

# DOMINANT TRENDS IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY HINDU THOUGHT

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## Introduction

To write with fair accuracy and completeness on modern and contemporary Indian Thought and yet to omit sweeping generalisations is almost an impossible task. Today, India's population is over 600 millions. Her cultural and religious heritage is vast and varied. Her present and immediate past are built on two or three millenia of history. As we calmly reflect on Modern Indian Thought, we slowly realise that modern Hindu thought is complex. To be more accurate, there are many strands in modern and contemporary Hindu thinking<sup>1</sup>. There are also Islamic, Sikh, and Christian "thoughts" in India<sup>2</sup>. Marxism too has assumed a new form in India<sup>3</sup>. Each of these is different from the others in origin, in purpose and development and in the conceptual tools used. Such being the sheer vastness and variety of the present thinking in India, we are forced to limit the scope of this paper very considerably. Since India is 80 % Hindu and since the dominant cultural and religious influences are those arising from the Hindus and above all since the Hindu world-views are what individualize and characterize India in the world at large, we shall deal here only with the dominant trends in modern and contemporary Hindu Thought<sup>4</sup>.

From the outset however let us be constantly reminded of two important truths. Hinduism is a "verbal symbol" to signify a conglomerate of religious sects and sub-sects, schools of philosophy and theology, which in

<sup>1</sup> In general we can say that at present all the Hindu sects are experiencing a period of renewal and revival. Revival and renewal mean not merely the return to the sources, but a process of reinterpretation and adaptation to present needs and situations.

The Hindu orthodoxy has not however, taken kindly to these movements. It insists on preserving traditional tenets in all purity. But its chances of survival seem to be little.

<sup>2</sup> For Islam: Vide T.M. TITUS: *Indian Islam*. Oxford University Press, 1930. Recent attempts at an Indian Christian Thought are summarised by BOYD R: "*An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*" CLS, Madras, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> As regards Indian Communist thinking: See: NEVETT, A. '*India Going Red?*' ISO Poona, 1954. The works of M.N. ROY and others gave some indication of this change.

<sup>4</sup> The Theosophist Mrs. ANNIE BESANT said in a speech: "Make no mistake without Hinduism India has no future. Hinduism is the soil into which India's roots are struck and torn out of that she will inevitably wither as a tree torn out of its place. — Let Hinduism go, Hinduism that was India's cradle and in that passing would be India's grave." All the modern Hindus and even others who know the individuality of India would agree with her.



many respects are doctrinally and ritually opposed to each other<sup>5</sup>. Yet there are a certain number of common tenets and practices which give an inner unity to Hinduism. For example belief in *karma-samsāra*, (doctrine of *Karma* and transmigration) final liberation, *yogic* practices etc., are accepted by all the groups, though each school and sect has its own way of interpreting these common tenets<sup>6</sup>.

We use advisedly the phrase Hindu Thought and not Hindu Philosophy. Philosophy in the Western sense of the word is not applicable to most of our ancient or modern thought. If philosophy is understood as the knowledge or the search after the knowledge of the totality of reality according to its ultimate grounds by the use of human reason or if philosophy is understood as the systematic and conceptually expressed rational analysis of the totality of human experience in order to discover the root of being as being and of the ought in man, then, we must admit that many of the modern and contemporary Indian thinkers are not philosophers. There have been few academic philosophers in India. K. C. BHATTACHARYA and RADHAKRISHNAN may be called philosophers in the technical sense of the term. It may be good to remember that in India we never made a clear cut distinction between philosophy and theology, ontology and ethics, religion and politics. All form one integral whole. Yet, if we understand philosophy as "love of wisdom", the quest after the absolute Truth, Being and Goodness; if philosophy is understood as the sincere and open confrontation with reality, with situations and facts; if finally philosophy is the courageous meeting with actual problems and the search after their solutions, then we can consider AUROBINDO, a *Yogin*, and GANDHI, a religious, social and political reformer, real philosophers. But, to avoid all misunderstandings, I prefer to use the expression "thought" rather than philosophy.

### *Background*

India was known to the West even prior to the Roman period. But only with the discovery of the sea route to India by VASCO DA GAMA in 1498 the massive entrance of the West into the country and into the hearts and minds of the Hindus began. With the coming of the West and especially with the consolidation of the British political power in the country in 1757, new cultural, social, political and religious factors unknown and unsuspected till then forcefully found their way into the placid, resigned lives of millions of Indians.

Before the consolidation of British supremacy over the Indian conti-

<sup>5</sup> "Hinduism is a great golden umbrella, which shelters many forms of thought many practices and many approaches to the divine" (RAMASWAMY IYER C.P., *Indian Inheritance*. Bhavan's Series Vol. 1. p. 222). "Hinduism is a league of religions than a single religion with a definite creed" (D.S. SARMA: *What is Hinduism?* Ganesh and Co., Madras 1939, p. 10).

<sup>6</sup> DASGUPTA S. N.: *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1. p. 71ff.



ment, the Hindus had to submit themselves to centuries of Moslem rule and law especially in the North. Islam, strictly monotheistic, fanatically missionary, with no caste distinctions or priestly class, permitting its followers to eat beef was at first violently opposed to the "idolatrous, polytheistic, caste ridden, ritualistic Hindus", who venerated the cows and practised "non-violence". In the beginning as the Moslems streamed into India, they destroyed temples, killed and maimed the Hindus, forced them to become Moslems, burnt their sacred books and articles<sup>7</sup>. Islamic political and religious dominance meant for the Hindus, slavery. They built walls around themselves, by making the caste system more rigid, and by the insistence on conformism. But slowly the relationship between the conquerors and the vanquished changed. Political, religious and cultural reasons were behind the change. From intolerance and persecution to tolerance and coexistence to a sincere effort to understand and appreciate each other, to positive assimilation and co-operation was the path of change<sup>8</sup>. Islamic monotheism, sense of morality, social equality and Sufi-mysticism profoundly influenced some of the Hindu thinkers. Religious men like KABIR and NANAK tried to transcend the limits of Hinduism and Islam and initiated movements embracing both<sup>9</sup>.

The EMPEROR AKBAR attempted to establish a universal religion (Din-i-Ilahi). He invited two Jesuits to his court to help him in his work. Islamic-Persian and Indian elements fused in a creative way and produced masterpieces in painting and architecture and music. A new language Urdu was created in the country and there was the growth of vernacular literatures<sup>10</sup>. There was a general awakening in the country. Hindu devotional movements gathered momentum and the devotees poured out their hearts in exquisite mystical poetry<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> In 1026 Sultan Mohamad, Ibn Kasim destroyed the most celebrated Hindu shrine, Somnath, in Kathiawar. Hindus were forced to pay a religious penalty tax.  
<sup>8</sup> MAJUMDAR R. C.: *An Advanced History of India*, pp. 384ff and 571ff.

<sup>9</sup> KABIR flourished in the North (near Banaras) towards the close of the 14th century. "Hindu and Turk were pots of the same clay. Allah and Rama were but different names". "It is needless to ask the Saint the caste to which he belongs." KABIR rejected the rituals and practices of both Hinduism and Islam. He insisted on internal attitudes and dispositions.

NANAK, the Founder of Sikhism lived in the 15th century. His mission in life was to put an end to religious conflicts.

<sup>10</sup> In fact the Hindu-Islam understanding and co-operation blossomed fully only during the time of AKBAR THE GREAT (1542—1605). Transcending the narrow limits of each religion, he worked towards the evolution of a new religion, which would he hoped prove to be a synthesis of all warring creeds and capable of uniting the discordant elements of his vast empire into one harmonious whole. In Fatehpur Sikri, AKBAR built a hall of religions. Politically and socially Hindus became fully free during AKBAR's reign.

<sup>10a</sup> R. C. MAJUMDAR, op. cit. pp. 393—415 and 571—594.

<sup>11</sup> The Hindu Bhakti (devotional) movement was very widespread. Hindu bhakti centred round chiefly Viṣṇu (*Kṛṣṇa*, *Rama*, *Radha* cults) and Śiva (*Rudra*,



Yet, with the decline of the Moghul power decadence once again enveloped the land. The subcontinent was split into innumerable warring kingdoms with no economic, political or social stability. Periodic famine and pestilence decimated the population. The creative potentialities of the Hindus and the Moslems dried up. The Hindu society was split into over 3000 sub-castes<sup>12</sup>. Immoral and debilitating socio-religious practices like sati (the widow burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband) temple prostitution, child marriage, prohibition of widows' remarriage, veiling of women, neglect of education, the absence of the personal and the spiritual from religious life and the insistence on externals and superstitious practices were rampant in the country. The result was the death of thought, resignation and the total loss of freedom. India had lost the memory of its past, hence its self-identity.

It is into this atmosphere, the West came — dynamic, self-reliant, convinced of its material and spiritual superiority and intent on profit making. Though, the overriding interest of the West was commercial, still both Catholics and Protestants wanted to propagate their respective faiths in the land. Together with the merchants and the missionaries and especially with the definitive domination of the sub continent by the British, Western Education, British type schools and universities, liberal ideas and ideologies and the Christian ethos reached our shores. Ideas centred on man, his dignity, freedom, equality, Western technology, natural sciences and the scientific spirit, a sense of the value of the world and of the need to transform it by human ingenuity, a feeling for history and its significance, all these forces found their way into India<sup>13</sup>. Surely, the British who introduced the English system of education and their language and the missionaries who started a net work of educational institutions of various grades in the land had their private interests and objectives: the perpetuation of British domination by means of the semi-westernised Indians and the propagation of Christianity and Christian ideals through the indirect method of education.

Again, the Westerners were instrumental in discovering India's past. They were the pioneers in the field of historical-critical study of Indology in its various aspects<sup>14</sup>. India's past with its rich philosophy and theology, literature and art and political social systems opened the eyes of the West to the inherent worth of India's culture and forced them to look on the Indians with respect and consideration.

Again, it was the West, chiefly England which politically and economically unified the subcontinent and gave to its people at least a sem-

*Pasupati, Sakti* cults). In the various Indian vernaculars we have an immense devotional literature which still remains to be scientifically studied.

<sup>12</sup> L'ABBE DUBOIS: "*Hindu Manners and Customs*", a work of the 18th century, gives us a graphic picture of the Indian religio-social situation.

<sup>13</sup> R. C. MAJUMDAR, op. cit. pp. 842ff.

<sup>14</sup> The History of the Western effort to study India: GONDA J. '*Religionen Indiens*' Vol. I. pp. 1—6.



blance of order, justice and peace. Even the cultivation of the vernacular languages of the land in a truly scientific manner is to a great extent indebted to the West.

Europeans, chiefly the Christian missionaries brought to the Indians a new social consciousness and responsibility. To any foreigner who walks through the streets of India, the most striking factor is the immense social evil. The Christians in words and deeds pointed out these evils and blamed chiefly the Hindus for their utter neglect of their fellow men. In a caste-ridden society that believes in the inexorability of past-actions (*karman*) how could there be real agape? true concern for others?

Thus the West challenged India in every sphere of human life: politics, social and cultural ideas and activity, and religious ideas and ideals. Can India stand on her own legs and find solutions to her problems? Can Hinduism be the foundation of a new India? Can the stagnant society of India be resurrected by a reinterpretation of her age old world views and beliefs?

Almost all the Europeans and quite many English educated Indians were convinced that India had to throw away her traditional values and beliefs and embrace Western ways and ideas in order to become rally modern.

Some of the Hindus, steeped in their traditions and sensing the danger to their religion and way of life reacted sharply to Western influences. Their answer to the all embracing European challenge was revivalism. They chiefly opposed Christianity because in their view the Christian missionaries were the agents of a foreign religion and culture.

Between these two extreme positions we have Hindu reform movements. They were ready, even eager to learn from the West. Many of them studied in Western style schools or even in missionary institutions. Some even went to England for higher studies. They embraced the scientific spirit and liberalism of the Europeans. English became the medium of their communication. Yet they did not throw away the past of their country. Using the very methods learnt from their conquerors they reached back to their ancient heritage and tried to re-interpret and reform Hindu beliefs and practices. Acutely conscious of the social evils surrounding them and infecting their society, they launched on a programme of reform. The weakness and ills of their people and the dynamism and strength of the Europeans forced them to reflect and to find creative solutions to their problems. Thus Hinduism entered on a period of renaissance and far reaching reforms. This renaissance was above all a renaissance in thought and our purpose is to analyse the main trends of this nascent Hindu thought, that is still a living and ongoing movement.

#### *Modern Trends:*

Hinduism in its meeting with the West had to face three important problems: First of all there was the socio-political problem; then the



religious problem and finally the problem of mental attitudes and methods. Now the Hindus had the insight to see that at the source of all these major issues, there lay religious world views which really formed and shaped every aspect of human life. Though externally most of the early movements and reflections had a social bias, still the core of every Hindu attempt at revival and reform was religious.

### *Philosophy of Religion:*

Religious pluralism has been part of India's life and history for millenia. Hinduism with all its sub-sects and Buddhism and Jainism existed side by side in India for centuries. With the arrival of Islam into the country this problem became more acute. Religious men tried to go beyond the particularities of Hindu sects and of Islam and establish religious groups open to all. These religious groups were theologically and philosophically based on the idea of the existence of one God who is the God and Father of the Hindus and of the Moslems. So when Christianity reached India, theologically or philosophically a new problem did not arise. But Christian propaganda methods and means were more powerful and subtle than those of Islam. The early thinkers of the Modern period therefore, wanted to find a religious world view that would at once advance the social welfare of India and check the progress of Christianity.

### *Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772—1833):*

Through a deep study of his own religion, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY reached the conviction that monotheism was the basis of all religions<sup>15</sup>. Monotheism is the source from which Islam and Christianity draw their unity, strength and social equality<sup>16</sup>. Hinduism according to him in its earlier phases believed in

<sup>15</sup> All the books on Modern Hindu Thought give a chapter on RAM MOHAN ROY. GANGULY C. '*Nalin's Raja Ram Mohan Roy*' (YMCA Publishing House, Calcutta 1934) offers us a good picture of the personality of RAM MOHAN ROY and a faithful summary of his thought.

"Roy placed theism on its own evidences as natural and necessary to all religions in as much as it was the greatest common denominator of them all and was indeed their vital essence." To his mind the root of the wretched state of Hindu society was idolatry. Obnoxious superstitions necessarily attached to it. In his, '*Works*' Vol 1, 283, Roy tries to prove that the 'ancient religion contained in holy *Vedānta* was monotheistic. He writes: "We regret idolatry in every form. The divine homage we offer consists solely in the practice of '*dayā*' benevolence towards each other." Surely every statement of RAM MOHAN regarding the pure monotheism of 'holy *Vedānta*' is textually questionable.

<sup>16</sup> His great prayer was: "My God! render religions destructive of differences and dislikes between man and man and conducive to the peace and union of mankind."



One Supreme being alone. But later, idolatry and polytheism entered into it, broke it up internally, weakened it and brought in moral and social degradation. RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY, and the Society he founded (*Brahma Samāj*) accepted this tenet as their foundational belief. This one Supreme God or Father is the source of all men and nations. Hence, social equality and the freedom of man flow from man's faith in one God. These thinkers rejected Trinitarianism, Incarnation or the possibility of God's appearance in any creaturely form as opposed to reason, unworthy of God and as imagination of the human mind<sup>17</sup>. In fact even a fundamentalist and revivalist like SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI (1824—1883) believed that monotheism was the fundamental teaching of the *Rg Veda Samhita*.

From a historical-critical point of view neither the contention of RAM MOHAN ROY that the *Upanishads* teach monotheism nor the conviction of DAYANANDA SARASWATI that the *Vedic Samhita* are monotheistic in character can be sustained. Yet, the educated Hindus of their time accepted this basic tenet of the two great reform movements because this would put Hinduism on a par with the other two religions. It is true that right from the beginning, in Hinduisim, monotheism was one of its trends. It is only in the *Bh. Gītā* and in the later devotional philosophy and literature, monotheism becomes all important. Yet it existed side by side with non-dualistic absolutism.

What is important is the insight of these thinkers that for a healthy moral, social and religious life, monotheism was essential. In fact GANDHI comes within this tradition. Though he has not explicitly written on monotheism, still his basic belief was monotheistic<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> His rejection of Trinitarianism, Incarnation etc. is rooted in "my reverence for Christianity and for the author of this religion that has induced me to vindicate this religion from the charge of polytheism, as far as my limited capacity and knowledge extend."

B. N. SEAL says that ROY got his moral inspiration from Christianity, his meta-physical background from Hinduism and his theological tendency from Islam (quoted by GANGULY, op. cit. p. 131).

<sup>18</sup> "If I did not feel the presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment around me that I would be raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghly" (*Young India*, 6 Oct. 1925, p. 272). "As days pass I feel this living presence in every fibre of my being" (*Bapu's letters to Mira* p. 298). To present GANDHI as a monist (Advaita) as P. T. RAJU does in his '*Idealistic Thought of India*', Allen and Unwin, p. 297, is not true at all. D. M. DATTA is correct when he observed: "If personality implies self-consciousness plus will, Gandhi may be said to believe in the personality of God whom he regards as the omniscient, omnipotent creator and just governor of the world. On the whole therefore, it will be reasonable to think that Gandhi was a theist — Vaisnava rather than an Advaitin" (*The Phil. of M. Gandhi* p. 27). The truth of DATTA's contention becomes clear to anyone who cares to read through the many passages on God from GANDHI's writings assembled by N. B. SEN in his "*Wit and Wisdom of Gandhi*" NB CI, N. Delhi, 1960.



What we see in this attempt is the old assimilative and synthetic spirit of Hinduism. Down the centuries it tried to assimilate whatever was good and beautiful in other cultures and faith and transform from inside foreign ideas to bring them in accord with its world-view and pattern of thinking. Modern Hindu thinkers like RAM MOHAN ROY, desired to be the harbingers of a universal humanism, to be the prophets of a coming humanity in which East and West would meet and merge, though without loosing their distinctive elements. The philosophical and religious striving of the *Brahma Samāj* and the *Ārya Samāj* was to establish monotheism as the fundamental religio-philosophical insight of Hinduism. It resulted from the conviction that that alone could be the basis of a universal humanism embracing Hindus, Christians and Moslems.

Other thinkers like VIVEKANANDA and RADHAKRISHNAN showed their opposition to this trend of putting monotheism as the basis of religion, morality and social reform. Insistence on an monotheistic, natural philosophy was considered too dangerous a concession to Islamic and Christian ideas and a betrayal of the traditional Hindu insistence on "experience" (*anubhava*). The basic goal of Hindu life is the experience of the Absolute<sup>19</sup>. The spirit-monistic (*advaitic*) tradition however, insists that a conscious being's ultimate goal is the immediate experience of the identity of one's self with the supreme self. From a really real point of view there is only One Reality — One without a second. The world of multiplicity, change and history is not real from the supreme point of view. Just as a rope-snake is not real from the point of view of the reality of the rope, so also the world is not real when viewed from the angle of the reality of the Supreme Being, *Brahman*. A lower level of reality is sublated by the higher. This does not mean that the world is unreal or utter non-being. It only means that from the absolute point of view, the changing multiplicity cannot be considered real. Yet, the Reality underlying the many and on which they are superimposed, is the Absolute. But what is important for us here is the philosophy of religion that is built upon these premises. Since, there is only one Reality and that reality is being, consciousness and bliss, the goal of every being is to realise and to become this Truth-Reality. In this world, the experience of multiplicity, personal distinction etc. pertain to the sphere of illusion. If we can speak of religion at all in such a world view, then the goal of religion is the experience of identity. Oneness of Reality is the truth. The immediate, intuitive experience of this Reality is the ultimate goal and bliss. But there are religions which teach distinction between the soul and the Absolute. How to reconcile such tenets with this absolutistic view? Religions like Christianity which at least in some of its forms teach the distinction between the Absolute and Individual are not totally untrue. But they belong to a lower plane of truth. The absolute truth is

<sup>19</sup> The second paper will analyse in detail the ideas of VIVEKANANDA and RADHAKRISHNAN. So I refrain from any detailed exposition of their views here.



*Advaita* (non-dualism) which only a few spiritual adepts can reach. So religions which teach "the individual self's distinction from the Absolute" or those that hold the individual self to be nothing but a mode of the Supreme, embody only partial truths. These religions are needed because the inner aptitudes and fitness of the persons who follow such religions can grasp only such partial truths. But they, by a natural process of repeated births and spiritual growth will one day reach the supreme Truth. More on this in the second paper.

### *Moral Thought:*

It is a widely accepted fact that Hinduism did not develop an explicit and elaborate ethical thought. Though laws and regulations are numerous in Hinduism, it did not reflect deeply on the roots of human activity, freedom, progress of a person through action and the ultimate norm of human actions. Along with this poverty of ethical thought, there was surely also a lack of concern for the other. Dr. A. SCHWEITZER calls the classical Indian world view as world and life-negating. According to him this is because for the Hindus, the world is a stage play in which man has must participate but not fully immerse himself. His true home is eternity<sup>20</sup>. Though SCHWEITZER has often overstated his case, it cannot be doubted that he has made a very valid point.

The modern and contemporary Hindus do certainly controvert SCHWEITZER's views. Some of them think that the essential truths of

<sup>20</sup> A. SCHWEITZER, "*Indian Thought and Its Development*" p. 7ff. Dr. RADHAKRISHNAN gives a fair summary of SCHWEITZER's views in "*Eastern Religions and Western Thought*" pp. 50—51". 1) The emphasis on ecstasy in Hindu Thought naturally tends to world and life negation; 2) Hindu thought is essentially other worldly and humanistic ethics and other-worldliness are incompatible with each other; 3) The Hindu doctrine of *Māyā* which declares that life is an illusion contains the flaw of world and life negation and in consequence Hindu thought is nonethical; 4) The best that the Hindu has to say about the origin of the world is that it is a game played by God; 5) The way to salvation is *jñāna* or self discovery. This is different from moral development and hence Hindu religion is non-ethical; 6) The goal of human endeavour is escape, not reconciliation. It is the deliverance of the soul from the bonds of finitude not the conversion of the finite into the organ and manifestation of the infinite. Religion is a refuge from life and its problems and man has no hope of better things to come; 7) The ideal man of the Hindus is raised above the ethical distinction of good and evil; 8) The ethics of inner perfection insisted on by Hindu thought conflict with an active ethic and wide-hearted love of one's neighbour. SCHWEITZER himself writes: "As a matter of fact it was through the influence of Christianity that it (Hinduism) was moved to the endeavour to develop into an ethical religion and it was thus influenced to a larger extent than it is ready to accept ... — Without the Gospel of Jesus Hinduism would not be, in fact or in ideal, what it is today." (Quoted by PARADKAR, B.A. *A Fragment of A Schweitzer's Inter-Religious Encounter, Religion and Society* 1966 Vol. 13, p. 38).



democracy, dignity of the individual, equality of persons and concern for others are all to be found in Hinduism<sup>21</sup>. Only, we have to interpret the classical texts in the right way.

Modern and contemporary Hindu thought shows considerable divergence from the classical thought in the areas of morality and social obligation. As remarked above, today, Hindusim is in search of a religious philosophical foundation for its ethical and social endeavours.

Simply taking the terms which Hindus use in their speeches and writings in English, we can already see the radical changes that are taking place in their thought. "Person, freedom, choice, decision, intellect, soul, dignity of the person, equality of all" are terms which embody ideas that have no exact equivalents in Hindu thought. I do not imply by this that Hinduism had no notions of person, freedom etc. But through contact with the West and by the use of a language and concepts which originate from a different thought pattern, a profound change is taking place within the interior of Hinduism as it was understood and practised before the advent of the West.

In thinkers like RAM MOHAN ROY and GANDHI morality was the biggest concern. What these great men wanted was a moral regeneration of the people. Years before SCHWEITZER, ROY was convinced that strict monotheism alone could be the firm foundation of morality. Moreover he found that the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles and better adapted for the use of rational beings than any others which have come to his knowledge<sup>22</sup>. RAM MOHAN ROY was more interested in reforming the Hindu Society than in elaborating a philosophical system. For this he wanted his people to give up polytheism and idolatry and embrace true spiritual theism which would lift them out of their moral degradation. For GANDHI, Truth is God and man is called to experiment

<sup>21</sup> S. RADHAKRISHNAN devotes a large portion of his *'Eastern Religions and Western Thought'* to the refutation of SCHWEITZER's thesis. Though RADHAKRISHNAN's refutation is very eloquent, it must be accepted that he has failed to face the core of SCHWEITZER's objections. But it must however, be accepted that he has succeeded in pointing out the defects of SCHWEITZER's generalisations and sharp contrasts and in showing that Christianity itself in many of its manifestations is not freed from the defects mentioned by him. In a small work entitled *"Cultural Foundations of Indian Democracy"* YMCA Publishing House, Calcutta, 1955, there is a chapter: "Religious resources of Hinduism" written by K. A. NILAKANTA SASTRI and M. YAMUNACHARYA. These authors try to show that in the classical texts of Hinduism the substance of democracy, the doctrine of the worth of the individual and the concern for others are to be found. Without denying the fact that Hinduism taught some vital truths concerning man, I feel that the unscientific tendency of some to read modern ideas into ancient texts is not conducive to our quest after truth.

<sup>22</sup> "By separating from other matters contained in the New Testament the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable end of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasion and degree of understanding" (*Precepts of Jesus* p. vi).



with Truth and to follow the glimpses of truth he receives. "To me God is Truth and Love. God is ethics and morality, God is fearlessness", says GANDHI. He was influenced by the West profoundly yet he always considered himself to be an orthodox Hindu. To his mind the eternal religion (the law of righteousness) rests on truth (*satya*) *ahimsa* (positive and universal non-violence) renunciation, passionlessness, equal love for all God's creatures, total self control (*brahmacharya*)<sup>23</sup>. For him and for many of the far sighted Hindu reformers liberation meant not the individual's emancipation from the painful cycle of birth and death, but a whole nations emancipation from the bondage of desire, anger, avarice, sloth and violence. Like RAM MOHAN ROY, GANDHI too absorbed the ethical teaching of Jesus (chiefly that of the Sermon on the Mount) the absolute and transcendent monotheism of Islam and the placid calmness, renunciation and the *sannyāsa* (ascetic) ideal of Hinduism. In his person he re-interpreted his religion. In his life and actions he showed tremendous concern for others. In the great ideals proposed in the *Bh. Gītā* — the idea of self-less action, equanimity, complete surrender to God and utter fearlessness, he learnt the way to love and care for the least important of his brothers.

In fact after RAM MOHAN ROY and GANDHI, Hinduism is no more the same as it existed before the time of ROY. By a process of re-interpretation, assimilation, discovery of the past and the acceptance of new ideas, Hindu ethical and social thought has undergone a change beyond recognition.

The Hindu thinkers who followed the "monistic" trends in Hinduism were surely very concerned with the uplift of India and chiefly the Hindu society from its moral and social degradation. They found in the supreme advaitic truth "*tat tvam asi*" thou art that i. e. thou art in truth the Supreme, the ultimate foundation for man's effort to love and serve others. Love your neighbour as yourself is a Christian principle. For the Neo-Advaitins love of the neighbour is founded on the fact that the reality of the neighbour and one's own reality are identical<sup>24</sup>. Love does

<sup>23</sup> GANDHIJI writes: "I was confirmed in my opinion that religion and morality were synonymous." "Morality is the basis of things and truth is the substance of all morality." "Morals, ethics, and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion, is like a house built upon sand. A religion divorced from morality is like sounding brass good only for making noise and breaking heads. Morality includes truth, *ahimsā* and continence. Every virtue that mankind has practised is referable to and derived from these three fundamental virtues. Non-violence and continence are again derivable from Truth, which for me is God" (N. B. SEN, op. cit., p. 155f.).

<sup>24</sup> VIVEKANANDA says: "We have always heard it preached, 'Love one another'. What for? That doctrine was preached, but the explanation is here. Why should I love every one? Because they and I are one — There is this oneness, this solidarity of the whole universe. From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings that ever lived — all have various bodies, but one soul." (*Complete Works* Vol. II. pp 414—415).



not imply alterity but identity. Thinkers like VIVEKANANDA and RADHAKRISHNAN preach with great eloquence the need of a spiritual and moral renewal of the world.

### *Morality and the Re-interpretation of old Concepts:*

Since morality and social concern imply freedom, dignity of the individual etc., it became necessary for many of these thinkers to understand anew the traditional Hindu concepts like *karma*, transmigration, and caste. For them *Karma* today means freedom and determinism that rules human life; caste is nothing but occupational differences and transmigration the law of retribution<sup>25</sup>. They are at the same time at pains to show that these are truths quite consonant with modern science.

### *World and History:*

Another point of great interest is the change that modern and contemporary Hinduism has undergone in its views on the reality and value of the world and history. Ancient and classical Hinduism did not place great value on the reality of the world. In fact the dominant advaitic illusionism affected not merely the advaitic school, but also to some extent infected other schools. It is a well known fact that India in her earlier eras did not produce accurate, substantiated and factual history. India was the land of myths and legends. For the Hindus of earlier periods what mattered was the spirit, untouched by matter and time. The spirit remained unsullied and untouched by the historical process like the lotus leaf untouched by water though immersed in it. At the same time the Hindus lived and thought too much in accordance with

For RADHAKRISHNAN '*Jñāna*' the seeing through the veil of *māyā* is the spiritual destiny of man. It is something more than ethical goodness, though it cannot be achieved without it ("*Easter Religion and Western Thought*" p. 94) RADHAKRISHNAN and all the modern Hindu thinkers admit the need of morality in the human quest for the vision of the Supreme. Even Neo-Advaitins with RADHAKRISHNAN accept: "The metaphysical truth of the oneness of Brahma, does in any way prejudice the validity of the ethical distinction on the empirical plane" ("*Indian Philosophy*" Vol. II. p. 621). Thus, though ethics is indispensable and very significant in man's ascent towards the spiritual vision, yet they believe that it is ultimately transcended. For them the religious plane which is the true spiritual plane is not reducible to the ethical. Ethics is the realm of the good; Religion is the realm of the Universal Consciousness, God, the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Here we can see the great difference between RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY and GANDHIJI on the one hand and the Neo-Advaitins on the other. For the former religion meant morality. For the latter religion is Spirit-consciousness. But in spite of their affirmation that the 'liberated' *Jīva* (*jīva-mukta*) is beyond good and evil, they do not countenance the idea that such a soul is or can be immoral.

<sup>25</sup> Such reinterpretation can be found in every work of RADHAKRISHNAN, HIRIYANA, T. M. P. MAHADEVAN etc.



the rhythm and necessity of nature. Unless one can separate himself from Nature, experience his freedom as transcending the necessity of nature, transforming it, and bringing newness into the predictability of Nature's rhythm, we cannot conceive history. In the traditional Hindu view man is more "historiatum" than "historians"<sup>26</sup>.

Contact with Western thought and Christianity in general and the existential experience of the struggle for independence and social progress in particular have brought in a deep sense of the reality of the world and its value, a feeling for the concrete multiple realities and meaningfulness of history. The Advaitic theory of illusoriness and sublatibility of the world and the general Hindu concept that man's final duty is to escape from this world were found to be insufficient basis for India's struggle for freedom<sup>27</sup>. The uniqueness of the individual, his change in permanence and his relatedness to others and to the world could not be left aside. Science and technology brought home to the Hindu thinker the value of the multiple material realities. Again the classical Hindu views which places man on a continuous line with Nature and thought of him more as a process than as the agent and director of that process had to be changed. Today's Hindu thinkers speak of man's freedom and responsibility, the centre of man's personality transcending groups and caste. Each person has a dignity and a worth irrespective of caste, colour or sex.

Modern thinkers taking up the old Hindu evolutionary theories have tried to interpret history as the evolution of the Spirit. Each individual, society and the whole world are nothing but the evolutive manifestations of the Spirit and history is the return of the manifest into the ultimate integration and unity of the Spirit. AUROBINDO, TAGORE and RADHAKRISHNAN and other Neo-Vedantic thinkers subscribe to some form or other of evolutionary philosophy<sup>28</sup>.

Though history is a new dimension added to traditional Hindu thought, yet most of the modern Hindu thinkers are reluctant to take history

<sup>26</sup> On the Hindu concept of History: See Dr S. J. SAMARTHA: "The Hindu view of History" CISRS 1959; M. M. THOMAS, "Gospel and the History of India" in *Religion and Society*, Vol. 13, 1966, p. 34 ff).

<sup>27</sup> All the Neo Advaitins understand the classical concept 'māyā' not as illusion but as relative reality. In his Fragments of a Confession, RADHAKRISHNAN writes: "This world is not an illusion it is not nothingness, for it is willed by God and therefore is real. Its reality is radically different from the being of the Absolute-God. The Absolute alone has non-created divine reality; all else is dependent, created reality. This is the significance of 'māyā'" p. 41. This certainly sounds like Scholasticism. But the original advaitic idea of māyā is not exactly the same as RADHAKRISHNAN makes it out to be.

<sup>28</sup> VIVEKANANDA for example tries to understand and explain Jesus Christ within the context of the evolution of the universal Spirit (Christ the Messenger). In fact the greatest 'evolutionary' thinker of modern India is AUROBINDO GHOSE. He follows the descent-ascent pattern of Plotinus, in which the Spirit and the One (both are identical) have priority over Matter and the Many.



seriously into the area of religion. According to most of them a religion cannot be founded on historical facts, or centered round historical persons. Universal principles are the source and rallying points of a religion that wants to embrace the whole of the humanity<sup>29</sup>.

Even a person like GANDHI so concerned with the concrete and the multiple used to say „I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived and that what was narrated in the Gospels was the figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be valid" (*The Message of Jesus* p. 35). Surely none of the great modern thinkers question the historicity of Jesus. But all feel that in the field of religion, history as understood in the West should not be too much insisted upon. The relation between "principle and person", the uniqueness of history and the all pervasiveness of principle' is one of the chief philosophical problems with which Indians especially Christians are today grappling.

### *Union with the Universal Spirit:*

Among the many world views India has produced in her long history, the West may be acquainted with the monistic, illusory ideas of *Advaita* and the more theistic-realistic world view of the great devotional teachers (Bhaktas). But there is another, which in a mystic vision sees the interconnection of all things, the indissoluble union yet distinction of the finite and infinite, the golden thread running through both and the reciprocity and duality that exist between the World and God. Hence reality is shot through with joy and love. Man forms at once a manifestation of the infinite and an individual unit capable of loving and enjoying in the very bosom of the universal spirit. TAGORE is the great representative of this thought of distinction in unity, and reciprocity in duality<sup>30</sup>. He writes: "Truth is to realize one's unity with the entire universe, to merge the individual soul into the universal soul. Sin is not mere action, but it is an attitude to life which takes for granted that our goal is the finite, that our self is the ultimate truth and that we are not

<sup>29</sup> M. N. ROY (1887—1954) is a very interesting thinker. His radical humanism is worth studying even today, given the situation in the country.

<sup>30</sup> DEVADAS NALINI, '*Svami Vivekananda*' CISRS, Bangalore, 1968 p. 214 ff

<sup>31</sup> R. TAGORE (1861—1941) was an eminent representative of the new Indian Humanism. He wanted to establish a harmony between the culture of the Orient and the Occident. For this purpose mankind needed a religion beyond all narrow, precise beliefs, a religion based on the beauty and harmony of the universe, on human equality and on the progress of men. He dreaded putting limits to man and to his quest. He rejected provincialism and nationalism in every sphere of human life. His great ambition was to see man as an effective expression of God's universality and joy and yet like the self-limiting God to be responsible and re-restrained in the exercise of freedom.



all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence" (quoted by ZÄHNER in *Hinduism*, p. 253).

### *New Methods and Attitudes:*

What new methods and attitudes were produced in modern and contemporary Hindu thought by India's contact with West? The question is very vast. Yet with a certain accuracy we can give a rather general answer to this question. From the time of RAM MOHAN ROY because of the very religious, social and political situation in the country, *comparative method* became all pervading at various levels of thought. Religio-philosophical ideas were studied from the point of view of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism were also not neglected. Later on this already vast field was widened to include the religions of China. Even today comparative method is pursued with great earnestness though very often quite a few of the thinkers show very superficial knowledge of other religions.

From the West, India, has learnt the *historical method*. European studies on Indology has taught the Hindu the importance of an historical approach in the study of ideas. Very often this historical approach lacks a critical sense. This is mostly because many Hindus have still not freed themselves from a defense mentality. Christian missionary criticism of Hindu tenets has been so violent and unreasonable in the past that even now many thinkers are interested in showing to the West that their religion is equal or superior to Christianity. This defensive mentality may be seen in facile comparisons, and uncritical equations at every level of thought.

The *rationalistic-scientific* method and the resultant mentality can be seen in almost every modern Hindu thinker. RAM MOHAN ROY's philosophy of religion is very much the result of the influence of 18th century rationalistic Deism of England. The *Brahma Samāj* resolved that Reason and Nature should be considered the source of all Truth. Among Hindu thinkers there is a general tendency to look down upon theology, which according to them is nothing but unreasonable dogmatism and to present Hinduism and Hindu thought as philosophy. Rationalistic-scientific methods and attitudes may be seen also in the rejection of the Hindu myths and legends and in the earnest efforts made by the educated Hindus to reinterpret traditional concepts in accordance with the demands of science and reason.

Others, more faithful to Hindu tradition pleaded for the capacity in the conscious being to intuit immediately the infinite and to enter into communion with the universal Spirit. From a Western point of view their attitude may seem contradictory. On the one hand they insist on the need of testing and experimenting with every truth, including religious ones and they extol the power and range of reason. On the other



hand they would accept the Spirit as intuitive and unitive beyond the reach of all the functions of reason i. e. analysis and synthesis.

The final purpose of the comparative, historical and rational-scientific methods is the "mobilisation of the wisdom of the world, the evolution of ideals, habits and sentiments which would enable us to build up a world community like in a co-operative commonwealth".

In India thought always wanted to be integral and synthetic, all embracing yet keeping the traditional values. This is particularly true of modern Hindu thought. In its search after a theoretical basis for the building up of a modern India it has tried to reach out to all the thought systems surrounding and influencing it. But in the process of the discovery of the past, reinterpretation, assimilation and synthesis, modern Hinduism has been to a great extent busy with immediate practical questions. Modern Hindu thought in the areas of (a) philosophy of religion, (b) morality, (c) social concern, (d) reality and history of the world, (e) methods and attitudes has constructed world views accepting insights from various sources and re-interpreting old ideas. Whether the world view so obtained is logical, philosophically and historically valid from a critical angle reaching down to the roots of reality is not a problem with which many of our thinkers are bothered.

If the solution is immediately satisfying, then, it shows the truth of the solution and of Hinduism. In the years to come, when the defensive mentality of the Hindus will have disappeared, we will be forced once again to rethink present day trends in the light of India's past and search for solutions which touch the roots of reality. But for the present we can only say that Indian thought is in a transitional state, embodying great possibilities for the future. Given the historical and geographical situation of India, and the socio-cultural situation prevailing in the country, we have sufficient grounds to hope that a new synthetic world and a more universal world-view are in the making.