and pacifying. It has to do with an important segment, but a segment of life, and is unrelated to the rest. This restrictive, reductionist and dualist view of spirituality, we reject.

Neither are we satisfied with neutral descriptions which present spirituality as the way one lives one's life ; or, the way one orders one's loves ; or as the ensemble of one's values, views, assumptions and attitudes. We do not wish to make the word available to Hitler as well as to Gandhi, or applicable to consumerism as much as to revolutionary striving. Spirituality for us is bound up with life and all that life involves : freedom and food, dignity and equality, community and sharing of resources, creativity and celebration of the God of life and liberation. Spiritual is all that the Spirit of God originates, gives, guides, and accompanies ; all that the spirit can bless, accept and work with. It is all that can contribute to the balance and blossoming, the healing and wholeness of India, of the human race, the earth, the cosmos. It may be described as the Godwardness of life, the experience of seeing God in all things and all things in God ; or, as a sustained search for meaning, depth, transcendence and comradeship, overcoming mental and social inertia and determinisms in order to grow in freedom and be able to relate to reality.

In order to comprehend the diverse spiritual currents that criss-cross India's life-scape, the religious no less than the secular, we would describe spirituality in terms of openness and response-ability vis-a-vis reality. The grace of God and the *prasada* of the Lord making openness and response possible is presupposed as always present to every human heart and human group everywhere. The reality in question embraces everything from sand and stone to grass and dew drops, to birds and bird songs, to human beings, their hearts and creations to the ultimate mystery we call God. Openness is letting reality come, enter, invade, touch, speak, challenge, upset and move us to awareness, to joy, to sorrow, to tears, to anger, to action. Contemplation is an aspect of openness, be it contemplation of nature or of history, be this biblical history or contemporary history. In nature-contemplation begins a concern for environment, and a respectful approach to the Earth as the basic Sacrament of God. History is contemplated to

discern the signs of the times, what God is doing in our days and to what collaboration God is summoning us. Contemplation may, in fact it must, deepen into probing and analysis of social reality with a view to finer response. If openness is a first response and contemplation, its continuation to action is its culmination. Openness is openness for action; if no action is put forth openness may be presumed to have been non-existent, and therefore spirituality as well.

It goes without saying that the response must be relevant, if it does not co-respond to the need at hand to the cry of the situation, to the Call of God that comes through the people, it is no response at all. In the Samaritan story, what the two religious men did is no response even if they hurried to the temple to pray for the man, broken and left on the roadside. Response should also be as adequate as possible, even as the Samaritan's was. But were the Samaritan to meet with more and more such cases in his subsequent journeys, along that road, would he not go beyond the relief work described in the narrative, and investigate the root cause(s) of the social malaise and try to tackle these? If love is the heart of spirituality, its concrete form, relevant and adequate, is defined not by abstract theologies and readymade religious rules but by the cries, needs and possibilities of those dispossessed and cast aside on the highways of history.

The voices of those cast aside can never be totally suppressed because from the midst of their cries for identity and humanhood there emerges a spirituality that sustain them. The dalits and tribals have lost much of their own spiritual heritage when their historical roots were distorted by the dominant power of the majority group who tried to assimilate all minority identities within its fold. Much of this spirituality therefore is unrecorded as they were basically oral traditions. However their songs, dances, folklore, poetry, art and dramas unfold a wealth of spirituality that is yet to be explored. Archeological evidences and popular religious experiences also provide scope for this search for a spirituality that has provided to dalits and to tribals the energy to survive centuries of oppression. In their new movements for identity and selfhood,

founded on their traditional value systems of justice and freedom, with a close affinity to creation, this deep spirituality once again finds expression and must be recognised.

From the perspective of the new spirituality that is emerging, we also recognised the wealth of the traditional spirituality of our land. In India in every philosophical and theological tradition, the spiritual has to do with realization of authentic Self (*atmasaksatkara*). Atman is personal self, akin to Absolute Atman. Spirituality is the kinship, this imagehood, which is both a gift given and a task to be accomplished. The self is to be cultivated and developed (*Samskara*) deepened and refined through the four states (*asrama*) of life : life as a student, as a householder, as a recluse having time to ponder and sift a lifetime of experiences, and as a mature person with a wealth of insights, at the service of the world. Throughout the journey, the goal, the loadstone of life is *Moksa*, liberation from the illusions and anxieties, the pains and deaths of existence. On the way the two spheres of value and action are *artha* and *Kama*, production and reproduction, two engagements in which one interacts intimately with the earth and with society. This worldly involvement is spiritual (*Adhyatma*) to the extent it is suffused and ruled by *Dharma*, ethics, religion, duty, tradition, which orients it towards *Moksa*. *Dharma*-ruled economic, political and social activity, are means (*Sadhana*) of spirituality. *Dharma* is, perhaps, the aptest Indian equivalent of spirituality, free of the dualistic connotation of the latter.

The way of *Dharma* is three-fold. There is *Jnana*, insight, enlightenment, wisdom, born of meditation which discloses the illusory (*Maya*) character of the world of phenomena (*Vyavaharika*) and transports one to the real world (*paramarthika*) where one realizes and enjoys one's union-identity with the Absolute. For those not capable of walking this lofty path, there is the way of *Karma*, action. Originally this meant complicated and costly ritual and sacrifice. The Gita interpreted it to mean historical action in confronting injustice and doing selflessly, as God does, the work required to hold the world together (*lokasamgraham*) and to ensure the well-being of every creature (*sarva-bhuta-hiteratah*). But the people's path, universal, easy and sure is the way of *Bhakti*, surrender devotion and

love which responds to the love, grace, and fascination of a self-revealing personal God. The Gita, available in all languages and with commentaries, seeks to integrate the three paths, according primacy to Bhakti, urging struggle against enthroned and structural evil, end inviting to a vision of the world and history as realities unfolding within the Mystery of the Lord. The authenticity of vision and experiences is measured and guaranteed by the down to earth outcome of it all, namely, the readiness to do God's will and word in history.

We are partial to the Gita because it has become in some measure the people's text, and could become such in still larger measure. It is a theology and a spirituality of liberative action. It has played a significant role in India's independence movement, having inspired several leaders and being commented upon by them. We are partial to the spirituality of the people, the deprived masses and the most oppressed groups. Some of it has been expressed and sung by the people's saints like Tukaram and Namdev.

We appreciate the new and dissenting path trailed by Gautama, the Budha, with his rejection of caste and gender discrimination, his attack on greed, his accent on historical existence as against the mythological, his turning from esoteric books and languages to people of flesh and blood, his measureless comparison and respect for life which deeply touched and transformed for a while an emergent culture of violence and complicated ritual technology. E. Schumacher speaks of Buddhist economics born of a Buddhist way of life "just as the modern materialist way of life has brought forth modern economics". (Small is Beautiful, Economics as if people mattered, 1973, p. 50). "While the materialist is simply interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. . . The keynote to Buddhist economics, therefore, is simplicity and non-violence. From an economist's point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern—amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results" (ib. 54). Trevor Ling maintains that "the original Buddhist goal, *nirvana*, was the restoration of healthy conditions of life *here and now*, rather than in some remote and transcendent realm beyond this life".

(The Buddha-Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon, 1973, p. 136). We are partial to the spirituality or Dhamma operative in this tradition.

We affirm the Sikh spirituality of service, community and hospitality, the Sikh refusal of gender distinctions and priestly hierarchies, and the tradition of doing things and governing themselves democratically.

We wish to make our own the spirituality of the Quran where God is invariably the merciful, the companions, and therefore enjoining mercy and compassions on all of us. We vibrate to the Prophets' call to the oppressed to fight against oppression, his stress on literacy, and his vigorous attack on ignorance and on contemporary Arab abhorance of knowledge. We appreciate the Quran's openness to and respect for all religions. its concern for equality of all persons, sexes, nations and tribes, as well as its emphasis on social justice together with total rejection of usury, share-cropping and accumulation of wealth. We wish to always remember that Muhammad was basically engaged in liberating the weaker sections of society.

Therefore, as Indians our search for a spirituality of liberation. must preserve the liberative institutions and values enshrined in the manifold religious traditions that are an integral part of the Indian context. Contemporary Indian spirituality must be dialogical affirming the complementarity of different religions. Originary religious experiences were creative responses to the felt problems of a community.

However, we recognize that in its ongoing tradition every institutionalized religion tends to dilute, domesticate, routinize, degenerate, corrupt and compromise the originary religious experience. It is manipulated and exploited to subserve the selfish, unspiritual interests of the powerful and the dominant. It is also unfortunate that the vast masses of the believers uncritically and credulously internalize the slanted and selective images and interpretations preached by the hierarchs and the clergy.

An enlightened search for liberation spirituality demands that believers sift the authentic from the inauthentic, the perennial from the relative, the essential from the accretions.

Therefore it is only in critical and creative hermeneutics that religions can become liberative in the present world.

Therefore the Bhakti movement in Hinduism and the Sufi movement in medieval Muslim India are landmarks in our people's search for a liberative spirituality. Here they saw religion as a community rather than as an organisation, as an experience rather than as established tradition in opposition to the oppressive sacrificial ritualistic systems, sterile intellectualism, and repressive and exclusivist hegemony of the dominant castes.

We affirm popular spirituality and religiousness which are not power-ridden nor overly institutionalised. In doing this we continue the mind and manner of Jesus who was partial to small people and the oppressed masses. Jesus affirmed children and women, he defied traditions and rule, he with outcastes. associated with sinners, and brought health to the sick and the broken. He shocked the virtuous by declaring that despised tax collectors and prostitutes could enter God's Kingdom before the elite and the powerful. Everyone had to become open and responsible like children to qualify for the reign of God. Jesus gave thanks to God for disclosing to unlearned little ones the saving news withheld from the learned and the arrogant. The gospel is given into the hands and hearts and lives of the poor. It is from them others have to receive it. It is by Mary of Magdala, that Peter and John are evangelised with foundational good news of the resurrecting of Jesus from the dead.

The vision of a new world order

It is clear to us that integral to our search for a new spirituality is a vision of a new human and humane social order which demands the restructuring of society on an entirely new basis. It is a vision that calls for a safeguarding of the unique diversity of India and demands an organisation of society where there is economic, social, political, religious and cultural space for all who people this land. We will strive to preserve this diversity, where all people will blossom and strengthen the essential unity of India and the rest of humankind.

This vision will reject the present capitalistic organisation of society and the development model which India has opted for which is based on the exploitation of creation and human

labour. The principal motive force of the present organisation of society is private gain and profit which in turn oppresses and deprives the masses of the toiling people.

Our future society will be based on the principle of community ownership and control of all resources and democratic organisation of society with collective leadership, drawing inspiration from our traditional tribal societies.

Such a society can only be brought about by the devolution of economic, political, social and cultural power down to the village level wherein the most oppressed and disinherited will be able to decide their destinies and will be able to live life to the full in harmony with oneself with others and with nature. Only such a structure will ensure that the dalits, the tribals, the deprived castes, the oppressed minorities and nationalities and women can wrest for themselves justice that has long been denied to them.

Our vision is beautifully expressed in Rabindranath Tagore's lines :

“Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls,
Where words come out from the depth of truth,
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection,
Where the clear stream of reason has not,
Lost its way into a dreary desert land of dead habit,
Where the mind is led forward by thee into
ever widening thought and action,
Into that heaven of freedom my father let my country
awake”.

Our vision is born of a new consciousness concerning people's struggles and their histories. These we view from the perspective of the oppressed masses themselves. In them we sense the promise and the process of a finer and more human future. The vision grows in clarity and significance as we

strive together to embody it in our history and our day-to-day life. We know that the vision is counter-cultural and subversive. It seeks to open prisons, to remove blinds from eyes and let people see reality; to break down divisive walls and set the downtrodden free. It speaks of a community of women and men, equal and free, and celebrant with an unfragmented and wholesome earth and the God of the earth. It is sure, therefore, to clash with principalities and powers and their class systems which need prisons and can only survive through oppression and fraud.

The vision thus implies a spirituality of conflict. It calls for a spirituality for combat. One that is to mature into a spirituality of "poetry", of untrammelled joyful creativity. To use christian imagery, we are for a spirituality of the Cross unfolding into a spirituality of the Resurrection.

It will be a spirituality which says clearly that the peace traditionally associated with it could never be a cheap and shallow peace. True peace will be Easter peace which grows, lotus-like, out of the stress and strife, the darkness and the mess of Good Friday. The spirituality of those who work for a new India, new earth, will always seek "the strength never to disown the poor or bend (our) knees before insolent might". It will not look for immediate success in the market sense of the term, but will see the struggle itself as victory in process, and recognise a new bud of life in every 'no' to oppression. With the fourth gospel, it will identify the Cross as 'exaltation' because the Cross of Jesus is a clear affirmation, in the face (lessness) of every oppressive power, of the freedom and dignity of all the crucified women, children and men of history. Our spirituality will consist in ever fuller openness, responsiveness and care for everything the spirit of life brings into being in nature or in our hearts or in history: to every event the Spirit makes, unfolds; to every upheaval through which the Spirit moves our world forward to its final liberation and completion.

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