

DEFENCE OF HINDU SOCIETY

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Ch 1 - The Situation at Present

In an earlier series, *Hindu Society under Siege*, I had dealt with the forces which threaten Hindu society, and are striving to throttle it out of existence with aid and abetment from their international allies.

I undertook, at that time, to write another series regarding the steps which Hindu society should take in order to break out of the siege, and snatch the initiative from its sworn enemies.

I have delayed this second series deliberately. Firstly, I wanted to watch and weigh the reactions from the readers of the first series. Secondly, the more I thought over the subject, the more diffident I grew about my own competence to deal with it adequately.

The response from the readers has been positive. I have received many letters of appreciation from Hindus residing in all parts of the country as well as abroad, and belonging to all sections of society and age groups. Most of them have congratulated me for articulating, in clear and concrete terms, what they themselves have felt instinctively and for a long time.

A few scholars and journalists who have never been known for their sympathy for Hinduism or Hindu causes have, however, remarked caustically that I have “failed to frighten them”. Some other birds of the same feather have dived deeper and referred to my “mentality” rather than refute my facts or demolish my logic.

It was far from my intention to frighten any one, far less the Hindu society which I aspire to serve. But [our hand-to-mouth scholars and journalists have only a number of shibboleths up their sleeves](#). If one says that some events

and trends are pregnant with bright possibilities, they dismiss him as a “dreamer”. On the other hand, if one draws attention to dangers that are maturing, they attack him as an “alarmist”. What they always refuse to do is to join a serious debate on any subject. And yet they strut around with superior airs as if they know all the answers. Most of the time these superior airs hide only stark ignorance, mental sloth, and moral indifference. I will not, therefore, enter into an argument with this tribe.

MY DIFFIDENCE

My diffidence, however, is an altogether different matter. Defence of a living and complex entity like a society is no easy task. It needs a sure touch which has to be sympathetic at the same time. A defence which does not take into account the spiritual, moral, and cultural aspirations embodied in and expressed by a society, can endanger rather than energize it.

This diffidence is doubly warranted in the case of a vast and variegated society such as the Hindu society, the like of which has been seen only rarely in human history, at least not on this scale. It is perhaps presumptuous on my part to deal with a subject which can be handled adequately and wholesomely only by sages, seers, saints, and visionaries. At the end of this exercise, I may only prove the old adage that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

Hindu society has grown and shaped itself in the vision of Vyas and Valmiki, Manu and Yajnavalkya, Narada and Vashishth, and a hundred other exponents of Sanatana Dharma in all its dimensions and dynamics.

Hindu society has been inspired through the ages by such mighty shastras as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, the Jainagam, the Tripitak, the various Yog shastras, the Vani of Siddhas and Sants, and the devotional outpourings of Alvars and Nayanars.

Hindu society has been defended, during its days of distress, by such high-souled heroes as Chandragupta, Skandagupta, Vikramaditya, Yashodharman, Bapa Rawal, Jaypal, Bhojdev, Prithiviraj, Prataprudra, Vir Pandya, Harihar and Rana Sanga.

Hindu society has fought a long-drawn-out struggle for freedom against Islamic invaders under the leadership of such veterans as Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Maharaja Surajmal, Banda Bairagi, Lokmanya Tilak, Veer Savarkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sardar Patel.

Hindu society has been reawakened and reformed by such visionaries as Bankim Chandra, Maharshi Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath, and Subramanya Bharati.

It is small wonder, therefore, that I feel like an intruder in this august field. No one is more aware than myself of the limitations of head and heart from which I suffer. Adapting a metaphor from Kalidasa, I can state my case in the following sloka:

*kva dharmā-prabhavah tantrah,
kva ca alpa-viSayā-matih,
titîrSuh dustaram mohād,
uDupena asmi sāgaram.*

(I am a small mind when it comes to understanding the social system which has been shaped by Dharma; it is only in a fit of folly that I am attempting to cross the great ocean by means of a ramshackle raft.)

BUT MY HEART BLEEDS

But **my heart bleeds when I see this great society being attacked by sheer barbarians whose only weapon is either a criminal theology masquerading as religion, or a materialist dogma sustained by the lowest in human nature, or a phoney modernism parroting the latest slogans**

from the West. My mind is deeply disturbed when I witness the leaders of this great society going on the defensive in the face of wanton aggression from inhuman ideologies whose only stock in-trade is self-righteous spite.

I fail to understand the selective journalism which spotlights *only* the atrocities on Harijans when statistics go to show that caste Hindus provide many more victims to violence in our countryside, which plays up *only* stories of bride-burning without caring to find out what is happening to old parents in many modern homes under the spell of an imported culture which places a premium on what is described as youth, which accuses Hindu organisations of aggression in every communal strife without investigating the hard facts about provocation from the so-called minorities, and which, in short, replaces serious debate on every subject with a few mindless clichés - reactionary and progressive, right and left, capitalist and socialist, revivalist and modern, communal and secular, and so on.

OPENNESS OF HINDU SOCIETY

History stands witness that Hindu society has never refused to listen to those of its critics who have had the good of this society at heart. This society has always accepted every well-intentioned advice, and tried its best to reform and renew itself. This society has always hanged its head in shame before every well-deserved reprimand, and done a penance in good time, provided the reprimand has come from those whose credentials are not in doubt.

Hindu society has never been a closed society which catches cold at the very first whiff of a wind from outside. It has never been a fundamentalist fraternity parroting the pontifications of self-appointed prophets, or burning the entire incense of its reverence at the altar of ridiculous revelations, or ruling out every rational and reflective

discussion of its dogmas. It has never been a regimented flock grovelling in an orgy of sinfulness which can be washed only by the blood of God's only-begotten son, or waiting helplessly for fiats from God's vice-regent on earth.

On the contrary, Hindu society has been the meeting point as well as the melting pot of as many spiritual visions as the human psyche is capable of springing up spontaneously. It has been a willing and welcoming platform for as many seers, sages, saints, and mystics as have responded to the deeper stirrings in the human soul. It has been a repository of as many metaphysical points of view as human reason can render in human language. And it has been a vast laboratory for as many cultural, social, economic, and political experiments as human nature in its widest range can carry out and cope with.

A PAINFUL SIGHT

It is, therefore, a painful sight that the spokesmen of some puny and petrified ideologies should be pointing accusing fingers at Hindu society, and that this society should fail to muster sufficient self-confidence to repel the attack. Hindu society never tries to tick them off in good time with the stem warning they fully deserve. It has never asked them, "Who the hell are you?" It has never told them, "Go and get lost or, better still, do a bit of introspection. You are blind with beams in both your eyes, and yet you have the cheek to raise a hue and cry about a mere mote in one of mine. Here is some sound advice for you. Stop telling lies about me, lest I be forced to tell the truth about you."

What is worse, a brood of professional Hindu-baiters has tried and tested an armoury of cheap gibes - polytheism, pantheism, idolatry, brahmanism, obscurantism, revivalism, fundamentalism, communalism, and the rest - and discovered to its great glee that the gibes hurt. It is a sorry spectacle indeed that this society should take these gibes as

well-deserved reproaches for its own good, and indulge in an orgy of breast-beating at the behest of every Hindu-baiter. The sworn enemies of Hindu society have made a great game out of some scare-words in order to keep Hindu society on the defensive, and go on drawing apology after apology from the spokesmen of this society, day in and day out.

THE BROOD OF HINDU-BAITERS

Here we have the inheritors of some blood-soaked bigotries holding aloft the flag of monotheism, and denouncing Hindu ways of worship as polytheism and idolatry. Hindu society has yet to scan the scriptures of these criminal creeds, and have a close look at their prophets, saviours, and saints. The day Hindu society does that, these creeds will beat a hasty retreat, and know not how to defend their dark doctrines and horrid heroes.

Here we have the erstwhile traffickers in slave trade trumpeting about “human brotherhood” and “social equality”, and brushing aside the whole of Hindu society as a beehive of Brahmin domination, caste discrimination, degradation of women, bonded child labour, and what not. Hindu society has yet to review the matrix of their societies, and expose the true character of “human brotherhood” and “social equality” from the annals of their remote as well as recent history. The day Hindu society does that, the “human brotherhood” will give up its bark, and the “social equality” shed its self-righteousness.

Here we have the salesmen of a “proletarian revolution” denouncing Hindu society as primitive, feudal, semi-colonial, capitalist, and full of class oppression in all stages and forms. Hindu society has yet to peep into their “proletarian paradise”, and raise the curtain on a vast salve empire sustained by mass slaughter and ceaseless terror. The day Hindu society does that, the socialist swearology will

lose its sting, and know not how to hide the horrible scene.
[1]

Here we have the minions of a mercenary culture dishing out lectures on individual freedom, rule of law, parliamentary democracy, secular state, human rights, rate of growth, distribution of prosperity, abolition of poverty, and arrest of population explosion. This imported culture frowns at the “fundamental failures of the Hindu social system” and the “hurdles on the path of progress presented by the Hindu cultural milieu”. They advocate “rapid modernization” of Hindu society in the image of this or that Western model. Hindu society has yet to expose this pompous priestcraft patronized by foreign foundations, multinationals, secret services, and defence departments of the West, and place on public view what is hidden behind its pretentious verbiage.

The day Hindu society does that it will show that their notion of individual freedom does not function beyond a small class of the English-educated fraternity; that their rule of law provides justice only for those who can pay the price; that their parliamentary democracy is a game of multiplying grievances in the minds of people who are then manipulated by self-seeking politicians in a ruthless pursuit of power; that their secular state is a promoter of separatism among the so-called minorities some of which have been artificially carved out of the Hindu society itself; that their human rights mean the right of plain criminals to terrorize innocent citizens; that their rate of growth really refers to the growth of their own bank balances besides what they themselves bemoan as black money; that their distribution of prosperity means distribution of the better and bigger jobs among themselves; that their abolition of poverty means sweeping the mass destitution under the carpet of doctored statistics; and that their arrest of population explosion works out towards reducing the Hindus to a minority in the only

Hindu homeland. As regards their Western models, all of them are sick with rising curves of crime, with boredom bred by excess of hedonism, and with pollution at all levels - physical, psychological, psychic, and spiritual - produced by hyper-industrialism and soulless commercialism.

Here we have some two-faced secularists who try to impress Western audiences by talking glibly about Indian yoga and mysticism, Indian schools of philosophy, Indian panorama of sciences, Indian styles of music and dance, Indian languages and literatures, and the Indian genius for unity in diversity; but who go into uncontrollable tantrums if someone tells them that what they are taking pride in is the Hindu cultural heritage, or describes India as the Hindu homeland. The same secularists not only do not object but also approve and applaud when some of this cultural heritage is credited to Islam, or when visiting VIPs from Islamic countries refer to India as the “second largest Muslim country”. These are the people who have fashioned India’s foreign policy in a manner which makes India look like the leader of an aggressive Islamic bloc rather than a peaceful nation pledged to non-alignment and friendship for all.

Hindu society has yet to affirm that all this spiritual, cultural, philosophical, and scientific heritage is Hindu, and that no one who is ashamed of being named a Hindu has a right to take pride in it. Hindu society has yet to proclaim that **India has always been and will always remain a Hindu homeland**, and that **people who fail to come to terms with Hindu society and culture have no place in this country**. Hindu society has yet to point out that **the only contribution of Islam has been the ruination of this country in medieval times and Partition with wide-spread bloodshed in the recent period**, and that projection of Pan-Islamism in India’s foreign policy is neither sanctioned nor supported by the

Hindu masses who have no illusions about Islam, or Islamic culture, or Islamic causes, or Islamic countries.

THE FAILURES OF HINDU SOCIETY

Hindu society has so far failed on all these fronts because it has failed to see the closed creeds and criminal ideologies for what they are. It has been suffering from self-forgetfulness, and has been taken in by the self-righteous slogans raised by these creeds and ideologies. It has tried to ransack its own records in search of matching prescriptions. In the process, Hindu society has been yielding ground to wanton aggression all along the line.

Christianity and Islam have only to raise the slogan of monotheism as opposed and supposedly superior to polytheism, and Hindu thinkers go out in search of a similar monotheism in Hindu shastras. At the same time, Hindu scholars line up quotations from the same shastras which are seemingly denunciatory of polytheism and image-worship. The thinkers and the scholars seldom stop to see that the monotheistic creeds are creations of the outer and the lower levels of the human mind, and that nothing which is prescribed by their criminal theologies can have a place in the shastras of Sanatan Dharma which have their source in the highest reaches of the human soul.

So also in the case of the Christian claim of "social service", or the Islamic claim of "human brotherhood", or the Communist claim of "social equality", or the modernist claim of "democracy" and "secularism", etc. Hindu scholars keep busy marshalling quotations from their own shastras in support of similar ideas, or citing examples from Hindu history of those who put such ideas into practice. The wealth of Hindu spirituality, philosophy, culture, history, and society thus goes on getting weighed in a balance which is tilted against it from the very start. It is small wonder that

the entire Hindu heritage is found wanting in the final assessment.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF DEFENCE

The first principle which Hindu society has to observe while preparing its defence is that it will stop processing and evaluating its own heritage in terms of ideas and ideals projected by closed creeds and pretentious ideologies. On the contrary, Hindu society will henceforward process and evaluate the heritage of these creeds and ideologies in terms of its own categories of thought, and find out the real worth of Christian, Islamic, Communist, and Modernist claims.

The first need of the hour, therefore, is for Hindus to become aware of the fundamentals of their own faith (Hindu Spirituality), the premises on which their own society has evolved (Hindu Sociology), and the vicissitudes which their own society has experienced in the march of Time (Hindu History). These are the three domains in which the Hindu image has been distorted to the utmost by imperialist thought systems, resulting in a deep sense of inferiority from which Hindus suffer at present.

Hindus have become devoid of self-confidence simply because they have ceased to take legitimate, well-informed, and conscious pride in their spiritual, cultural, and social heritage.

This lack of pride has led to a serious weakening of the Hindu psyche. Hindus are no more prepared to stand up and fight for anything, because they no more believe or feel that anything is worth fighting for, not at least to the bitter end.

The sworn enemies of Hindu society have taken advantage of this enervation of the Hindus. They feel instinctively that threats coupled with some show of violence are sure to frighten the Hindus out of their wits,

and make them yield almost anything including precious parts of their homeland.

Footnotes:

[1] Since I wrote this para in 1983, the “*proletarian paradise*” has been exposed as the worst hell known to human history.

Ch 2 - Sanatana Dharma versus Prophetic Creeds

The one Vedic verse which modern Hindus quote most frequently is the third quarter (*charan*) of Rigveda 1.164.46 – *Ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti* (it is of One Existence that the wise ones speak in diverse ways).

The full mantra reads as follows:

*“Indram mitram varunam agnim ahuh,
atho divyah sa suparno garutman,
ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti,
agnim yamam matarisvanam ahuh”.*

(They hail Him as Indra, as Mitra, as Varuna, as Agni, also as that divine and noble-winged Garutman. It is of One Existence that the wise ones speak in diverse ways, whether as Agni, or as Yama, or as Matarishvan.)

Why do modern Hindus quote only one-fourth and not the whole *mantra*? Why do they forget or refuse to cite the rest of it, or at least consider three-fourth of it as irrelevant or superfluous? And why do they assign a disproportionate weight to just one word, *ekam*, out of the five words which comprise what they consider to be the weighty one-fourth?

A careful reading of the full *mantra*, particularly in the context of the *sukta* of which it is a part, leaves no doubt that the three-fourth which is ignored is not at all a repetition or paraphrase of the one-fourth which is presented. On the contrary, that three-fourth is as significant, if not more, as

the one-fourth when we take into account the spirit of the Veda from which the citation has been selected. In fact, the one-fourth which is flourished so forcefully remains meaningless unless it is read with the rest of the *mantra*.

Why do modern Hindus maim in this manner a *mantra* from what they hold as their most sacred Shastra? What do they want to prove by this wanton misrepresentation of an entire and ancient ethos in spirituality, philosophy and culture?

The answer becomes obvious as soon as we look into the psychology behind the citation.

HINDU PSYCHOLOGY OF SURRENDER

Firstly, modern Hindus want to stake a claim for admission to the exclusive club of *Monotheism* maintained by Christianity and Islam. Hindus here are out to convince the monopolises of monotheism that the earliest Hindu Shastra, the Rigveda, also supports and sanctions what is supposed to be the *summum bonum* of religion according to Christian and Muslim theology, or its apotheosis according to the modern Western "Science" of Comparative Religion. At the same time, there is an almost pathetic appeal to the monopolises of Monotheism that they should not be appalled by the multiplicity of gods and goddesses in the post-Vedic Hindu pantheon, and that they should judge Hinduism in terms of the "original aspiration" rather than in terms of the latter-day "aberration".

Secondly, modern Hindus are pleading before the custodians of the "only true" creeds that Hinduism is only a different way of stating the same truths which were revealed to the founders of the former. In effect, Hindus are praying with folded hands, "Please do not denounce Hinduism as polytheism, pantheism, idolatry, paganism, and *kufir*. Please ignore the differences of language and metaphor, and attend

to the fundamental spirit which informs your faiths as well as ours.”

The Hindu psychology throughout this exercise is one of apology, of shamefacedness, of defence against what is initially conceded as a valid criticism of the idioms and forms in which Hindu spirituality has been spelled out in its shastras. This is a disastrous psychology. It leads to a supine surrender on the one hand, and to a slavish invitation on the other.

The psychology of surrender is best symbolised by the well-intentioned Hindu slogan of *sarva-dharma-sambhav* when it is extended indiscriminately to Christianity and Islam. Hindus are shouting themselves hoarse in stressing the identity of Brahma with Abraham, of Manu with Noah, of Rama with Rahim, of Krishna with Karim, of Kashi with Kaba, and so on. But the monopolies of Monotheism remain far from mollified. The orthodox among the monotheists dismiss with contempt the Hindu claim of sharing the same faith with them fundamentally. The kinder (or craftier) among the monotheists take pity on this plight of poor Hindus, and invite them to renounce their nebulous, if not counterfeit, Monotheism in favour of the fully developed doctrine.

HINDU PSYCHOLOGY OF IMITATION

The psychology of imitation is manifest in modern Sikh scholars who have, over the years, forced the message of the great Gurus into monotheistic moulds. They have almost succeeded in eclipsing, more or less completely, the Upanishadic spirituality of the *nirguna* saints among whom Guru Nanak occupies the front rank. They take immense pride in equating the *Ek Omkar* with *Allah*, the *Adigranth* with *Al-Kitab*, the succession of Sikh gurus with the succession of prophets in which Guru Gobind Singh is the last like Muhammad, and the injunctions of the last Guru

regarding outer symbols with similar injunctions of the Sunnah.

A manifestation of the Islamic spirit could not lag far behind, once Sikhism started Islamicizing itself. It has progressed on the path of a similar exclusiveness, a similar self-righteousness, a similar self-aggrandizement, a similar use of terror in the service of religion, and a similar mob mentality vis-à-vis internal dissent, as have characterised Islam throughout its blood-soaked career. Sikhism is fast moving out of its spiritual moorings, and becoming a politics of power which Islam has always been.

THE WAY OUT

Hindu society will never be able to combat or come to terms with the “only true” creeds like Christianity and Islam, so long as its spokesmen continue to clothe Hindu spirituality in concepts borrowed from Monotheism. The slogan of *sarva-dharma sambhav* will fail to make any dent in the armour of Christian and Muslim animosity, so long as Hindus fail to recapture the spirit and the context in which this slogan had been evolved.

What, then, is the way out?

Firstly, Hindus have to reawaken to the sublime spirituality of their own Sanatana Dharma, and base their evaluation of other religions and cultures on its pristine premises. That will give them the requisite self-confidence to counter all misinformed or malicious criticism.

Secondly, Hindus have to study and scrutinise the sources from which the “only true” creeds derive their inspiration. That will invest Hindus with an insight into why the monopolises of Monotheism have always been so impervious to appeals for goodwill and understanding among different sections of the human family.

The fundamental difference between the Sanatana Dharma family of faiths on the one hand, and the “only true” creeds like Christianity and Islam on the other, can be drawn out in the form of a dialogue between a Soviet citizen and a citizen from a free society. The story may not be literally true. But it is illustrative of what can happen to human mind when it is deprived of freedom, and is regimented by blind beliefs imposed from outside.

A FREE SOCIETY VERSUS A CLOSED FRATERNITY

A Soviet diplomat arrived in the capital of a democratic country on a commercial mission on behalf of his government. The mission was to continue for several months, and the hotel in which the diplomat had to stay immediately on his arrival was rather expensive by Soviet standards. Next day, the diplomat approached the enquiry counter of the hotel and asked the lady in attendance, “Where can I find your Housing Committee?”

The lady could not understand his question and asked him to elaborate. The diplomat explained, “You see, I cannot stay for long in this expensive place. I want to apply to the appropriate authority for allotment of adequate but cheaper accommodation.”

The lady picked up the telephone directory, opened it at a particular page, and told the diplomat, “Sorry, we have no such committee in this city or anywhere else in this country. You have to go to an estate agent who will show you all kinds of accommodation and negotiate for the one you approve of finally. The leading estate agents are listed on this page. You may phone to any one of them for an appointment.”

The diplomat was visibly annoyed. He shoved aside the telephone directory and shot his next question, “And where can I find your Food Committee?”

The lady informed him that there was no such committee either. The diplomat was now furious. He shouted, "How and where, then, do I buy the food which I will need every day? I must have the necessary permit."

The lady assured him patiently that he needed no permit, and that he could go into any of the hundreds of stores to buy whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted.

By now the diplomat was in tantrums. He taunted, "I suppose you have no Transport Committee either?"

The lady kept her cool and said with a smile, "Why, there are all those taxies standing and cruising all over this city. You can hire any one of them at any time of the day or night and go wherever you please."¹

The diplomat gave up in utter disgust. There was sadness writ large on his face. He shook his head several times and said to himself, "Very bad! Very bad indeed! There is no system in this country. It is a chaos all around. I feel lost."

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM VERSUS RELIGIOUS REGIMENTATION

A follower of closed creeds like Christianity and Islam finds himself in a similar situation when faced with the spiritual freedom that is Sanatana Dharma. He discovers very soon that Sanatana Dharma does not fit into any of the mental moulds to which he is wedded, and which he seeks in other systems of thought. He is most likely to shake his head in utter disgust and feel lost like our diplomat from a closed social system stationed in the metropolis of a free society. An encounter between a monotheist and an informed follower of Sanatana Dharma is, therefore, sure to develop along similar lines.

The first point in which the followers of closed creeds take great pride is the historicity of the only saviour or the last prophet who was sent by or who received the "full and final revelation" from the "one and only true god." The first question which such a faithful will put to a student of

Sanatana Dharma, therefore, is bound to be as follows: “Who is your only saviour or your last prophet? Where was he born and brought up? Where and when and before which apostles or companions did he teach, preach, and reveal?”

A student of Sanatana Dharma cannot but reply as follows: “The very concept of a historical saviour or prophet is foreign to Sanatana Dharma. We do not concede the monopoly of spiritual truth or moral virtue to any historical person, howsoever great or highly honoured. Everyone has to be one’s own saviour, one’s own prophet. One has to discover the spiritual truths for one’s own self, if that truth has to have any meaning for one or any validity in one’s life. A truth discovered by someone else cannot become my truth unless I rediscover it for myself. Scriptures and spiritual teachers can be my aids and guides, and may help me in my search for truth. But the truth of which the scriptures speak or which the teachers expound cannot become a truth for me unless it comes alive in my own consciousness, and starts transforming my own life. Moreover, the very historicity in which you take pride is for us the hallmark of the ephemeral and the false. We reject a historical religion as *pauruseya prasthanana*, idiosyncrasies of a particular person, no matter how you hail him. That which was born in history has also died in history. You are showing devotion to what is dead and gone.”

Next, the followers of closed creeds are mighty proud of being as *Ahl-i-Kitab* or the People of the Book. They are sure that the “only true revelation” from the “one and only true god” is contained in the book (*al-kitab*) which was compiled by the apostles of the only saviour or the companions of the last prophet, after the saviour or the prophet had passed away and could speak no more. They believe that nothing can be taken out from or added to this “book” which is supposed to contain the final truth for all time to come. Therefore, the second question which such a faithful will put

to a follower of Sanatana Dharma is as follows: “Which is *the* book in which you believe, or your *al-kitab*?”

A student of Sanatana Dharma is sure to reply as follows: “What for do we need a book? The whole spiritual truth, every shastra, is secret in the human heart. Anyone, anywhere, at any time can have access to the spiritual realm provided one seeks for it sincerely, and prepares oneself for entering it. Many seers and saints have seen it in as many ways, spoken of it and in as many languages and by means of as many metaphors. The Vedas provide one version of it, the Jainagam another, the Tripitak yet another, and so on down to the latest Hindu saint such as Sri Ramakrishna, or the latest Hindu sage such as Raman Maharshi. Different sects of Sanatana Dharma have collected the sayings and songs of different sages and saints in as many books which these sects cherish as their shastras. But these shastras are not at all what you describe as *the* book or *al-kitab*, even by distant definition. Your creed will get lost for good if your the book or *al-kitab* gets lost. The book or *al-kitab* cannot be recovered because the person who preached it or to whom it was revealed is dead and gone. But Sanatana Dharma will lose nothing if all its shastras are lost. All old shastras and many more can be recovered from inside the human heart, where all of them are ultimately enshrined.”

By now the follower of a closed creed is most likely to feel flabbergasted by what he has been brainwashed to regard as blasphemy. The third question which such a faithful will put to a student of Sanatana Dharma is as follows: “You have no only saviour, no last prophet. You have no *al-kitab*. How, then, do you know who is your one and only true god? How do you distinguish this one and only true god from the many false gods which abound all around you?”

At this stage the student of Sanatana Dharma will have to smile and say, “According to our spiritual tradition, testified by a long line of spiritual seekers, the way to God-discovery

is through Self-discovery. As one proceeds on that inner voyage one sees spiritual truths in many forms. None of these forms is false. It is only one's seeking which can falter and lead to one's fall from the path of spiritual progress by insisting that this or that form alone is true. Sanatana Dharma stands squarely for a human becoming God in the process of Self-discovery- *Atman* becoming *Paramatman*, *Purush* becoming *Purushottam*. This is the path of world-discovery as well. The deeper one dives into oneself, the faster one's world gets divinised. One starts seeing God in every human being, in every animal, in every plant, in every stone. One feels free to worship God in any form or in all forms at the same time. One also feel's free not to worship God at all, and to dwell within oneself in spiritual self-delight. Sanatana Dharma, therefore, has no use for a God who makes himself known to mankind through the medium of a saviour or a prophet, or through the pages of *al-kitab* or *the* book. Such a God must always remain external to us, and external to the world in which we live. Such a God does not permit humanhood to grow into Godhood, nor allows this world to get divinised. He has reserved all divinity for himself, and has nothing to spare for his creatures except an abject servitude to his arbitrary commandments conveyed through a saviour or a prophet chosen equally arbitrarily."

The follower of a closed creed now shoots the last arrow in his armoury with what he believes to be deadly effect. He is sure to shout, "You have failed to win the favour of the only saviour or the last prophet by not living a life according to the final commandments of the one and only true God as revealed to his only son or his last prophet in *al-kitab* or the book. How will the only saviour or the last prophet intercede for you on the Day of Judgement, and save you from God's wrath and eternal hell-fire? You cannot say in all seriousness that you are not interested in going to an eternal

heaven full of fair maidens, flowing with milk and honey, and fanned by ever-fragrant breezes.”

A student of Sanatana Dharma will keep his cool and reply as follows: “Sanatana Dharma is not so mean and miserly in deciding human destiny. It gives many lives to every creature. One can start anew from the point where one stopped in one’s previous life. And the process does not cease till a creature has attained perfection and achieved Godhood. Every one is a *bodhisattva* destined to become the Buddha in the course of spiritual seeking. The journey is from darkness and bondage to light and freedom, and not from the sensual pleasures of this world to the sensual orgies of a high heaven. On the other hand, the only hell we know is neither situated outside ourselves, nor at the end of time. The hell is within us - in our greed and gluttony, in our hatreds and infatuations, in our self-righteousness and self-seeking, in our dark drives for power and domination, in our self-love and pursuit of pleasure. The only way out of this hell is through an awakening to the divinity within us, and through dispelling the darkness of ignorance in which we live our mundane lives. The favour or disfavour of a saviour or a prophet can neither catapult us into heaven nor drag us down into hell. A saviour or prophet is absolutely irrelevant to the realm of spiritual progress or retrogression.”

At this point the follower of a closed creed is bound to give up in utter disgust. He is bound to exclaim, “Very bad! Very bad indeed! There is no system in your bewildered beliefs. It is a free for all. What is worse, it is blasphemy against the one and only true God, against the only saviour or the last prophet sent by Him, and against the only true revelation conveyed by Him through a mighty messenger.”

PSYCHOLOGY OF CLOSED CREEDS

A student of Sanatana Dharma can ignore these pronouncements and proceed to examine the “only true” creeds. To start with, he will not judge these creeds for their inner logic or want of it, but instead weigh them on the scales of yogic spirituality systematized by reflective reason. And he will very soon find out that these creeds are not born of a spiritual consciousness at all. On the contrary, they are constructs of the outer mind drawing strength from dark drives of the unregenerate unconscious which Freud and other psychoanalysts have studied and surveyed with some insight.

The one and only true god of these creeds is the embodiment of fear and awe of the dark and the unknown. Their only saviour or last prophet is a father figure in an infantile search for security in a world full of doubts and uncertainties. Their *al-kitab* is a collection of rationalisations mounted upon human passions like self-love, jealousy, vindictiveness, cunning, covetousness, and aggression. Their heaven represents an explosion of the animal hunger for endless sense-pleasures unmixed with or followed by pain. Their hell symbolizes a deep-seated hatred for follow human beings who refuse to bow down before self-appointed messengers of an imaginary almighty.

Hindu society will acquire self-confidence vis-à-vis the “only true” creeds when it recognizes that Sanatana Dharma stands for self-exploration, self-purification, and self-transcendence, while these creeds stand for self-stupefaction, self-righteousness, and self-aggrandizement. The horrible histories of these creeds are running commentaries on the character of their doctrines. Those histories are full of crusades and *jihads*, massacres and genocides, inquisitions and witch-huntings, extinction of the freedom of thought and spiritual aspiration, and imperialist aggression against “infidels” in which the latter’s religion and culture are destroyed, their properties pillaged, their lands

misappropriated, and their men and women and children slaughtered or enslaved. It is a sin to regard them as religion in any sense of the term, and to extend *sambhav* towards their exclusive and intolerant dogmas. One of the tasks of a resurgent Hindu society will be to rescue those people who have been forced or lured into the folds of these crude and cruel creeds.

Footnotes:

¹ This dialogue was written when the Soviet Union was functioning. Now, the Soviet Union is no more. But the point made is still valid.

Ch 3: The Spiritual Centre of Hindu Society

Hindu society has had to go on the defensive against monotheistic creeds masquerading as religion mainly because it has lost consciousness of the spiritual centre round which its religious, cultural and social life has revolved, and which has sustained it through the ages.

Hindu society has failed to fathom the chasm which separates its own sterling spirituality from the “only true” creeds because it has fallen in love with a dead uniformity in place of a living plurality prescribed by its own spiritual centre.

Hindu society will never be able to win the debate with thoughtless theologies unless it rediscovers its own spiritual centre, and holds in its hands the scales of yogic spirituality on which alone all theologies should be weighed for whatever worth they have.

It was an active awareness of its spiritual center which emboldened Hindu society, at the very dawn of its history, to explore all varieties of religious experience, to evolve endless ways of religious worship, to express its

philosophical insights in many metaphysical points of view, and to project its plastic genius in many forms of language, literature and art.

It was an active awareness of its spiritual centre which encouraged Hindu society to experiment with cultural, social, economic, and political pluralism on a scale such as has been unknown to any other human society.

It was an active awareness of this spiritual centre which provided an inner stability to Hindu society in the midst of outer change, and which proved its inexhaustible source of strength in weathering the vicissitudes of worldly fortune.

Hindu awareness of its spiritual centre suffered a steep decline after a long spell of spectacular creativity in all fields of human endeavour. Hindu society also suffered a corresponding decline of its vitality and vigour. Even so the awareness remained sufficiently strong to see Hindu society through a few more storms.

One of these storms was the Islamic invasion which brought death and destruction to large parts of the Hindu homeland. But thanks to the still surviving awareness of its spiritual centre, Hindu society was able to preserve its patrimony in the face of a totalitarian imperialism spreading fire and sword, pillage and rapine for a thousand years.

It was the still surviving awareness of its spiritual centre which enabled Hindu society to stick to its own Gods and Goddesses and to honour its own seers and saints, in the midst of a large-scale desecration and destruction of its temples at the hands of Muslim swordsmen, and harrowing humiliation of its holy men and women by haughty Muslim hoodlums. Some of these swordsmen and hoodlums styled themselves as sultans and sufis, and proclaimed that they had been commissioned by an almighty Allah to spread the latest and the last *ilham* (revelation). But Hindu society

refused to be hoodwinked by the honorifics donned by these disciples of the Devil.

It was the still surviving awareness of its spiritual centre which steeled Hindu society to witness the sacrifice by fire of hundreds of thousands of its daughters who cherished their chastity above every allurements offered by the Islamic marauders. Some of these marauders were known as kings and generals, governors and great dignitaries, qazis and mullahs, living in mansions full of every kind of luxury available in the world at that stage of human history. But few daughters of Hindu society yielded willingly and voluntarily to the amorous advances of these animals masquerading as men.

It was the still surviving awareness of its spiritual center which inspired Hindu society to send hundreds of thousands of its sons into unequal battles and inevitable martyrdom against a militarily superior monster. Countless Hindu heroes courted death in defence of their heritage and honour rather than seek power and pelf in the courts of Muslims swordsmen masquerading as monarchs.

And it was a resurgence of its spiritual centre which rallied Hindu society round a counter-attack which rolled back the Islamic invasion, and wrested victory from a ferocious and formidable foe. At the same time, a victorious Hindu society was prevented by its spiritual centre from being vindictive towards an erstwhile enemy, and extending to him the same treatment which he had meted out to Hindus during the days of his own domination. Muslims could have easily met the same fate in India as they did in Spain, had not this spiritual centre of Hindu society intervened and saved them from a holocaust which the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet have prescribed for defeated adversaries.

Hindu society was humbled once more by another invader who swore by another but a similar closed creed. The Christian missionaries mounted a vicious and well-planned attack on the outer forms as well as the inner core of the Hindu heritage. Hindu awareness of the Hindu spiritual centre revived once more and the Christian attack was not only contained but also reversed. Hindu thought stormed into the strongholds of Christianity in Europe and America. Hindu religion and philosophy lent a helping hand to the revival of humanism and rationalism in the modern West against a fanaticism which had dyed Europe deep with several hundred years of bloodshed.

What is this spiritual centre of Hindu society?

We must first understand quite clearly as to what it is *not*, before we come anywhere near comprehending it in all its dimensions. This negative approach has been rendered necessary because the language of religion has been confused by Christianity and Islam to such an extent that darkness now passes for light, the Devil for the Divine, vice for virtue, and vice versa.

The spiritual centre of Hindu society is not constituted by *the book* or *al-kitab* revealed by an almighty Jehovah or Allah to a Chosen People, through the only saviour or the last prophet, at a particular point in human history. Nor is it a Church or Ummah entrusted with the mission of saving mankind, if need be, by force and fraud. All these formulations of religious doctrine are inspired and sustained by the dark drives of an unregenerate human nature.

THREE SUBLIMITIES OF SANATANA DHARMA

Hindu seers and sages as also Hindu shastras, no matter to what Hindu sect they belong, designate this spiritual centre of Hindu society as Sanatana Dharma. This designation can be loosely translated into English as the

Perennial Philosophy or the Permanent Principle of Sustenance.

Firstly, Sanatana Dharma says that the aspiration for Truth (*Satyam*), Goodness (*Shivam*), Beauty (*Sundaram*), and Power (*aishvarya*) is inherent in every soul, everywhere, and at all times, like the physical hunger of the body for food and drink. The satisfaction of this spiritual aspiration is neither dependent upon, nor waits for, a particular prophet or revelation, as the physical hunger has never been dependent upon, or waited for, a particular pioneer in food production or a particular textbook of food technology. The soul of the spiritual seeker in all ages and among all races of mankind has soared upwards till it has found its true status in its own heights.

Secondly, Sanatana Dharma states that spiritual aspiration cannot come to rest till it overcomes all limitations of human nature, lower as well as higher, and emerges as master of one-self. Simultaneously, one emerges as master of the universe also because human nature, in all its dimensions, is a segment of Universal Nature. One arrives at the end of one's spiritual quest only when, Buddha-like, one can say to oneself: "I have known whatever is to be known; there is nothing more to be known. I have attained whatever is to be attained; there is nothing more to be attained. I have done whatever is to be done; there is nothing more to be done." This is the boundless bounty which flows from becoming a Buddha. This is the mighty meaning of becoming a Mahavira.

Thirdly, Sanatana Dharma promises this supreme fulfilment, this acme of attainment, to every being born in a world brimming with blind forces of Nature, ignorance, evil, suffering, disease, deprivation, and death. The path is summed up in three spiritual steps-self-exploration, self-purification, and self-transcendence. One has to travel inwards and upwards, and reverse the law of human nature

in the raw which is outwards and downwards. This reversal is not brought about by an outer baptism but by an inner opening. The very first perception of the earliest Hindu seers has been - *yatha pinde tatha brahmande* (as in the microcosm, so in the macrocosm), that is, the way to world-discovery is through self-discovery.

The Upanishadic prescription, *atmanam viddhi* (know thyself) is a variation on the same theme. It leads to the same attainment - *aham brahmo'smi* (I am Brahma), *tat tvam asi* (thou art That), and *sah tadasti* (he is That). It is a steep spiritual ascent at the end of which the Atman (self) becomes *Paramatman* (Supreme Self), and the *Purush* (Person) becomes *Purushottam* (Super-person). In the language of Theism, man becomes God.

Here there is no place for an almighty Jehovah or Allah, sitting outside and above the Cosmos, communicating with his creatures through the medium of a privileged historical person, and coercing them through a Holy Roman Emperor or an *Amir-ul-mu'minin* to conform to a closed code of moral and social conduct. Here there is no place for a world-wide warfare between a True One God who has to be wooed and worshipped, and the False Many Gods who have to be disowned and destroyed. Here there is no command for Crusade or *Jihād* by a Church or an Ummah for spreading the "only true creed" at the point of the sword.

Nor is a metaphysical speculation of any sort relevant to this spiritual seeking which has an entirely and intensely practical purpose. The Buddha was so indifferent to metaphysical questions that most of the time he fell silent when he was faced with them. He always repudiated all metaphysical curiosities with the stern rebuke: "How will it avail you if you accept or reject this theoretical postulate or that? The problem is practical. There is all this suffering. The suffering has a cause. And whatever has a cause can be cured. I tell you of the cause, and also of the cure." Patanjali

systematised this curative prescription into a scientific discipline, the system of Yoga, locating all landmarks and signposts along the path in purely psychological terms, without reference to any metaphysical proposition.

One is, therefore, free not to give any name to the Self which seeks the Truth. One is free not to accept the ontological language of *Atman* and *Paramatman*, *Purush* and *Purushottam*. One is free to describe the spiritual experience in cryptic aphorisms or sonorous songs, or to say that it is indescribable and fall silent. It is the discovery and not the description which is significant. All sects of Sanatana Dharma share this discovery in common, and have their starting point in it.

It is this spiritual centre of Hindu society which has been the watershed of many ways of worship, each with its own outer forms; many religious sects, each with its own private and public rituals; many shastras, each with its own language and metaphor; and many metaphysical points of view, each with its own ontology, epistemology, axiology, and ethics. They are like the streams of crystal clear water which spring from the same snow-clad Himalayan heights, which become many rivers as they meander through the plains with many villages, towns and ferries on their banks, and which merge in the same Great Ocean to become one wide spread of water once more.

TRUE AND FALSE UNIVERSALISM

This is the basis of true universalism envisaged by Sanatana Dharma. One is free to take a start according to one's own individual stage of spiritual evolution and preparation (*adhar*), and also free to follow along the curve of one's own cultural moorings, one's own individual inclination and aptitude (*adhikar*). The pace of spiritual progress can be slow or fast, evolutionary or revolutionary, depending upon the drive towards divinity which one feels

within oneself. One is free to choose this form of worship or that, this round of ritual or another, this religious sect or a different one, this philosophy or some other speculation.

Here there is no place for that counterfeit universalism which has only one closed concept of God, one dogmatic designation of the deity, one fixed form of faith, one regimented mode of worship, one rigid code of moral conduct, and one strait-jacket of social culture. Here there is no place for hysterical harangues to conform to the One True God's commandments in the only life one has, and no forced pace by fear of an eternal hell or promise of an eternal heaven. On the contrary, here one can start again after every false step, wander away and wait till the inner call comes again, and resume the journey in as many rebirths as are required to arrive at the ultimate goal of final freedom from bondage.

It is this sterling universalism of its spiritual centre which has sustained Hindu society as a spacious platform for the free play of a large number of spiritual traditions, and for the fullest functioning of a still larger number of religious denominations. Hindu society has never known the religious strife which has characterised the closed creeds throughout their history.

There have been prolonged and many a time heated debates among different Hindu religious sects and Hindu schools of philosophy. Some sects and schools have also used sometime a vituperative language about the precepts or practices or both of some other sects and schools. But there has never been breaking of heads, nor killing of heretics, nor a desecration or destruction of rival shrines or shastras, nor a marshalling of military forces in a war against another religious community, such as has blackened the annals of Christianity and Islam.

Hindu history has known many monarchs who subscribed to this or that particular religious prescription in their private lives. But Hindu history has seldom known a prince who patronized his own sect to the exclusion of others, or persecuted sects other than his own, as has been the standard practice of potentates most highly honoured in Christian and Muslim history.

Hindu society has sent out many saints and sages to distant lands down the ages. But Hindu society has never equipped an armed force to impose its own Gods on other people by fire and sword, as has been done by Christian and Muslim societies whenever they got an opportunity.

There is no sociological explanation for the votaries of the Vedas, the Jains, the Buddhists, the Vaishnavas, the Shaivas, the Shaktas, the Alvars, the Nayanars, the Sikhs, and many other Hindu sects never exchanging blows in pursuit of power, or privilege, or prestige for people of their own persuasion. There is no sociological explanation for several members of the same family subscribing to as many religious doctrines and yet living amicably under the same roof.

There is no political explanation for princes engaged in warfare but never quoting a shastra in support of their defensive or aggressive designs. There is no political explanation for no conqueror casting a covetous eye on any religious place, howsoever rich its coffers may have been in gold and silver and precious stones.

There is no economic explanation for rajas and rich men contributing with even-handed munificence towards the building of rival religious shrines or towards maintaining the monasteries of rival religious orders. There is no economic explanation for every householder extending equal hospitality to monks and mendicants who come to

their doors in multifarious attire, and who invoke for their hosts the blessings of different deities.

It is very often stated by students of Hindu culture that Hindus have a genius for unity in diversity. But Hindus have never claimed to be the Chosen People who are radically different from other members of the human family, either in terms of native propensities or in terms of creative capacity. In fact, Hindus are never tired of repeating that all human beings, in all places and at all times, are similarly constituted, have the same appetites and aspirations, can descend to the same depths and rise to the same heights. In fact, Hindus have always failed to understand why people do not practise religious tolerance, and continue to quarrel over questions of no relevance to spiritual seeking.

The only explanation for this Hindu broad-mindedness, this Hindu spirit of religious tolerance, and this open psyche of the Hindus towards all currents and cross-currents of thought and culture, is to be found in the spiritual centre of Hindu society. It is this spiritual centre which has given to Hindu society a calm and quiet dignity of its own, and a compassion which reaches out equally not only to all members of the human family but also to all elements in the human environment-the insects, the animals, the birds, the creepers, the plants, the trees, the rivers, the oceans, the mountains, and the minerals deposited in the womb of Mother Earth.

Ch 4 Hindu Spirituality versus Monotheism

It is an intuition ingrained in the Hindu psyche to inhabit our entire environment - celestial, physical, vegetable, animal, and human - with innumerable Gods and Goddesses. Some of these divinities are installed in temples as icons, and worshipped with well-defined rituals. Some

others are worshipped as and where they are invoked. Hindu shastras, saints and sages have paid homage to many Gods and Goddesses in many sublime hymns.

The Sky which forms the firmament, and permeates the whole universe as space including the interstices in human and animal and vegetable anatomies, is a great God. It is the abode of all sounds. And it harbours in its vastnesses many other Gods such as the Sun and the Moon and the Stars, and Goddesses such as the Dawn and the Dusk. These celestial Gods and Goddesses are worshipped in their own right, particularly the Sun and the Moon and the Dawn.

The Air which fills the hollow between the sky and the earth, which rages as storm and blows as breeze, and which sustains the respiratory system in all that is alive, is also a great God. It is not visible to the eye but it manifests itself by its power to touch and turn.

The Earth which bears all burdens, which bestows boundless bounties from beneath and above its surface, and which is the symbol of forgiveness and forbearance, is also a great Goddess. The mountains which soar up till they become snow-capped are the abodes of Gods and Goddesses. So are the forests which are full of flowers and fruits and varied wealth. Some creepers and plants and trees are veritable Gods and Goddesses, harkening us to pay our homage to them.

The Water which is clustered in the clouds, which pours down as rain, which flows in rivers and springs, which gets stored up in tanks and lakes and seas and oceans, which showers itself as snow and gets settled as ice on mountain tops, is also a great God. It washes all dirt and slakes all thirst. It nourishes our field crops and our forests. It becomes the sap in all vegetables and fruits, and circulates as blood in all animals and humans. Lakes like the Mansarovar are specially sacred because Gods and Goddesses play their

games in and around them. Rivers like the Ganga and the Godavari are themselves Goddesses.

The Fire which blazes in the sun, which heats up every hearth, and which is stored as energy in all fuels, is also a great God. It manifests itself not only as heat but also as light which shines in the stars, which reveals itself in a riot of colours, which endows everything with form, and which lends vision to every eye. It maintains every metabolism as vital heat without which nothing can remain alive. The Fire God is worshipped daily in the family hearth, is regarded as the ambassador of Gods in every sacrifice, and is a witness to the sanctity of all sacraments.

The birds, the fishes, and the animals are the venerable vehicles of Gods and Goddesses, and are revered as much as their riders. The Garuda is the vehicle of Vishnu, the bull that of Siva, the lion that of Durga, the mouse that of Ganapati, the swan that of Sarasvati, and the owl that of Lakshmi. The horse is yoked in the chariot of Indra as well as that of the Sun. The snake is *nag-devata*. And the cow is sacred above all, a Goddess par excellence.

Nearer home, the mother is a Goddess and the father a God, to be obeyed while they are in their prime and served when they grow old. They are to be remembered with reverence, and their protection is to be sought after they pass away and become *pitris*. The wife who looks after the family welfare, who brings up the children, and who participates in all sacraments, is a Goddess. The Guru who is the repository of wisdom and learning, is also a God to be propitiated with gifts as profuse as one can afford. The Guest who comes to our home by chance is a God deserving of our warmest hospitality. The King who protects us from evildoers and presides over the welfare of his *praja* is also a God.

And so on, the roster is endless. Every family has a *kula-devata*, every community a *jati-devata*, every village a *gram-*

devata, every city a *nagar-devata*, and every region a *janpad-devata*. The Bharatmata who came to be worshipped as *rashtra-devata* in more recent times, and who inspired the national song, *Vande Mataram*, is a projection of the same Hindu psyche which sees a God or a Goddess in everything, everywhere. It is a belief common among Hindus that the Gods and Goddesses worshipped by them add up to thirty-three crores.

The Hindu psyche has always harboured a deep sense of sanctity towards all elements and forces of Mother Nature, in all their forms and transforms. It worships these elements and forces not only outside the human body but also within it. In fact, it sees the human body as a magnificent mansion in building which all these elements and forces of Mother Nature have participated, and feels grateful towards what it greets as great Gods and Goddesses.

What is more significant, this Hindu psyche intimates that as all that is without is also within, all that is within must also be without (*yatha pinde tatha brahmande*). It, therefore, invests everything outside with life, with consciousness, with thought and feeling, and also with will. The inanimate thus becomes animate, the unconscious becomes conscious, the thoughtless becomes thoughtful, the insensitive becomes sensitive, and the inert becomes active.

This power of the Hindu psyche persists till long after a Hindu gets converted to Christianity or Islam, and invites frowns and fierce lectures from the missionary and the mullah. This power of the Hindu psyche is illustrated by the story of a Hindu lady in Kerala who got converted to Christianity for some reason. The missionary who had presided over the conversion paid a visit to her home one day, and found her worshipping the old Hindu Gods and Goddesses of the family. The missionary was red in the face and rebuked her in the name of the only True God. The lady

smiled and said, "So what? My becoming a Christian does not mean that I have renounced my *Dharma!*"

It would not do for Hindu society to fight shy of this pervasive Hindu psyche which is as old as the oldest Hindu shastras, the Vedas, and perhaps much older. It would not do for Hindu society to disown this deep-seated Hindu psyche which sustains practically the whole of Hindu religion and culture. In fact, Hindu society has to go back to the source of this psyche, reawaken to the spiritual centre which gave birth to this psyche, and reaffirm an abiding faith in its reaches and ramifications.

HOSTILITY TO HINDU PSYCHE

Western sociology is trying to explain this psyche as a hangover from a primitive past when human reason was not so developed and could not discriminate between fact and fancy, or, worse still, when a "puerile priestcraft" succeeded in deceiving people for its own private profit. The Western "Science" of Comparative Religion, which is only another name for Christian theology, is trying to pooh-pooh this psyche as a vestige of primitive animism which was at best only a crude form of religious awakening.

A more serious attack on this Hindu psyche is mounted by the Christian missionary. He pronounces that Hindu psyche has been heavily "polluted" by pantheism which sees a God or Goddess "in every bug that bites, and every cockroach that crawls". He believes that Hindus can be "cured" of this "perverse" psyche only by being baptised in the Christian Church, and by accepting Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour.

Similarly, the Muslim mullah frowns on this Hindu psyche as *shirk*, that is, a mixing up of the divine with the mundane. He sees no future for Hindus, either here or hereafter, unless they accept Allah as the only true god, and Muhammad as the last prophet of Allah.

And the missionary and the mullah are not mere preachers of some distinct doctrines. They are also crusaders and *mujahids* who believe that Hindus should either be converted to the "true faith", or killed and consigned to eternal hell-fire. Destruction and defilement of the images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, demolition of Hindu temples and monasteries, desecration of Hindu places of pilgrimage, and burning of Hindu shastras are the fundamental tenets of their faiths.

What is this other psyche which is suffused with such smug self-righteousness, and which finds such satanic satisfaction in hurting the deepest sentiments of people belonging to another faith? Hindu society will have to understand this other psyche if it wants to save itself from the inroads of Christianity and Islam, both of which are eating into its vitals with the aid of international allies and resources.

THEOLOGY OF MONOTHEISM

Let us for the time being forget the Freudian analysis of Christianity and Islam, though that analysis provides an intimate peep into the psyche of these primitive creeds. Let us have a look at the philosophy underlying their doctrines, and find out if they have any share in the spiritual seeking which is intrinsic to human beings and which stands systematized in Sanatana Dharma.

Christianity and Islam differ on many points of detail. But they share a common view of what they invoke as the creator and controller of the cosmos, as well as of the cosmic process. In the language of theology, they describe their basic dogma as 'Monotheism' as opposed to what they denounce as 'Polytheism' and 'Pantheism'. It is this basic dogma which needs a philosophical probe deeper than that to which it has been subjected so far.

The term Monotheism casts such a magic spell on certain minds that they stop at its literal meaning - the concept of one God as opposed to many gods. But the literal meaning tells us little, almost nothing, about its theological inspiration or its practical implications.

In the theology of Monotheism, God is extra-cosmic. He created the cosmos out of 'Nothing' in order to demonstrate his almightiness and, consequently, kept himself outside and above the Cosmos. There is nothing in God's creation which can partake of God's divinity. The elements and forces of Nature are devoid of any divinity whatsoever. The sky is empty space, and the Sun and the Moon and the Stars are only bright spots in that sky. Matter is absolutely material, and animals and birds are mere brutes unless they are domesticated when they show some improvement. Trees are timber, and the flowers embody no more than colour and fragrance. Air and water and fire and earth are what they are, and point to nothing beyond.

It is only man who is placed on a higher pedestal because the Almighty God blew His own breath into the handful of dust which He used in order to manufacture Adam, the male ancestor of the human race. Woman cannot share man's status because Eve, the female ancestor of the human race, was carved out of Adam's rib without the benefit of God's breath being blown into it. Man is thus the best of God's creation, the *ashraf-ul-makhluqat*.

But it is an unpardonable folly and a cardinal sin for man to fancy that he shares even an iota of God's divinity. The only privilege which man enjoys as God's best creation is to lord it over the lower creation which God has made for man's use and benefit. Man can exploit the material resources of the earth in whatever way he pleases. Man can eat every bird and fish and animal for God has created them specifically for man's consumption. And man can marry and divorce and keep as his concubines any number of women,

at any stage of his three score and ten years. (The monogamy we find in Christianity is not prescribed by the Christian scripture. It was an institution which it borrowed from the pagan Romans.)

As man is likely to be carried away by the freedom of will which has been bestowed on him, and forget his creator, God has been sending prophets from time to time to restrain him from worship of false gods and philosophical speculation, and to turn his thoughts towards a higher purpose - obedience to God's will as revealed through the prophets. The complete code of such do's and don'ts has been conveyed by God in his final revelation - the New Testament according to Christianity and the Quran according to Islam - through his only son who is Jesus for Christianity or the last prophet who is Muhammad for Islam.

The supreme purpose of man's life is to worship this extra-cosmic God with whom man cannot communicate directly, lead a life of piety according to rules laid down in the final revelation which man cannot question, and seek the intercession of the only son or the last prophet whose claims man cannot scrutinize in terms of his natural reason or normal moral sense. If man can thus bid good-bye to his critical faculty and conscience, "the seats of the Satan", he can hope for an eternal heaven at the end of the only life God has granted to him. But if man wavers, or questions, or criticizes, or tries to understand, or judge these mysteries by using his own mind or moral sense, he becomes bound for an eternal hell from which there is no escape, and where the torment turns worse and worse with the ticking of every moment.

Whether all this applies to woman as well has been a point of dispute among Christian and Muslim theologians. Nevertheless, this much is clear that Islam at least assigns the same role to woman in heaven as she is expected to play

on this earth - to serve man in servile obedience and to provide sexual pleasure to her male master. The only concession extended to woman after she enters heaven is to be spared the pains of maternity and old age. She becomes a *hour* endowed with eternal youth and unfading beauty. In Christianity, woman is essentially a temptress who leads man to hell. Her role in the hereafter has not been clearly defined.

An added duty of all true believers is to band together in a *Church* or an *Ummah* for propagating *the only true* religion, and to prop up *the only son* or *the last prophet* by all means including force and fraud. The fraternity thus formed is expected to invite all unbelievers to get converted to the only true creed, and to declare a *crusade* or *jihad* against all those who refuse to be persuaded peacefully for saving themselves from eternal perdition and for securing an eternal heaven. The Church is expected to secure the aid of its secular arm, and the *Ummah* is expected to convert itself into a theocratic state in order to carry forward the struggle.

There is no limit to what these holy wars can legitimately do to the unbelievers except the limit imposed by power equations at any time. The least that the wars should do at the first available opportunity is to destroy the false gods of the unbelievers, and the unholy temples where those gods are worshipped. The holy warriors are under no obligation at all to prove that they are better human beings as compared to those they are expected to convert, or kill, or enslave, or subjugate. Their only qualification is that they believe in the only son or the last prophet, and follow the only true religion.

MONOTHEISM IS DISGUISED MATERIALISM

One may spend a lifetime searching this theology of Monotheism for a factual or rational proof of what it proclaims so pompously. But the search will be in vain. For,

all the time it assumes what it wants to prove, and proves what it has already assumed. At its best, it is a syllogism of which the major as well as the minor premise are arbitrary assertions.

Is there a proof that a being called Almighty God exists, and controls the cosmos? The answer is that the only son or the last prophet has said so. Who has sent this son or appointed this prophet to tell us about God and his doings? The answer is that it is God who has proclaimed the son or the prophet. What is the proof that what the son or the prophet pronounces as a divine revelation comes from God? The answer is that the revelation says so. And so on, it is an endless exercise in casuistry with no reference to human experience or human reason at any point.

In the last analysis, God is really a superfluity in this system of thought. A time comes when God imparts his final revelation to the only son or the last prophet, and retires to a well-deserved rest after entrusting the fate of his world as well as of his creatures to the keeping of the son or the prophet. In due course, the son or the prophet also is dead and gone after bequeathing his monopoly over truth and virtue to the Church or the Ummah. The Church or the Ummah, in turn, is dominated by a single man or a clique that can control and use a mighty military machine which has been built in the meanwhile. In the final round, it all ends up as imperialist aggression against other people in which a veneer of religious verbiage is retained in order to sustain the self-righteousness of the aggressor. The idols of the conquered people are destroyed and their temples pillaged, not because their Gods have been found to be false but because an imperialist always aims at destroying the self-respect of a people upon whom he wants to secure a stranglehold. It is in the nature of imperialism to indulge in cultural genocide on the slightest pretext, or at the first favourable opportunity.

The plight of the Allah of Islam is portrayed by Shaykh Muhammad Iqbal when he puts the following question to Allah in his *Shikwa*: "*Tujhko ma'lûm hai letā thā kuî nām tirā / Qurwat-i-bāzû-i-muslim nê kiyā kām tirā* (Do you know of anyone who bothered about you before we came forward? It was the muscle-power of the Muslim which came to your rescue)." The God of the Bible is in no better position. He has been held aloft all along by Christian bayonets or Christian bags of money.

History is witness that Christianity as well as Islam have always expanded by the power of the sword, and seldom by power of any truth contained in their scriptures. In the words of Iqbal again, "*Par tire nām pê talwār uThāî kisnê ? Kāt kar rakh diyê kuffār kê lashkar kisnê* (But who did draw their swords in defence of your name and fame? Who was it that slaughtered the armies of the infidels for your sake?)." It is obvious that the Allah of Islam had to be thrust down people's throats at the point of the sword. Otherwise poor Allah was a non-existent entity which no one was prepared to affirm. The same can be said of the Jehovah of Christianity, though no Christian poet has had the honesty of Iqbal to come out with the naked truth in a frank and forthright manner.

It is small wonder, therefore, that this politics of power masquerading as religion cannot understand the language of spirituality which speaks in terms of a Divinity secret in everything, everywhere, and which enables human beings to dwell constantly in the company of Gods and Goddesses. This politics is too busy amassing wealth and power and pleasures of a material world to care for things which belong to the realm of Spirit.

Pained by the poverty of Muslims and the decay of the power of Islam, Iqbal has lamented: "*Qahar tō yêh hai ke kâfir ko milê hûr-o-qusûr/ Aur bechârê musalmāñ kō faqat wa'da-i hûr* (The terrible tragedy is that the infidels live in palaces

and make love to houris in this life, while the poor Muslim has to remain content only with the promise of houris hereafter)." This is the highest aspiration to which this venerable Allama of Islam could ever attain. It speaks volumes about Islam as a religion. Christianity too aspires towards no goal higher than this. Only its spokesmen are not so crude (or honest) in putting forward its case.

Hindu society has not only to recover the source of its own psyche which speaks in the language of Gods and Goddesses, it has also to realize that **the psyche of Christianity and Islam hides vulgar materialism and imperialist ambition under a welter of high-sounding verbiage.**

Ch 5: The Basis of Universal Spirituality

Sri Ramakrishna was one day taunted by a sceptic that the Kali he worshipped at Dakshineswar was only a slab of black stone carved into a bizarre female figure and decked with glittering trinkets. The saint was taken aback. So far he had not cared to see the sacred icon in its supreme spiritual splendour. He had been content to witness the Divine Mother in all Her majesty in the cave of his heart whenever he was in a state of *samadhi*. Now he had been challenged to find out if what he worshipped was a figment of his fevered imagination.

He entered the *sanctum sanctorum* and stood before the sacred icon. He fixed his gaze on the holy figure, and prayed with all his concentrated psychic power: *Ma! dyākhā dē* (Mother ! Reveal Thyself). And lo and behold! The Divine Mother dazzled his physical eyes with the same indescribable infinities as he had witnessed with his inner eye while meditating on Her form. He looked back at the sceptic who had accompanied him, and smiled with

compassion. The sceptic had seen nothing which he had not seen before. To his physical eyes, the Goddess was still a slab of black stone. And it had not been given to him to train the inner eye.

The point which was made that day at Dakshineswar was that to the physical consciousness a slab of stone in any shape or form will always remain a slab of stone, while to another consciousness which has awakened to some sublime dimension the same slab will reveal its innermost mysteries. To a consciousness such as that of Sri Ramakrishna who had already scaled the highest spiritual heights, the slab of stone became an incarnation of *Sat* (truth), *Chit* (Consciousness), and *Anand* (Bliss). It was not the icon which was inert and insouciant; it was the witness within the sceptic which had not yet awakened to its own spiritual power. It is not the Gods who are unwilling to reveal themselves; it is the worship which has not yet known how to woo them.

This is the spiritual secret discovered by the Vedic seers. This is the mystery and miracle witnessed and vouchsafed by Hindu saints and sages throughout the ages. And this is the vast vision which forms the spiritual centre of Hindu society.

There is a consciousness, inherent in all beings, everywhere and at all times, which, when reached and brought forward, witnesses the world-play as a drama of divine forms and forces. There is not a thing, nor a thought which does not get transfigured from the terrestrial into the celestial, whenever and wherever this consciousness comes into play. Everything then returns to and resumes its supreme spiritual status, or becomes the outer symbol of an inner sublimity. It is these sublimities which invite the seer's worship as Gods and Goddesses. It is these sublimities which spur the *bhakta* to burst out in song and *stuti*, the paeans of praise pouring out of a grateful heart for being permitted to witness what has been witnessed.

The Vedic seers were not primitive animists who invested the phenomena of physical Nature with anthropomorphic attributes, as the "Science" of Comparative Religion will have us believe. They were spiritual explorers who discovered and employed well-defined yogic disciplines to raise up human consciousness from its terrestrial turmoil to its transcendent tranquility. Nor were the Vedic Gods and Goddesses born in the poetic hyperboles of some barbaric bards, as the "higher criticism" of modern Indologists will have us imagine. The poetry did not *precede* the birth of the Vedic pantheon. On the contrary, it *succeeded* that birth when the Vedic seers saw the inner secrets of outer forms.

SECRET OF IMAGE-WORSHIP

Sages such as Sri Aurobindo who have meditated on Hindu iconography, and savants such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch, and Alice Boner who have studied the subject, assure us that the forms and features of Hindu icons have a source higher than the normal reaches of the human mind. The icons are no photocopies of any human or animal forms as we find them in their physical frames. They are in fact crystallizations of the abstract into the concrete, of the infinite into the finite. They always point beyond themselves, and a contemplation of them always draws us from the outer to the inner.

Hindu *Shilpa shastras* lay down not only technical formulas for carving holy icons in stone, and metal, and other materials. They also lay down elaborate rules about how the artist is to fast, and pray, and otherwise purify himself for long periods before he is permitted, if at all, to have a psychic image of the God or Goddess whom he wants to incarnate in a physical form. It is this sublime source of the *Śilpaśāstras* which alone can explain a Sarnath Buddha, or a Chidambaram Natraj, or a Vidisha Varah, to name only a few of the large assembly of divine images inhabiting the earth. It is because this sublime source is not accessible to

modern sculptors that we have to be content with poor copies which look like parodies of the original marvels.

The same sages and savants inform us that the Hindu temple architecture and the rituals that are performed at the time of *puja* also have a sublime source. This is a deep and difficult subject, largely beyond the reach of the present writer. I shall, therefore, not proceed with it. What needs to be emphasized is that the plurality of Hindu Gods, the icons in which they are embodied, the temples in which they are installed, and the rituals with which they are worshipped, are not mere accessories and aids towards some deeper spiritual vision; instead, they incarnate the vision itself.

Ram Swarup has presented the proper perspective on the plurality of Hindu Gods as well as their incarnation in concrete images, in his recently published book, '*The World as Revelation: Names of Gods*'. His discussion leaves no doubt that the plurality of the Hindu pantheon, and the large use of concrete images is not only quite in keeping with but also necessary corollaries of (1) the spontaneous processes of human psychology, (2) the normal growth of human knowledge culminating in spiritual vision, and (3) the natural development of human language for incorporating and communicating that knowledge and vision. I will quote at length from Ram Swarup's book because I find it difficult to clothe his insights in my own language.

PLURALITY OF GODS

He introduces the subject as follows:

"If we look at the word 'God', we find that though today it has acquired a forced, intellectualized outward meaning appropriate to the mentality of the present age, yet it still retains the memory of the idea of a deity of a more intuitive people and of more spontaneous times.

"Etymologists connect this word with Gothic *guth*, which is Skt. *huta*, which means 'one to whom oblations are made'

and, therefore, one who is worshipped. It connects us with the period when fire was a great living symbol of the deity within and around. In later times, the symbol was denounced as nature-worship by some sects but there was a time when it claimed, along with the Sun and the Sky, universal acceptance. Even Moses who belonged to an iconoclastic tradition had a glimpse of his God through the medium of fire. And in the *Old Testament* itself, certain hymns are considered 'nature hymns' by its scholars.

"Etymologists also connect the word with the German word *gotse* whose original meaning was an image or a figure. In the Norse language also, the word meant 'image of a deity'. So the word perhaps referred to the practice of worshipping God through various images and figures, a practice quite common amongst different peoples all over the world, ancient as well as modern.

"There is another feature worth noticing. Spengler tells us that the Old German word for 'God' was a neutral plural and was turned into a masculine singular by Christian propaganda. The same is true of the word in the Norse and Teutonic languages. But after the heathens were converted, God changed his gender and number. This can hardly be regarded as the deepening of its meaning and conception.

"The Hebrew word *Elohim* too is plural in origin, form and sense. The same is true of the Semitic word *El*. It is not the name of the deity common to all but is a common name for different deities in the Semitic world.

"Thus we see that the untutored and the more spontaneous intuition of the human race excludes neither the plurality of Gods nor the use of images and nature symbols from its religious sensibility. The denial comes when the mind becomes too conceptual; or when dogmatic faith develops faster than understanding.

“If we study the ancient religious literature of the Hindus, particularly the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Mahabharata, certain things stand out prominently. The very first thing is a very large use of concrete image. There are Gods like Indra, Pusan, Varuna, Asvins for whom there are no physical correspondences, but many important Gods like Surya, Agni, Marut, take their names after natural objects.

“There is also another important feature that we notice. The spiritual consciousness of the race is expressed in terms of the plurality of Gods. In these two respects, at least, the Hindu approach agreed with the spiritual intuition of other ancient peoples.

THE PHYSICAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

“The physical and intellectual are not opposed to one another. The names of physical objects become names of ideas, names of psychic truths, names of Gods; sensuous truths become intellectual truths, become spiritual truths. As the knowledge of the senses becomes the knowledge of the *Manas* and the *Buddhi*, the knowledge originating in the higher organs of the mind also tends to filter down to the levels of the *Manas* and the senses. So in this way even the highest knowledge has its form, colour and sound. This need not lower down its quality in any way. In fact, this is the only way in which the sense-bound mind understands something of the higher knowledge.

“This reverberating, echoing and imaging takes place up and down the whole corridor of the mind, at all levels of abstraction. Here, as we traverse the path, we meet physical forms, sound-forms, vision-forms, thought-forms, universal forms, all echoes of each other. We meet *mantras* and *yantras* and icons of various efficacies and psychic qualities. In one sense, they are not the light above

but they are its important formations. They invoke the celestial and raise up the terrestrial.

“There is another reason why images in the Vedas and the Upanishads are concrete. When the fever of the soul subsides, when the mind becomes calm, when the spiritual consciousness opens, things are no longer lifeless. In this state, things which have hitherto been regarded as ordinary are full of life, light and consciousness. In this state, ‘the earth meditates as it were; water meditates as it were; mountains meditate as it were.’¹ In this state, no need is felt to separate the abstract from the concrete because both are eloquent with the same message, because both image one another. In this state, everything expresses the divine; everything is the seat of the divine; everything is *That*; mountains, rivers and the great earth are but the Tathagat, as a Chinese teacher, Hsu Yun, proclaimed after his spiritual awakening.

“According to Hindu thought, the names of Gods are not names of external beings. They are names of truths of man’s own highest Self. So the knowledge of the epithets of Gods is a form of Self-knowledge. Gods and their names embody truths of the deeper Spirit and meditation on them in turn invokes those truths. But those truths are many and, therefore, Gods and their names too are many, though they are all held together in the unity of a spiritual consciousness.”

THE ONE GOD OF THEOLOGY

Next, he provides a peep into how the Western-Christian mind views the Vedic pantheon. He proceeds:

“This way of looking at the Godhead is disconcerting to the Western schematic mind. In the Vedic approach, there is no single God. This is bad enough. But the Hindus do not have even a supreme God, a *fuhrer*-God who presides over a multiplicity of Gods. If there has to be a plurality of Gods as

is the case in all polytheistic religions, there could at least be a tabulated statement of Gods arranged in some order of superiority and inferiority, each God having some distinctive characteristics of his or her own. But here we have no such thing, no ranking, no order of seniority and precedence, no hierarchy, no recognizable magistracy; it is all anarchy. This melee could not even be called a pantheon - a body of Gods, however disordered (Gk. *pan+theos*); it is a body of demons and evil spirits, pandemonium (*pan+diamon*).

“It seems that the Hindus were either confused about their Gods or that these Gods were not jealous enough to be like the God of the Bible. The Hindus worshipped their Gods in turn with the same supreme epithets. It seems to be like a philanderer wooing several women at the same time with the same vows, promises, and protestations and telling each in turn that she is the only beautiful and true one for him. If they only knew what the man was doing there would be trouble enough for him. In like manner, if a Hindu God knew what his worshipper was telling his rival God, it would either expose the devotee’s insincerity or the powerlessness of his God.”

NO OPPOSITION BETWEEN ONE AND MANY

Finally, he presents the Vedic point of view in the following words:

“But there is another approach, quite a different one, which was adopted by the people of the Vedas. According to this approach, ‘Reality is one but the wise call it by different names; they call him Indra, Mitra, Varun, Agni, Yama, Mātariśvān.’² Reality is like the Ganges: different villages along its banks are differently named but they are all on the same river; the people drink the same water and their soil is watered and fertilized by the same source. The Reality is like an ocean rolling against different continents; you taste it

anywhere, it is the same. The Reality is like a nugget of gold; it is the same at the corners, at the top, or at the bottom, or in the middle. Like a lump of sugar, it is sweet at all points. Similarly, whether you go East or West, South or North, you move in the same pervading space and you meet the same truth and principle of things.

“The Hindus do not call their Gods either “One” or “Many”. According to them, what they worship is One Reality, *ekam sat*, which is differently named. This Reality is everywhere, in everything, in every being. It is One and Many at the same time and it also transcends them both. Everything is an expression, a play, an image, an echo of this Reality.

“In Vedic literature, the question of the number of Gods was no point of dispute and agitated no mind. The number could be increased or decreased at will. It all depended on the principle of classification, on the context, and on the viewpoint.

“There are two ways of regarding the Godhead. In one approach, God is a jealous one. He brooks no other. He is Ismael-like, his hand against everyone and everyone’s hand against him. But in the Vedic concept, all Gods are friends, one and equal. Brahmanaspati is associated with Indra, Soma and Dakshina; they are invoked jointly. The Maruts are requested to come along accompanied, *saMjagmāno*, by Indra, and both are called of ‘equal splendour’, *samāna varcasa*.³ Indra and Varuna are offered conjoint praise, *sadhastut*.⁴ They are invoked together. ‘I invoke you both,’ says the worshipper;⁵ or, ‘come Agni with the Maruts,’ is the repeated prayer of the devotee in another hymn.⁶

“Spiritual life is one but it is vast and rich in expression. The human mind also conceives it differently. If the human mind was uniform without different depths, heights and levels of subtlety; or if all men had the same mind, the same

psyche, the same imagination, the same needs; in short, if all men were the same then perhaps One God would do. But a man's mind is not a fixed quantity and men and their powers and needs are different. So, only some form of polytheism alone can do justice to this variety and richness.

“Besides this variety of human needs and human minds, the spiritual reality itself is so vast, immense, and inscrutable that man's reason fails and his imagination and fancy stagger in its presence. Therefore, this reality cannot be indicated by one name or formula or description. It has to be expressed in glimpses from many angles. No single idea or system of ideas could convey it adequately. This too points to the need for some form of polytheism.

OPPOSITION IS BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE WORSHIP

“In this deeper approach, the distinction is not between a true One God and the false Many Gods; it is between a true way of worship and a false way of worship. Wherever there is sincerity, truth, and self-giving in worship, that worship goes to the true altar by whatever name we may designate it and in whatever way we may conceive it. But if it is not desireless, if it has ego, falsehood, conceit, and deceit in it, then it is unavailing though it may be offered to the most True God, theologically speaking. ‘He who offers to me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that I accept from that striving devotee,’ says Lord Krishna in the Gita.⁷

“He also assures us that ‘those who worship other Gods with faith worship me,’ for ‘I am the enjoyer of all sacrifices.’⁸ Devotion, faith, austerity, striving in the soul - they all belong to Him; they are His food; they can never go to a false God though so declared by a rival theology.

“The fact is that the problem of One or Many Gods is born of a theological mind, not of a mystic consciousness. In the Atharvaveda, the sage Vena says that he ‘sees That in that secret station of the heart in which the manifoldness of

the world becomes one-form', *yatra višvam bhavatyekarûpam*⁹ or, as in the Yajurveda where the world is rested in one truth, *eka nîDam*.¹⁰ But in another station of man, where not his soul but his mind rules, there is opposition between the One and the Many, between God and Matter, between God and Gods. On the other hand, when the soul awakens, Gods are born in its depths which proclaim and glorify one another.

“Worship is in man’s soul and the divine glory is reflected in every symbol. Therefore, the Vedic seers worshipped Him in many forms and under many Names. ‘Veneration to the great Gods, veneration to the lesser, veneration to the young, veneration to the old, we worship all the Gods as well as we are able,’¹¹ that is their attitude. A true heart’s homage cannot go waste; it cannot go to false Gods; in a divine economy, it is taken up by That which is the secret meaning and the principle of truth in everything.”

It was this all-pervading sense of divinity which inspired Hindu seers and sages to sense the same *Sat-Chit-Ananda* sleeping in the stone, stirring up in the sapling, smiling in the flower, singing in the bird, shining in the sun and the stars, and resuming its own supreme status at the summit of spiritual experience. It was in this crucible of concrete spirituality that they saw the one Divine Substance manifesting itself in a multiplicity of forms, and many Divine Diversities dissolving themselves in one ubiquitous Unity.

It was these intimations from infinity which invited Hindu saints and mystics to invoke the same Reality in many Names and Forms, and make it accessible to each aspirant according to his or her aptitude (*adhikar*) and in keeping with the stage of his or her spiritual development (*adhar*). They devised many ways of worship and sang their devotion unto the same Divinity in many languages. It was this vision of the One-in-Many and the Many-in-One which

is the source of the Vedic verse, *ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti*, which has now been torn out of context and turned from a trenchant truth of Sanatana Dharma into a tawdry slogan of Monotheism.

This Vedic verse is neither a defence mechanism to be put into operation whenever the monopolises of Monotheism mouth their war-cry of the 'true One God', nor a secularist slogan to be shouted whenever a Muslim mob stages a riot over music before a mosque or over a pig wandering away into a Muslim *mohalla*. On the contrary, it is the statement of a profound principle which informs sincere spiritual seeking everywhere, at all times. It is the basis of a universal spirituality.

Footnotes:

¹ Chhandogya Upanishad, 7.6.1

² Rigveda 1. 164.46.

³ Ibid, 1.6.7

⁴ Ibid, 1.17.9

⁵ Ibid, 1.17.7

⁶ Ibid, 1.17.1.9

⁷ Gita, 9.26

⁸ Ibid, 9.23-24

⁹ Atharvaveda, 2.1.1

¹⁰ Yajurveda, 32.8

¹¹ Rigveda, 1.27.13

Ch 6 Revival of Universal Spirituality

The Hindu and Buddhist Gods and Goddesses in India, Nepal, Bali, Burma, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and elsewhere are only local expressions of a universal spirituality. In this respect, spirituality is akin to science.

Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Geology and Physics reveal the same secrets of Nature to all men everywhere and at all times, no matter in what language those secrets are couched or communicated. In like manner, the spontaneous expressions of spirituality have been the same everywhere and at all times, though the language and metaphor of those expressions have been different according to culture and clime. In the final analysis, they are variations on the same sublime theme.

ALL ANCIENT NATIONS WORSHIPPED MANY GODS

There was a time when the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians worshipped a multiplicity of Gods in the form of icons installed in innumerable temples. The ancient Iranians paid homage to the Fire God in their sacred shrines. The Gods of the Greeks and the Romans are well known in spite of a large-scale destruction of their physical manifestations by the vandals of Christianity. The Britons, the Celts, the Franks, the Germans, the Scandinavians, and the Slavs also sensed their Gods as residing in many a mountain, river and forest. The pre-Islamic Arabs had many Gods and worshipped them in many sacred shrines besides the principle one at Ka'ba before the prophet of Islam presided over their destruction.

Nearer home, the pre-Islamic Turks in Central Asia and the pre-Islamic Indonesians and Malaysians to our south were Hindus and Buddhists with similar ways of worship as we have in this country. The Cambodians, the Chinese, the Laotians, the Mongolians, the Tibetans and the Vietnamese had their own Hindu-Buddhist Gods till the other day before they fell into the clutches of the Communist monolith.

The Red Indians in North, Central, and South America practised what their Christian invaders from Europe denounced as 'idolatry'. The so-called aborigines of Africa,

Australia, New Zealand and the far-flung islands of Oceania did the same, and met the same punishment at the hands of Christian invaders and missionaries.

The physical destruction of the icons and temples does not mean that the Gods have been destroyed. Nor have the Gods become outdated. They do not belong to a distant past. On the contrary, they are always there, waiting to be witnessed and worshipped by anyone who prepares oneself to be admitted to their presence. For they dwell in a dimension which defies time and space. They dwell in the depths of the human heart, in the innermost sanctuary of the human soul. Their disappearance from the physical scene only means that human spirituality has become shallow, and suffered a steep decline.

HINDU GODS PROVIDE A LINK WITH ALL ANCIENT GODS

Ram Swarup has drawn our attention to this eclipse of the ancient Gods of many people after those people were forcibly converted to Christianity or Islam, and their temples were destroyed or converted into churches or mosques. I shall, therefore, quote again at some length from his book, *The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods*:

“There was a time when these Gods satisfied the religious urges of their devotees. But in the course of time they came under attack from new Gods that were appearing on the horizon. They are by now completely replaced but the old persecution still continues though in a modified form. The new persecutors are not theologians and religious zealots but staid academicians. To them these Gods are not false but primitive. They hold that these Gods represented the attempt of the primitive mind to express, however imperfectly, through Nature’s symbols and objects, its groping for a unitary principle. At this stage of human evolution, it was difficult for man’s mind to rise above the

sensuous to the intellectual and the spiritual, and from the many to the one. That was left for a later generation to achieve, reaching its high water-mark in Christianity and modern Europe.

“If Gods are born of religious urges and spiritual intuitions, it is difficult to see how modern European Christians are superior in this respect and, therefore, how their ‘one God’ could be truer than the ‘many Gods’ of their ancestors.

“A look at the Hindu Gods may throw light on this aspect of the subject. The Hindu pantheon has changed to some extent but the old Gods are still active and are still understood though under modified names. Hindu India has a sense of continuity with its past which other nations, that changed their religions at some later stage, lack. It is also known that the Hindu religion preserves many old layers and forms. Therefore, its study may link us not only with its own past forms but also with the religious consciousness, intuitions and forms that prevailed in the past in Europe, in Greece, in Rome, in many Scandinavian and Baltic countries, amongst Germanic and Slavic peoples and also in several countries of the Middle East. In short, the study may reveal a fundamental form of spiritual consciousness which is wider than its Hindu expression.

“This discussion should help to promote our understanding not only of Vedic religion and Vedic Gods but also of a whole archetypal spiritual consciousness which expresses itself in the language of Many Gods; and as a result should also help us to understand better the old religions of Europe and Asia which are no more; it should also help us to see in a new light the old Gods of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Gods of the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, the Gods of the Germanic, Celtic, and Slavic peoples.”

RETURN OF ANCIENT GODS

Ram Swarup pleads that a revival of universal spirituality should lead to a return of ancient Gods eclipsed by Christianity and Islam:

“In the cultural history of the world, the replacement of Many Gods by One God was accompanied by a good deal of conflict, vandalism, bigotry, persecution and crusading. These conflicts were very much like ‘wars of liberation’ of today, hot and cold, openly aggressive or cunningly subversive. Success in such wars played no mean role in making a local deity, say Allah of certain Arab tribes, win a wider status and assume a larger, monarchical role.

“Looking at the whole thing from the perspective of today, it is difficult to say whether the replacement was enriching or impoverishing in the spiritual and cultural sense. In most cases like these, outer symbols change without making any significant changes in their psychic meanings. It would, therefore, be difficult to hold that the present Gods of Semitic origin are superior to the now defunct pagan Gods. There was a time when the old pagan Gods were pretty fulfilling and they inspired the best of men and women to acts of greatness, love, nobility, sacrifice, and heroism. It is, therefore, a good thing to turn to them in thought and pay them our homage. We know pilgrimage, as ordinarily understood, as wayfaring to visit a shrine or a holy place. But there can also be a pilgrimage in time and we can journey back and make our offerings of the heart to those Names and Forms and Forces which once incarnated and expressed man’s higher life. They are holy Names and Symbols.

“The present generations of many countries tend to regard their past as a benighted period of their history. A more understanding approach towards their Gods of old will work for a less severe judgement about their past and

their ancestors. It will also fill the generation gap, not the one we talk about the most these days but a still wider one, the general rootlessness of a whole nation. Gods provide an invisible link between the past and the present of a nation; when they go, the link also snaps. The peoples of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Germany and the Scandinavian countries are no less ancient than the people of India; but they lost their Gods, and therefore they lost their sense of historical continuity and identity.

“Today, there is a spirit of revolt amongst Western youths against their parents’ religion. Some are seeking light in new symbols. One of the most fruitful channels for them could be to explore the symbols of their more remote forefathers. This could help to broaden and deepen the religion of their parents with the religion of their ancestors.

“What is true of Europe is also true of Africa and South America. The countries of these continents have recently gained political freedom of a sort. But it has done little to help them and to give them a spiritual identity. If they wish to rise in a deeper sense, they must recover their soul, their Gods, their roots in their own psyche; there has to be a spiritual reassertion, a resurrection of their Gods. If they need any change, and there is no doubt they do, it must come from within themselves as a part of their own experience. If they do enough self-churning, then their own Gods will put forth new meanings in response to their new needs. They have to make the best of their own psychic and spiritual gifts and discover their own Gods within themselves. No people can import their Gods ready-made and rise spiritually under the aegis of imported deities, saviours and prophets.

“But one cannot retain old Gods or revive their memory artificially. One should develop a spiritual way of looking at things. One should live with these Gods and spend much time with them. In a sense, all Gods are jealous Gods. They

want a person wholly with themselves before they become wholly his. One has to dwell with them and meditate on them before they become vivifying forces. If there is sufficient aspiration, invoking, and soliciting, there is no doubt that even Gods apparently lost could come back again. They are there all the time. For nothing that has any truth in it can be destroyed. It merely goes out of manifestation; but it could reappear under propitious circumstances. So could the old Gods come to life again in response to new summons."

Hindu society has to help the peoples of Asia, Africa, America, Europe, and Oceania to go back to their own Gods, their own ancient shastras which their Gods will reveal again. Hindu society can perform this onerous task only if it reawakens to its own Gods, repels the attack which monotheistic creeds are mounting again on its own spiritual traditions, and turn the tables on mullahs and missionaries who are stinking sick with self-righteousness.

MONOTHEISM IS THEOLOGY, NOT SPIRITUALITY

The very fact that Christianity and Islam fall outside the commonwealth of this universal spirituality goes to show that there is something seriously wrong with the consciousness which has constructed these coercive creeds. The very fact that Christianity and Islam are intensely hostile to universal spirituality expressing itself through diverse deities goes to prove that there is something particularly perverse in the psychology of these thoughtless theologies. A special effort has to be made to psychoanalyse the pathological behaviour of Christianity and Islam, and spot the source of their spiritual sickness.

Ram Swarup has something significant to say about Monotheism, which also I shall quote:

“Ancient Rome, Greece and Egypt, all polytheistic cultures, were relatively free from religious wars though they had their full quota of wars otherwise.

“In polytheistic Rome too, men of different religious persuasions and sects met and built their temples and worshipped in their own way. But this freedom disappeared when Christianity, the religion of One True God, took over.

“Monotheism was not always a spiritual idea. In many cases, it was an ideology. It was consolidated in wars and in turn it led to further wars. There were wars between different tribes, each tribe claiming its own God to be supreme. Eventually, the Gods of the tribe that lost in battle were supplanted by Gods of the winning side. Or, sometimes, a tribe exchanged its Gods for power. It accepted the Gods of the conquered people in order to consolidate its power over them. Or, perhaps, there was a larger association to create, an empire to consolidate, or other nations and tribes to conquer, and the idea of a ‘One True God’ was handy in the pursuit of this object. Thus, diplomacy, the sword, systematic vandalism, all played their part in making a particular god supreme. From very early days, the One God of Christianity was bound up with the imperial needs of Rome. In more recent times, the Biblical God has tried to consolidate what the European arms and trade have conquered.

“When the urge for unity is spiritual, the theology of One God is no bar and the seeker reaches a position no different from *Advaita*, from *ekam sat*. He realizes that God alone is, and not that there is only one God.

“But if the motive for unity is merely intellectual, it helps little, spiritually speaking. God remains an outward being and does not become the truth of the Spirit. It does not even help to reduce the number of Gods; instead it multiplies the number of Devils if Christianity is any guide in the matter.

We know how Medieval Christianity was chock-full of them. In fact, they occupied the centre of attention of the Church for many centuries to the exclusion of everything else. During these centuries, it was difficult to say whether the Church worshipped God or those devils. One authority calculated that the number of demons was six and a half million. According to another authority, there were 7,905,926 lesser demons presided over by 72 Princes of Hell. All of them were intriguing against the Church and were undermining its work and authority. Each of the Princes had his allotted work. Lucifer promoted pride, Asmodeus lechery, Belphegor sloth, and so on."

Christian and Islamic imperialism gave wide currency to monotheistic theologies during periods of Christian and Muslim domination over large parts of the world. These theologies, in turn, supported totalitarian tyrannies practised by Christian and Muslim theocracies, and mobilised mobs against subject populations belonging to other faiths. The worst thing that happened was that these theologies confused the language of religion and philosophy. Their impact on imbecile minds can be judged by the thesis of Dr. Tarachand and his tribe that Advaita was a concept coined by the Adi Shankaracharya in imitation of Islamic Monotheism brought to Kerala by Muslim merchants (mind you, merchants!) in the early years of the 8th century AD.

MONSTROSITIES OF MONOTHEISM

Monotheism, polytheism, in fact, the whole brood of concepts born of the basic concept called theism are products of a petrified mind and an inert intellect. These are theological concepts and not spiritual perceptions. That is why they move so mechanically, back and forth, without illumining any corner of the human mind or improving any part of human behavior. They create a lot of casuistry and cantankerous cant. They are not only irrelevant to any practical spiritual purpose, but also positive impediments on

the path of spiritual progress. Anyone who is interested in the upliftment of human life as lived should shun these concepts like a plague.

What is worse, Monotheism has manufactured a number of hate-filled words - infidel, *kafir*, unbeliever, *munkir*, *mushrik*, heathen, heretic, hypocrite, polytheist, pantheist, pagan - which raise unbreakable barriers between brother and brother, and which divide the one human family into a number of warring camps. These swear-words are hurled at unoffending people belonging to other faiths like stones thrown by street hooligans at peaceful citizens. These malicious words have motivated many crusades, *jihads*, inquisitions, genocides, imperialist aggressions, and campaigns for pillage and rapine. Rivers of innocent human blood have been made to flow in the service of these spiteful words, and for causes that are of no consequence at all, either for the moral upliftment or the spiritual illumination of mankind. The only way a monotheist can conceive of human brotherhood is that everyone accepts his exclusive creed.

What is still worse, Monotheism and the monstrosities that logically follow from it such as *the saviour*, *the prophet*, *the revelation*, *the ilham*, *the church*, *the ummah*, have been selling the most degenerate type of idolatry known to human history. Being dead to the intimations of immortality conveyed by icons of Gods, the monotheistic mind manufactures any number of myths about its all-too-human saviours, prophets, saints, and sufis, and attributes any number of miracles to them. Being bereft of any true sense of divinity, this materialistic mind starts seeing the supernatural in the dirt and dross of its prophets and saints such as the saliva, the hair, the shoe, the shirt, and the shroud. And this mind ends up by kissing and kowtowing before these dead objects in a surfeit of sickening superstition. There is a brisk trade in 'holy relics'

till the total number or weight of each relic reaches fantastic proportions, far in excess of what had really survived the prophet or the saint. Stinking tombs and sepulchers take the place of sublime temples. Less said about the slaughter of innocent animals in a round of so-called sacrifices, the better.

The monotheist reaches the limit of the ludicrous when he struts around as an iconoclast or a *Butshikan*, saying that the false Gods of the infidels could not save themselves from his sword and fire. He secretly expects the idols to perform the same sort of miracles as he attributes to the saliva, the hair, the shoe, the shirt, and the shroud of his own prophets and saints. But if he is requested that his own relics be subjected to the same physical test, he loses his balance, shouts that his religion is being insulted, and takes to violence at very short notice.

No one who knows anything about the sanctity of icons has ever attributed any powers or miracles to them, except the power to point to a still greater sanctity beyond themselves and the miracles they work in human hearts. No one who knows the mystery of icons manifesting themselves has ever expected them to rise in self-defence, sword in hand, against gangsters styling themselves as *ghazis*. Yet the monotheistic mind has spread many yarns about Hindus and Buddhists believing that their icons were repositories of magical powers, and could raise deadly storms and armies of demons!

PIETY WITHOUT UNIVERSALITY IS POISONOUS

Some people are impressed by the piety displayed by some merchants of Monotheism such as poverty, penance, patience, chastity, obedience, etc. No doubt these are great virtues, and can add a lot to the loftiness of human character. But a piety which is not preceded by self-purification and which is not permeated by universality (*samata*) born of wisdom (*prajna*), can easily turn into poison in the human

soul. This sort of self-flattering piety lacks charity and compassion, and feeds self-righteousness as is evident in the case of Muslim mullahs and sufis, and Christian monks and missionaries. They have been not only advocates of inhuman persecution of those they describe as infidels, but also privileged members of imperialist establishments. They have always been out to save others without ever having a look at their own hardened hearts and closed minds. Quite a few of them have been sanctimonious humbugs selling salvation to others without first trying to salvage themselves from hatred towards fellow human beings. St. Francis Xavier is an excellent example of spiritual lepers deluding themselves that they are spiritual healers.

The Buddha is very emphatic that mere piety leads nowhere, and saves no soul. He says: "It is the blockheads who believe about me that I preach piety (*shil*). I say that I teach meditation (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*prajna*)." The self-transcendence and the opening of a universal vision in which Hindu spirituality specializes have been predicated not on piety but on purification. According to the Brihadaranyak Upanishad, the journey is from darkness to light (*tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*). Piety alone cannot be of much help on this inner pilgrimage, not at all when it consists of only an outer code of conduct such as laid down in the Ten Commandments, or the Sunnah of the Prophet. It needs be added that the *shila* which the Buddha finds inadequate is much larger and loftier than the pretentious piety which is prescribed by Christianity or Islam, and which degenerates into exhibitionism more often than not. Sufis have been the exhibitionists par excellence. Read the lives of Shaykh Farid Ganj Shakar and Nizamuddin Awliya, for instance.

Ch 7 Starting Point of Universal Spirituality

Hindu seers and sages could tap the sources of universal spirituality because they did not start with an *a priori* assumption of an Almighty God whom man had to

fear and obey in awe and objection. Nor did they fortify this *a priori* assumption with a framework of deductive inferences drawn from an observed order in the workings of the outer world. They never asserted that an Almighty God had to be accepted as a matter of faith as the creator and controller of the cosmos. Nor did they dogmatise that faith in an Almighty God could not and should not be subjected to the test of human experience and reflective reason.

The starting point of Hindu sages and seers was not God but man. Their testing ground for what they divined was not fanatical faith but direct perception (*pratyaksh praman*). Whether it is the Mahabharata of a very distant date, or the songs of Chandidas who came quite late, the refrain has always been, *sabār ûpar mānuSa satya*, that is, the highest truth is man, the ultimate mystery (*paramam guhyam*) above all other mysteries.

Man is neither an *a priori* assumption nor an abstract concept like God. On the contrary, man is a concrete reality accessible to direct (*pratyaksh*) perception which is the only valid evidence (*praman*) recognised by Hindu spirituality. The first question which a Hindu seeker puts to himself, therefore, is: "Who am I (*ko'ham*)?" This is the question asked again and again in the Upanishads. This is the question which Raman Maharshi asked himself in the twentieth century, only to reaffirm the ancient answer: "I am That (*aham brahmo'smi*)."

Lest this starting point of Hindu spirituality be mistaken for modern humanism, it may be made clear that the former does not stop short at the first few faculties of knowledge possessed by man. It searches for and finds some other and more powerful human faculties of higher and wider knowledge. Modern humanism views man mostly as a rational, or a social, or a tool-making (*homo fabricus*) animal, or, at best, as a scientist, or an artist, or a seeker of ethical and aesthetic values. Hindu spirituality does not deny or

discount these definitions of man. Man can indeed be placed in all these categories. What Hindu spirituality has discovered specifically is that man is very much more than his body, his mind, and his intellect. His reach is far beyond his inventive, his imaginative, and his intuitive genius. Hindu spirituality proclaims that man in his innermost being is God-*Shivo'ham*, as the Adi Shankaracharya sang.

The concept of an Almighty God *can* yield an experience of the Divine if it is employed as a subject of meditation in order to purify and raise a person's concentrated (*ekagra*) consciousness, as Patanjali has prescribed (*îśvara-pranidhānāt vā*), or as an object of selfless devotion described in the Gita and other compendiums on Bhakti. But in the mind of the unmeditative, the self-centred, and the self-righteous, it can become a source of serious mischief. A passionate (*rajasik*) preoccupation with God can lead to delusions of sonship and prophethood. The best that can be said about such self-appointed sons and prophets is that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In the case of the prophet of Islam, even the intentions are highly doubtful. The cunning, the covetousness, the carnal craving, and the calculated cruelty come through quite clearly even though covered with a liberal coat of Allah and his ninety-nine names. The Almighty Allah of Islam is no more than a tape-recorder which relays back obediently what has been fed into it.

THEOLOGY VERSUS SPIRITUALITY

As one reads the scriptures of Christianity and Islam with a morally alert mind, one starts getting sick of the very sound of word 'god' which is littered all over this literature like dead leaves in autumn. The deeds which are ascribed to or approved of by this God are quite often so cruel and obnoxious as to leave one wondering that if these are the doings of the Divine, what else is there which is left for the Devil to do.

On the other hand, the literature of Hindu spirituality employs a vocabulary which breathes an altogether different atmosphere. It deals with the soaring up of a purified human consciousness, and comes up with words and phrases and figures of speech which embody intimations from the infinite (*anant*) and the immortal (*amrita*). It speaks of *atman*, *brahma*, *rita*, *sat*, *cit*, and *anand*; of *rup*, *vedanā*, *saMjñā*, *samskara*, and *vijñāna*; of *shil*, *samadhi*, *prajna*, and *nirvana*; of *yam*, *niyam*, *asana*, *pranayam*, *pratyahar*, *dhyān*, *dharna*, and *moksa*; of *cittabhūmi*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *bodhi*, *sattvaśuddhi*, *kSetra* and *kSetrajna*. The list can be extended and many more terms of a similar import can be cited.

These psychological and psychic terms inspire no self-righteousness which Hindu spirituality stigmatizes as the fundamental frailty of unregenerate human nature. There is no malice in these words, nor spite, nor proclivity to put the other person in the wrong. They only invite one to improve oneself, and to start on a journey towards a fuller and larger life - from the unreal to the Real (*asato mā sadgamaya*), from darkness to Light (*tamaso mā jyotirgamaya*), from death to Immortality (*mrityormā amritam gamaya*).

It is an altogether different matter that Hindu seeking for the deepest and the vastest and the highest and the holiest in man has led to visions of Gods and Goddesses, and that the *Atman* has ascended into the *Paramatman* and the *Purush* has been perceived as *Purushottam*. The significant point is that at no stage of its search, Hindu spirituality has got separated from its starting point, namely, that man and not God is the only proper subject of exploration.

There are strains of Hindu spirituality which have no use for God. Jainism and Buddhism have plenty of Gods but no God as the creator and controller of the cosmos. Buddhism discards even the concept of a Soul or Self (*atman*). In fact, the entire range of technical terms used by the Buddha are of

psychological and psychic intent; none of them suggests philosophical speculations. The several schools of the Shaktas have a Goddess instead of a God to denote the supreme power they worship. The six systems of Hindu philosophy - Nyay, Vaisheshik, Samkhya, Yoga, and the two schools of Mimamsa - also have no notion of God. It is only in Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and the other sects of Bhakti that we come across God besides Gods. But this God again is nothing like the God of Christianity or the Allah of Islam. Shiva and Vishnu grow directly out of the Vedic and the Upanishadic pantheon; they are Gods invested with the attributes of all other Gods; they represent and are represented by all other Gods.

This is a very significant feature of Hindu spirituality. A spirituality which does not have its base in humanism can soon become a sham and a self-deception. It can emerge as a closed creed leading to a closed culture, a closed society, and a closed polity. Similarly, no true universalism can be built or sustained except on the basis of humanism - the validity of human experience and the objectivity of human reason raised to its highest power.

It is not an accident that the modern West made a worthwhile progress in science, technology, and a culture of general human welfare *only* when it rejected the dogmas of Christianity derived from an *a priori* concept of God, and returned to the humanism of ancient Greece and Rome. It is not an accident that the Western humanists alone appreciated the Hindu heritage at a time when it was under an unprecedented attack from the crusading Christian missionaries and the bearers of the white man's burden. And it is not an accident that Communism ended by becoming a closed ideology, a closed culture, a closed society, and a closed polity when the Bolsheviks led by Lenin abandoned the humanism of Marx and Engels, adopted the Almighty God of the Bible as Almighty History, and came up with the

doctrine of a permanent war between two sections of mankind *a la* Christianity and Islam. The brutalities committed in the name of Almighty History are now known. On the other hand, the Western democracies retained the humanism of Max and Engels, and revised only such of their formulations as had gone off the rails of rationalism or were proved to be defective by subsequent social developments. How they created welfare societies, how they came to have a bad conscience about their empires, and how they retired from the colonies, is recorded history.

HINDU CONCEPT OF MAN

Humanism by its very definition must be rooted in some concept of man. What is man? - that must remain the quintessential quest for humanism. Different cultures have given different definitions of man. Here we are concerned with the definition evolved by Hindu spirituality from an endless exploration of the human personality, uncontrolled by any preconceived ideology and led only by an unbounded curiosity to get to the bottom of it all. The results of this exploration are the core of Hindu culture, and the spiritual centre of Hindu society.

The earliest definition of man that we come across in Hindu tradition is to be found in the Upanishads. The rishis who started their search with the eminently empirical formula of 'know thyself' (*ātmānam viddhi*), and employed yogic methods to reach the farthest frontiers of the inner in man, arrived at the conclusion that man was constituted of five faculties or sheaths (*kośas*), one within the other. These they enumerated as follows: (1) human body or the physical sheath (*annamaya kośa*), (2) human desires and drives, or the vital sheath (*prāṇamaya kośa*), (3) human sense perceptions or the mental sheath (*manomaya kośa*), (4) human intellection and intuition at their highest and most universal or the spiritual sheath (*vijñānamaya kośa*), and, (5) human self-delight or the blissful sheath (*ānandamaya kośa*).

The spiritual science of Samkhya spelled out the same structure of human personality in a different language. So did the various Yogas and Tantras. But the purpose of all these statements always remained practical - the human personality was to be explored, purified, uplifted, and made to reach and rest on its highest perch. Many mystic methods were devised, experimented with, and perfected in order to achieve this ultimate aim. But the central theme always revolved round human consciousness and what can be done with it as it rose from one level to another. The metaphysicians engaged themselves in their round of abstract discussions. But the yogin and the bhakta and the mystic pursued their path towards perfection without bothering about mere metaphysics and without anchoring their boat at this scholastic shore or that.

That explains why it is the seer and not the scholar who has all along dominated the scene in Sanatana Dharma. That explains why it is the saint and not the pandit who has always sat at the centre of Hindu society. That explains why it is the mystic and not the man of letters who has ruled the roost in Hindu culture. The most honoured names in Hindu history, above even those of the heroes, are the names of seers, sages, saints, and mystics - Vyas, Valmiki, Yajnavalkya, the Buddha, Bhagvan Mahavira, Shankara, Ramanuja, Gorakhnath, Kabir, Nanak, Tulsidas, Mira, Ramakrishna, Raman - to mention only the most notable in a galaxy of great names. It is said that there is not a village in India which has not known an authentic saint within a radius of three miles around it. The *vani* and the *vacanāmrita* of these great souls has sustained Hindu masses in their allegiance to Sanatana Dharma even when subjected to the most harrowing hooliganism as during the medieval Muslim rule, or under the Portuguese pirates in Malabar, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.

THE MYSTIC QUEST IS UNIVERSAL

Mysticism is not a monopoly of Hindus who have never claimed to be the Chosen People, or organized themselves into the Church or the Ummah. It is the universal religion of the human race whenever and wherever it has not been forced or harangued into shutting itself against the higher message by pontifical prophets and ridiculous revelations. The record has not survived but the sculptures and hymns of ancient Egypt leave no doubt that this was a land of lofty mysticism to which the Greeks acknowledged a great debt. The mysticism in the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia can be gleaned from the points of odium attached to their religions in the Old Testament. The pre-Islamic Iranians had their full quota of mystics, the same as in the medieval period under Islam before the sufis were made subservient to the Shariat. So also the pagan Arabs. The Jews have had giant mystics. The Greeks had their Thales, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Plotinus. The annals of Rome reveal the same mystic spirit. China scaled the same spiritual heights in Lao-tse and Confucius.

It is only when we come to countries and ages dominated by Christianity and Islam that we find systematic theological tirades against mysticism. The ancient traditions of mysticism derived from Egypt, Iran, India, and Greece had survived for some time in many Christian and Muslim countries. They were particularly prominent in Iran and Iraq which gave us such great sufis as Rabia, al-Hallaj, Junaid, Abu Yazid, Attar, and Rumi. Europe under Christianity also gave us great mystics such as Eckhart, St. Teresa, and St. John of the Cross. But the theologians of Christianity and Islam were vigilant, so were the tyrants propped up by the Church and the Ummah. They could not tolerate for long such erosions of their exclusiveness by what they denounced as an unsanctioned universalism.

SUBJUGATION OF MYSTICISM TO THEOLOGY

The theocratic hand that came down on the Christian mystics and Muslim sufis was quite heavy to start with. The mystic and the sufi spirit was irrepressible like all other sterling expressions of the human spirit. But theology and theocracy were equally uncompromising. After a lot of terror inspired by theologians and theocrats, a compromise was made between the two. The Christian mystics could continue their 'mumblings' provided they swore by the primacy of the Catholic Church, and paid homage to the Pope. The sufis could sing and dance and indulge in other 'frivolities' provided they swore by the Muhammad, conformed to the Sunnah in their outer conduct, and served the sultans in the extension of Islamic imperialism.

This victory of theology over theosophy is very much manifest in the functioning of sufis and their *silsilas* in India. One never meets a sufi in the large number of this tribe in India who even whispered a word of protest against what the mullahs were saying about Hindu religion and culture, and what the sultans were doing to Hindu temples, places of pilgrimage, and holy men. But one meets many sufis who were furious with the sultans for stopping short of converting or killing all Hindu *kafirs*, and destroying all Hindu places of worship. Some of them never got reconciled to the recognition of Hindus as *zimmis* and the imposition of *jizyah* on them because in their theology it was tantamount to bartering away the mission of Islam for mammon. The only choice which Hindus had, according to them, was between Islam and death.

A typical example of such Sufism was Shykh Nuruddin Mubarak Ghaznavi (died 1234-35 AD), a disciple of Shykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (1144-1234 AD), and one of the founders of the Suhrawardia sufi *silsilā* in India. He propounded the doctrine of *Din Panahi*, and presented it to Sultan Iltutmish (1210-36 AD). This doctrine declared its very first principle as follows: "The kings should protect the

religion of Islam with sincere faith. And kings will not be able to perform the duty of protecting the Faith unless for the sake of Allah and the Prophet's creed, they overthrow and uproot *kufr* and *kafiri*, *shirk* and the worship of idols. But if the total uprooting of idolatry is not possible owing to the firm roots of *kufr* and the large number of *kafirs* and *mushriks*, the kings should at least strive to insult, disgrace, dishonour and defame the *mushrik* and idol-worshipping Hindus, who are the worst enemies of Allah and the Prophet. The symptom of the kings being the protectors of religion is this: When they see a Hindu, their eyes grow red and they wish to bury him alive; they also desire to completely uproot the Brahmans, who are the leaders of *kufr* and *shirk* and owing to whom *kufr* and *shirk* are spread and the commandments of *kufr* are enforced. Owing to the fear and terror of the kings of Islam, not a single enemy of Allah and the Prophet can drink water that is sweet or stretch his legs on his bed and go to sleep in peace." Such statements from sufis can be multiplied. Amir Khusru, the dearest disciple of Nizamuddin Awliya (Chishtiya luminary of Delhi), mourned loudly that if the Hanafi law (which accommodated Hindus as *zimmis*) had not come in the way, the very name Hindu would not have survived.

Similar examples can be cited from the annals of Christian mysticism as well. In the process, Christian mystics and Muslim sufis not only drifted away from their spiritual search, but also prolonged the life of such falsehoods as Christianity and Islam by making the dogmas of these creeds sound deeper than they were intended to do. Their personal tragedy turned, in due course, into a tragedy for universal spirituality which had initially inspired them to deepen and widen the dogmas propounded by the Founding Fathers of the Church and prophet Muhammad. This double tragedy was inevitable because Christian mystics and Muslim sufis failed from the beginning to see

that what they were being made to serve was not religion but a politics of power and imperialist aggression.

MISINFORMATION ABOUT MONOTHEISTIC CREEDS

Hindu society has never had an organised hierarchy like the Christian Church. Nor has Hindu society ever been a fanatical fraternity like the Muslim Ummah. Hindu spirituality, therefore, never became an instrument of predatory imperialism. Hindu princes in pre-Islamic India fought many wars. But none of them was a religious war. The scene changed to a certain extent when Hindu society was attacked by an imperialist ideology named Islam which pretended to be a superior religion, and which swore that Allah and his last prophet had mandated the whole earth to the Muslim Ummah. Hindu sword had to be drawn in defence of Hindu society and culture, and some Hindu saints blessed the enterprise. Even so, Hindu saints of the stature of Kabir and Nanak kept on pleading with the mullahs and the sufis to give up their exclusiveness, and accept the Hindu spiritual insight that all paths lead to the same goal. Hinduism thus retained its spiritual character and universality all along.

Kabir and Nanak and numerous other *nirguna* saints failed to carry any conviction with the mullahs and the sufis and the sultans. The latter were either too self-righteous or too enamoured of the power and pelf which the exclusiveness of Islam had earned for them. Kabir had to suffer persecution from Sikandar Lodi for questioning this exclusiveness. Guru Arjun Deva and Guru Tegh Bahadur had to lay down their lives in defence of Sanatana Dharma.

In the final round, however, the *nirguna* saints succeeded only in confusing Hindu society into believing that Islam was just another religion and not an ideology of imperialism. Fortunately, the impact of *nirguna* saints on Hindu society

was marginal. The *sagun* saints and the *acharyas* did not even so much as mention Islam even in the heyday of its power and sway. They found it beneath contempt.

The *nirguna* saints have been revived in more recent times, and presented as social reformers who stood for a casteless and classless society and as the precursors of what passes for Secularism in present-day India. This monstrous misrepresentation has been mostly the work of Hindi scholars working for doctoral degrees. They have succeeded to a large extent in misleading the Hindu intelligentsia. Now it is the turn of the Buddha and Bhagvan Mahavir who are also being dressed up in the same secular plumes.

The confusion has by now become very widespread, and is symbolized by the sanctimonious slogan of *sarva-dharma-sambhav*. This slogan was coined by Mahatma Gandhi and included in his *Mangal Prabhat* as one of the sixteen *mahavratas*. The result was an unprecedented appeasement of Islam starting with the Mahatma's support of the Khilafat movement. The Mahatma had believed sincerely that he could touch the heart of Islam and win over the Muslims to nationalism by paying handsome tributes to the Quran and the Prophet. But he also ended as a colossal failure like Kabir and Nanak. In the final upshot, he had to pay the price with his own life, and the nation had to suffer partition of the motherland.

For, Islam has no heart which can be touched. The heart has been drained of all human feelings and hardened into a calculating machine which manufactures only imperialist ambitions. Hindu society will never be able to soften that heart, or make that machine produce anything except contrived grievances and repeated rounds of violence. Let Hindu society make no mistake. The same is true of Christianity, though it has been forced to soften its face and language due to its collapse in the modern West. The heart

of Christianity, too, has been hardened into a calculating machine.

A RESCUE OPERATION NEEDED

The only hope lies in the mystical elements which still survive in Christian as well as Muslim communities in India due to the Hindu converts carrying with them a lot of Hindu culture and also due to the intrinsic urges of universal human nature. These urges have nothing to do with theological Christianity or prophetic Islam. It is not an accident that Aldous Huxley could not find a single mystical passage in Christian theology or the Quran which he could cite in his *Perennial Philosophy*. He quotes only from Christian and Muslim mystics.

One of the enterprises which a reawakened Hindu society will have to undertake is to rescue Christian mysticism from the clutches of Christian theology, and salvage sufism from the stranglehold of prophetic Islam. This can be the only basis on which Hindu society can come to terms with Christian and Muslim communities in India. One can be sure that there are many Christians for whom the message of Christian mysticism is more important than Christian theology, as there are many Muslims in whom Attar and Rumi touch a deeper chord than is touched by the pronouncements of prophetic Islam and its stultified sufi accomplices.

Hindu society has to make it clear, once and for all, that there can be no compromise with a Christian theology which preaches that Jesus Christ is the only saviour and that it is the mission of Christianity to save all mankind. At the same time, Hindu society has to tell the Muslims, in an unmistakable voice, that it will not permit the permeation of prophetic Islam according to which Muhammad is the last prophet and the Ummah has inherited the lands of the *kafirs* as a mandate from Allah.

Ch 8 - Christianity and Islam: Ideologies of Imperialism

The story which I am now going to tell is true. I remember it word by word, although it happened twenty-five years ago.¹

A young Muslim Sufi from Kashmir was telling us about the teachings of his *guru* (this was the word he used for his teacher) who had died some years earlier. *Pranayam* was a prominent part of these teachings. This again was the term he used, though he did not know even the Hindi language, not to speak of Sanskrit.

The sufi was a very simple and unassuming person. He had had no schooling. And he made his living by the humble occupation of a tailor. But we were fascinated by what he told us about the techniques used by his *guru* for his spiritual training. His language was straightforward without the slightest touch of pedantry.

As the conversation drew to a close someone from among us started to play a record of *padavali kirtan* by one of the few famous female specialists from Bengal. The sufi was visibly moved by the pathos in Radha's pining for Sri Krishna who had left Vrindavan for Mathura. Soon after the music stopped, he exclaimed, "*Aisā gānā hamnê êk hazār baras bād sunā* (I have heard this sort of music after a thousand years)." His eyes were brimming with tears which he was trying to hide.

We were amazed. He was in his thirties. He could not have been in this world a thousand years ago. What did he mean by that statement? We requested him to explain. He said in a voice full of innocence: "*Pahle janam mên sunā hogā* (I must have heard it in an earlier life)."

I became agog with curiosity. He was talking of transmigration. So I asked him, “*Āp kyā is zindgî sê pahlê janam kî bāt mānatê hain* (Do you believe in a birth before this present life)?”

The sufi seemed to be somewhat annoyed. He asked a counter-question in a tone which had a touch of temper: “*Āp mazhab kâ sawāl kyoñ uThātê hain* (Why are you raising a theological controversy)?”

I was puzzled by his reply, as was everybody else. I had not the slightest intention to annoy him. He was our guest. I had asked the question out of sheer curiosity. So I came forward with a clarification, and said, “*Sûfijî, āp musalmān hain. Islām êk hî janam mānatā hai. Āpnê pahle janam kî bāt kahî, isliyê sawāl uThāyā thā* (You are a Muslim. Islam recognises only one life. You talk about an earlier life. That is why I had asked the question).”

He relaxed and explained: “*Mazhab tō wahî bāt kahtā hai. Lekin maiñ tō rāz kî bāt kah rahā thā* (It is true that theology says that. But I was talking of the esoteric way).”

We were surprised by this distinction. This was a new revelation to us - this separation of esoterism from theology. The Sufi continued: “*Rāz kî bāt ham sab kê sāmanê nahîñ kahtê. Yeh tō maiñ āp logoñ se kah rahā thā* (We do not talk of the esoteric way before everybody. It is only to you people that I was talking about it).”

All of us asked simultaneously: “*Kyoñ (Why)?*”

The Sufi said, “*Woh log* (those people)”... and without completing the sentence he put the edge of his outstretched palm on his throat and moved it across. He was trying to convey that “those people” would cut his throat.

We asked him about “those people”. Who were they? He did not name any. But he became gloomy. It was obvious

that he did not like to continue the dialogue, which we dropped immediately.

I was sure in my mind that nobody was going to cut his throat these days even if he proclaimed publicly what he believed privately. Times had changed. Moreover, he was a citizen of India, not of an Islamic theocracy. Yet the alarm in his voice was unmistakable.

I knew how Mansur al-Hallaj had been tortured to death by an Islamic state prompted by Islamic theologians for saying that he himself was the *Haqq* (Truth). But that was all. I had not yet read any detailed history of Sufism, nor compared or contrasted the doctrines of Sufism with the dogmas of prophetic Islam. It was years later when I made such a study and came to know of the *rishi* tradition in Kashmir Sufism, that I was suddenly reminded of that talk with the young sufi that day. He was obviously referring to the tradition of terror which had silenced the sufs of the *rishi* tradition, and forced them to keep in their breasts the best of their knowledge. The memory of that terror, it seemed, was still intact in the mind of this sufi.

THE SUFI AS A FANATIC

My studies in Sufism also brought back to my mind another encounter with another Sufi at about the same time. He was an elderly man. He was quite learned in his own way, and could discuss various religious and philosophical doctrines with some knowledge. He could also manage some English in which language he also wrote an occasional pamphlet. The incident which I shall now relate took place when I met him for the first time, though I had heard a lot about him from a close friend.

I was staying by myself in the house of this friend when this sufi dropped in one day. I requested him to stay with me for a few days and give me the benefit of his company. He agreed and we had quite a few fruitful sessions during

which we talked about mysticism and the rest, without touching the subject of Islam or Hinduism. I was impressed. His language was quite forceful, particularly when he made fun of atheists, materialists, and mere philosophers.

One day I was reading an Urdu translation of Sarmad's Persian poems when the sufi came into my room and sat down by my side. I put away the book and had another long talk with him. Then I left the room because I had a few other things to do. When I returned after about half an hour, I found the sufi reading the same book by Sarmad. A few days earlier I had heard him talking about Sarmad with reverence and in a language of fulsome praise. So I sat down quietly in a corner and waited for him to read out and explain some significant lines from that book.

But I was taken aback when he suddenly threw the book against the opposite wall with some violence and shouted, "*Harāmzādā kāfir hī thā* (The bastard was an infidel indeed)!" I picked up the book, brought it back to the sufi, and asked him to show me the lines that had enraged him so uncontrollably. He leafed through the book and finally put his finger on two lines almost towards the end. I cannot recall the exact words of the couplet, but I remember very well the message that was conveyed. Sarmad had addressed himself as follows: "*O Sarmad! What is it that goes on happening to you? You started as a follower of Moses. Next you put your faith in Muhammad. And now at last you have become a devotee of Ram and Lakshman.*"

I could see nothing wrong or improper in this couplet. Sarmad was only telling the story of his seeking which had led him from Moses to Muhammad to Rama and Lakshman. I had not read the book as fast and as far as the sufi had done. Nor did I know the real reason for which Sarmad had been beheaded in Delhi by the order of Aurangzeb. All I had heard was that Sarmad used to roam about naked on the roads of this imperial city. I had supposed that he had been

punished for his impudence in the midst of a polished society which placed immense importance on being properly dressed. It was years later that I learnt the real nature of Sarmad's "crime". It was apostasy which is punishable with death according to the law of Islam laid down by the Prophet himself during the days of his tussle with the polytheists of Mecca.

I have never lost my respect for this second sufi. He is a man of character endowed with a keen mind and a good knowledge of what passes for mysticism in Islam. But he becomes absolutely impregnable, indeed an insufferable fanatic, when it comes to the dogmas of prophetic Islam. His contempt for everything Hindu comes through clearly whenever he publishes a pamphlet. Hindus, he says, are worshippers of *kankhajuras* (scorpions), *khatmals* (bugs), *gay ka gohar* (cow-dung), and *Kali*. How he has worked out this combination of four "filthy" things has always defied my imagination. But one thing becomes obvious whenever he opens his mouth, namely, that he derives immense satisfaction by portraying Hinduism in this picturesque manner. Sometimes I feel that the very vehemence of his language against Hinduism helps him keep the fire of his fanaticism burning. Whenever he is in this mood, it is impossible to have a word edgewise with him, or make him realize that he is being downright ridiculous.²

THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY AND THE MYSTIC

I had the same experience a year earlier with a Catholic missionary who was trying to convert me to his own creed. He had taken me to a monastery in a mountainous region, and put me into what the Christians call a retreat. The very first sentence he uttered in his very first lecture was that I should not expect him to give "some funny feeling inside you". I did not get the point at that time. Later on I learnt that he was referring to the mystic experience for which we Hindus are supposed to have a special weakness. The Father

failed to give me any feeling, funny or otherwise, and the retreat was a total failure. I had started as an ordinary Hindu and came out of it in the same condition. The dogmas of Christianity he had dished out sounded to me, to say that least, rather infantile. But what pained me the most in my meetings with this otherwise lovable man was his contempt for Hinduism which he always equated with the “worship of every bug that bites and every cockroach that crawls around”.

In later years I met another Christian missionary who made it a point to call on me whenever he visited Delhi. His first fascination in India (he was a foreigner) was for Raman Maharshi. That led him to Vedanta and the Upanishads which fascinated him still more. Finally, he gave up his missionary station in the south and moved to the Himalayas for a quiet life of study and meditation. He was a prolific writer. He died a few years ago.

In my first encounter with him I made him feel somewhat uncomfortable by asking him some unconventional questions about Christian theology, particularly about Jesus being the only saviour. Next time we met, he asked me to avoid doctrinal disputation and join him in a deeper communion of minds in meditation. I agreed with him very gladly, and we never discussed theology again. Most of the time, I listened to him as he spoke about the Upanishads, particularly about the experience of *Advaita*. He had made a very deep study of the subject, and I was nowhere near him in my own knowledge of it.

But I was puzzled when I read some of his writings. Here he was trying very hard to reconcile the experience of *Advaita* with what he called the Christian experience. I referred the matter to Ram Swarup. He told me that Christian experience was the new name which they were now giving to Christian theology.

I knew nothing about any experience, advaitic or Christian. Nor do I know it now. But one thing I know for certain is that human experience, whatever its level, is human experience. There is nothing Hindu, or Muslim, or Christian about it as such. The fact that *Advaita* is a Sanskrit word - a language which flourished in India and is now honoured by Hindus - as also the fact that it has been discussed most exhaustively in the Upanishads, which are now known as Hindu shastras, does not make it a national or sectarian word. For the word only refers to a state of human consciousness which Kabir has described so aptly as *bahar bhitar ekai jano, yeh guru gyan batai* (it is the same everywhere, whether without or within; this is the secret taught by the teacher).

Here was a man who was moved so sincerely and so deeply by his seeking for *Advaita*. Why could he not concentrate on the experience itself, and forget Christianity for the time being? Why could he not throw his theological luggage out of the window and travel straight to the station towards which the train of his own experience was heading? Why should he look out every now and then to find out if the stations on the way had their nameplates inscribed in a language which he had inherited by the accident of his birth? I could not find at that time any satisfactory answers to these questions.

The young sufi was afraid of being slaughtered for saying what he believed to be true. The sincere Christian seeker was trying to stick a label where it failed to stick. Their plight was pathetic.

On the other hand, the old sufi was so sure about himself, about his Islam, and about the abomination that was Hinduism in his eyes. So was the Catholic missionary who had tried to save me from perdition. They seemed to know what was wrong, and where. They seemed to know what was right, and how. What was it that made them feel so

secure in their beliefs, and so self-righteous in their swearing against Hinduism?

POLITICS MASQUERADING AS RELIGION

The questions remained unanswered till I had a chance to read the life of Prophet Muhammad and the history of the rise of Christianity. I knew a lot of Muslim history in this country, and also abroad. I knew how blood-soaked it was in all its chapters. I also knew a lot of Christian history in Europe, and America, and elsewhere. I knew what a horrible story it was in terms of death and destruction it brought to many lands. What I did not know for a long time was the genesis of these creeds which had inflicted so much suffering on mankind.

It was only when I looked into the source books of these 'religions', and examined the character of their founders that I discovered the *asurik* roots from which they had sprung. It was only then that I realized the grave error in recognizing these 'creeds' as 'religions' in any sense of the term. I could see quite clearly that what we were faced with were purely political ideologies inspired by imperialist ambitions. It was only then that all pieces of the puzzle fell into a pattern - the theologies, the histories, the swearologies, and the rest.

Before I take up the genesis of these creeds, I should like to make one point very clear. [There are no non-Christian records available about the birth, rise, and spread of Christianity till it captured state power in the Roman Empire.](#) Whatever I write below about the genesis of Christianity is based entirely on early Christian records. [Similarly, no non-Muslim records have survived about the rise and spread of Islam in Arabia.](#) What I write below about the genesis of Islam is based entirely on Islamic records.

GENESIS AND CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANITY

Some historians in the West have serious doubts about the very existence of a man called Jesus Christ.³ And almost

all historians agree that if he existed at all, nothing can be known about his person or teaching because all contemporary sources, Christian and non-Christian, are either silent or unreliable regarding the subject. Thus, all we have is the Jesus of the Gospels which are now regarded as theological statements rather than a record of historical events. And [Jesus of the Gospels is a questionable character. He makes tall claims about himself, and curses all those who do not accept those claims.](#) He denounces his own people as sons of the Devil and killers of prophets.

In due course, Christian theology came to proclaim that Jesus was the only-begotten son of the only true god; that he had been sent down in order to wash with his own blood the sins of mankind by mounting the cross; that he had risen from the dead on the third day and appeared to his apostles in flesh and bones; that he was the same as his father whose divinity he shared in full; that those who accepted him as the only saviour had all their sins washed by his blood; that he had entered his apostles as the holy ghost and entrusted them with the mission of saving all mankind from eternal hell-fire; that the Church founded by the apostles and joined by the converts was his body and bride; and that the whole world had been mandated to the Church by the father and the son and the holy ghost.

What one finds striking about these ridiculous statements is that none of them can stand the test of human reason or experience. The Church declares them to be mysteries beyond the reach of human understanding. The apostles had tried to sell these 'mysteries' to the Jews in Jerusalem. The only response they met was dismissal with contempt. Next, they tried these 'mysteries' on Jewish communities settled in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. They had some small success, but most of the time met with considerable resistance. Finally, they took this merchandise to the metropolitan mart at Rome where their business found some firm footing for

the first time. It was in Rome that the methods of missionary salesmanship were matured over a period of time. The structure of the Roman Empire provided a model for the structure of the Church. The missionaries got busy building a state within the state.

In the next two centuries, the Church became a rich and powerful organisation with members in many leading families of Rome. It found many adherents among politicians who wielded power, among military commanders who were superstitious or in need of political support, and among merchants who had money but no brains for philosophical questions. The mother of Emperor Severus (222-235 AD) became a Christian, so did Emperor Philip the Arabian (244-249 AD). Helena, the mother of Constantine, was also a Christian convert. Now the Church extended the Divine Right to rule as a despot to anyone who was prepared to declare Christianity as the sole state religion and suppress all pagan religions. Constantine, who wanted to secure a dynastic succession for his family - a practice unknown to Roman politics so far, saw his opportunity in this new doctrine, and proclaimed in favour of the Church. The common people in Rome resisted this royal renegade. So he removed his capital from Rome to Byzantium, which was renamed Constantinople.

The precedent set by Constantine in consolidating a dynastic despotism with the help of the Church was copied by many crowned heads all over Europe in subsequent centuries. The king in pagan societies was only the first among equals. The Church enabled him to become an unbridled autocrat who derived his authority not from the community over which he ruled but from God Almighty. The conflicts which developed between these autocrats and the powerful Church with a Pope at its head, came much later, after the common people all over Europe had been enslaved and deprived of their traditional institutions which

safeguarded their fundamental freedoms. For quite some time, the Church co-operated with the kings to convert the common people everywhere into hewers of wood and drawers of water.

This was one part of the story. Another was a large-scale destruction of ancient religions all over Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa where the Church spread its tentacles with the help of despotic rulers. All pagan schools were closed, all pagan temples were demolished or converted into churches, and all pagan images were publicly defiled and destroyed. Pagan books were burnt and pagan priests were killed, mostly by Christian monks who led Christian mobs after lecturing them into fevered frenzy. That is how Christianity triumphed over pagan religions and societies - not by the power of its moral or spiritual superiority or the logic of its doctrines, but by the power of the sword wielded by despicable despots.

GENESIS AND CHARACTER OF ISLAM

Muhammad followed in the footsteps of Jesus in making the same sort of claims for himself, cursing his own people in the choicest language of monotheism, and threatening them with slaughter. He, however, did not have to struggle against a centralized state when he found that his prophethood had no attraction for the people of Mecca. He migrated to Medina, which was more receptive to monotheism because of a large presence of Jews in that town, and emerged as a powerful potentate. He ended by exiling or killing *en masse* the Jewish population which resisted him as soon as he came out in his true colours. Meanwhile, he had amassed much wealth by plundering merchant caravans and scattered Arab settlements. He created the nucleus of a standing army out of the toughs and desperados who flocked to him in increasing numbers for committing crimes and sharing the loot. In short, he built the apparatus of a military state in Medina and used it for

imposing his closed creed on the tribal settlements of Arabia by means of armed force. The doctrines of Islam were tailored to the needs of this galloping tyranny, and sold with the help of the sword. And the sword was stamped with the name of an almighty Allah, in whose service the ancient religion and culture of Arabia were destroyed root and branch.

THE MISTAKE MADE BY HINDU SOCIETY

Hindu society has to understand very clearly that what it is faced with in the form of Christianity and Islam are not religions but imperialist ideologies whose appetite has been whetted by running roughshod over a large part of the world. Hindu society is making a serious, almost a fatal mistake, in appealing to these ideologies in the name of reason and morality which are supposed to accompany religion. This sort of appeal is bound to fail because it falls on deaf ears. The menace has to be met by methods and means which are suited to the nature and magnitude of the menace. Hitler had said, "*if the chicken and geese pass a resolution about peace, the wolf is not convinced*". There is little chance that Hindu society will ever be able to contain Christianity or Islam if it continues to regard these aggressive and imperialist ideologies as religions, and extend tolerance to them.

Footnotes:

¹ In 1958.

² This Sufi remained a friend till he saw my writings, particularly *Hindu Society under Siege*. In my last meeting with him, he said that I had "stabbed him in the back". He died a few years ago.

³ See Sita Ram Goel, *'Jesus Christ: Artifice for Aggression'*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1994.

Ch 9 - Character of Nehruvian Secularism

Twenty years ago I had been invited to a seminar on '*Hurdles to Secularism*'.¹ It was presided over by the late Shri

Jayprakash Narayan (JP). The Working Paper had been prepared by the late Professor A.B. Shah. It was a surprising departure from the usual norm of such papers. While he had repeated the current clichés about 'Hindu communalism', Professor Shah had been equally unsparing about what he had nailed down as 'Muslim communalism'.

In the event, however, the paper remained irrelevant to the discussion that took place. The several speakers that rose, one after another, became red in the face and foamed at the mouth as they fulminated against Hindu society for denying employment to Muslims in the public as well as the private sector, for reducing the Muslim minority to the status of second class citizens, for committing untold atrocities on the poor and helpless Muslims in a repeated round of riots, and so on so forth. All these speakers wore Hindu names. The most vociferous of them was Balraj Puri, who has managed to masquerade for many years as a martyr in the service of what he proclaims to be humanist causes.

There were four or five Muslim participants present in that seminar. One of them was a professor of Arabic from a leading university. Another was a lawyer well-known for his championing of all communist and Islamic causes at all times. They were invited to speak next. But they all smiled and said that they had nothing to add to what their 'Hindu brethren' had already said so 'loudly and so lucidly'.

And then all of a sudden I saw some fireworks from the same silent and satisfied Islamic fraternity. They had all stood up, shaking with uncontrollable rage, and were shouting at the same time, "*He is lying!*" They were pointing their fingers at the gentleman who had been invited to speak by the president, and who had said only a few sentences. Balraj Puri kept sitting. But he looked as if he would burst out of his skin.

This was the late Hamid Dalwai. I had heard of him. But this was the first time I saw him. He was a tall man with a slight stoop, a smiling face, and a rather relaxed self-possession. He was saying, *"All that has been said about Hindu communalism today is nothing new. We have heard it for the nth time. The intention of the working paper of this seminar, however, was to highlight for the first time what has so far been ignored by all progressive people who swear by secularism. What I want to expose today is Muslim communalism which has already divided the motherland, and which is still strong enough to poison our body-politic..."*

It was at this point that the Muslim gentlemen had stood up and started shouting. I had been asked by JP not to speak at all. He was of the view that I being a well-known 'Hindu communalist' was quite likely to say something wild and thus mar the proceedings. It was Professor Shah who had extended the invitation to me, and then conveyed to me the condition laid down by JP if I wanted to be present. So I had kept quiet in spite of the insufferable Balraj Puri staring at me provokingly, off and on. But I could restrain myself no more. I stood up and addressed JP as follows: *"For almost an hour and a half we have been listening patiently to what so many Hindus have said about Hindu society. Now a Muslim gentleman wants to say something about Muslim society. Why should we not listen to him with the same patience? Why should this gentleman, who is attending this seminar not as a gate-crasher but as an invited participant, be shouted down in this shameless manner?"*

JP had also come to feel very strongly the iniquity of it all. He looked at the Islamic fraternity with annoyance on his face, and said with a touch of temper in his voice, *"I insist that Hamid should be allowed to say whatever he wants to say."* The Islamic fraternity collapsed in their seats with pained and perplexed expression on their faces. They felt betrayed. It was the unkindest cut of all, coming as it did from a man of such eminent standing in the world of India's Secularism.

Hamid continued:

“Hindu society has produced many communalists. Admitted. But it has also produced men like Mahatma Gandhi who went on a fast unto death to save the Muslims of Bihar from large-scale butchery. It has produced men like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had the Bihari Hindus bombed from the air when they did not respond to the Mahatma’s call. These have not been isolated men in Hindu society, as Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and M.C. Chagla have been in Muslim society. The Mahatma was a leader whom the whole Hindu society honoured. Pandit Nehru has been kept as Prime Minister over all these years by a majority vote of the same Hindu society.

“Now let me give you a sample of the leadership which Muslim society has produced so far, and in an ample measure. The foremost that comes to my mind is Liaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. Immediately after partition, there was a shooting in Sheikhupura in which many Hindus who were waiting for repatriation in a camp, were shot down. There was a great commotion in India, and Pandit Nehru had to take up the matter in his next weekly meeting with Liaqat Ali in Lahore. The Prime Minister of Pakistan had brought the Deputy Commissioner of Sheikhupura with him. The officer explained that the Hindus had broken out of the camp at night in the midst of a curfew, and the police had to open fire. Pandit Nehru asked as to why the Hindus had broken out of the camp. The officer told him that some miscreants had set the camp on fire. Pandit Nehru protested to Liaqat Ali that this was an amazing explanation. Liaqat Ali replied without batting an eye that they had to maintain law and order. This exemplifies the quality of leadership which Muslim society has produced so far. This...”

All hell now broke loose as the Islamic fraternity stood up again, and started shouting that they had not come to the seminar to be insulted by “a hired hoodlum of the RSS fascists”. JP could restrain them no more, and declared the proceedings closed with a note of anguish in his voice. As

we walked out, I saw that the Hindu champions of Secularism avoided Hamid as if he was a snake. He was trying to take leave of them by approaching each one of them with a smile still lingering on his face. I was the only Hindu who shook hands with him, and patted him on the back for the brave stand he had taken in the face of a rowdy opposition

GENESIS OF SECULARISM IN EUROPE

Ever since then I have pondered over the subject of Secularism which has become a political cult next only to Socialism² and to which all political parties subscribe without so much as a why. What has Secularism come to mean in the Indian context? How did the concept arise? Who were those that gave to it its current shape and content? I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that **Secularism in its present Indian form is no more than an embodiment of anti-Hindu animus, and is supported by all those who want to destroy Hindu society and culture.**

Secularism is essentially a political concept which originated and took shape in nineteenth century Europe. Till about the middle of the 18th century, the State in all European countries was allied with one denomination or another of the splintered Christian Church. In fact, the State was described by the Church as its secular arm. It was not unoften that the State carried out pogroms against 'heretics' and 'dissidents' at the behest of the dominant Christian denomination. The King of England is still described as Defender of the Faith whenever the full array of his titles is trotted out. This is a relic and a reminder of that dark period in European history when the king in every country was used by the Church to maintain its stranglehold, and when he used the Church in turn to sustain his unbridled despotism.

Then came the Enlightenment when the exclusive claims of Christianity were questioned, and a wave of anti-clericalism attracted the intellectual elite in all European countries. This was followed by the rising tide of rationalism and humanism, fostered and fed by the empiricism of modern science. The churches defended their dogmas very doggedly. But there was very little in those dogmas which could survive a rational or moral scrutiny. That was why the Church had needed a secular arm to maintain its monopoly of truth for more than fourteen hundred years.

It was in this atmosphere of revolt against Christianity and its closed culture that the concept of Secularism was evolved and employed in country after country in Europe. The secular power of the State was no longer to be the secular arm of the Church. It was to become secular on its own, that is, a power which secured equal rights to all its citizens without bothering about their beliefs. The Church was separated from the State which was no longer supposed to interfere with the religious life of the citizens, or to discriminate against any citizen on the basis of his or her religion or absence of it. Religion was now to be treated as a purely private matter in which the state was not supposed to pry, and which was not to be projected in public affairs.

HINDU SOCIETY HAS ALWAYS BEEN SECULAR

India had never known a theocratic state till the advent of Islam in this country in the first quarter of the eighth century AD. Hindu Dharma has always been a pluralistic religion. Hindu culture and society too have been pluralistic throughout their hoary history. It was, therefore, impossible for the Hindus to erect an established church or to proclaim a state religion and call upon the State to impose it by force. The Hindu state extended its patronage to all religious sects equally, even when a king and his courtiers adhered to a particular sect in their private lives. Religious strife followed

by bloodshed had never blackened the fair face of Hindu society.

Things changed radically when Islamic imperialism invaded India, and brought with it a fully developed theory as well as the apparatus of a theocratic state. The Islamic state had already destroyed by fire and sword the ancient religions of the Arabs, the Persians, and the Turks. It started to do the same in India, and succeeded to a large extent in several parts of the North-West. But the resistance offered by Hindu nation in the rest of the country was too strong. The Mughals under Akbar had to abandon the experiment in order to save and extend their empire. And the Islamic state met the fate it deserved when Aurangzeb tried to reverse the trend.

The Hindu experience of a theocratic state was a very painful experience, spread as it was over several centuries. Even so, the Hindus did not learn any lessons in theocracy. The Hindu states which re-emerged under the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Sikhs, and the Jats were secular states which did not molest the Muslim population in spite of Hindu memories of what Islam had done to Hindu religion and culture during the days of its domination. The same Secularism characterised the national movement for freedom from British imperialism which was manned overwhelmingly by the Hindu masses. Hindu leaders tried their best to take along the Muslim masses in the fight for freedom.

THE RISING TIDE OF MUSLIM REVIVALISM

On the other hand, the Muslim society in India which consisted almost entirely of those whose forefathers had been converted by force, started throwing up one revivalist movement after another throughout the period of British rule. All these movements reminded Muslim society that it had lost political power in India due to its own fall from the

faith, that it had to purify itself in the image of the first four Khalifas who had founded the world-wide Islamic empire, and that it could not and should not rest till it recaptured political power and restored its theocratic state. It is debatable whether any of these movements achieved any purification of Muslim society except a spasmodic outburst of beards on many Muslim faces. But it is on record that every one of these movements turned into a jihad against the Hindus wherever the latter were found in a minority and unable to defend themselves. The British power had to intervene against the mullahs and the mujahids not to protect the Hindus so much as to restore law and order. Some of the Muslim fanatics got killed in these encounters and were hailed by Muslim society as martyrs (*shahids*) for the greater glory of Islam. Recently the Communist Party of India has been resurrecting these riots staged by Islamic lust for Hindu blood as illustrious instances of the Muslim fight for freedom against the hated British imperialism!

Muslim society in India, therefore, looked at the freedom movement with suspicion, and frequently denounced it as a Hindu conspiracy to capture power to the detriment of Islam. The British had started feeling the impact of the freedom movement in the opening years of the twentieth century. They saw an ally in Islamic revivalism, and made up their mind to pit it against a nation in revolt. The foundation of the Muslim League in 1906 was a command performance at the instance of a British Viceroy as is now very well known. It followed immediately after the partition of Bengal (1905) in order to carve out a Muslim majority province in the east of India. The partition had to be undone due to fear of Hindu revolutionaries. But the alliance that was thus forged between British imperialism and Islamic revivalism continued, and got consolidated in the years to come. Muslim society now started staking its claims for a

lion's share whenever the British were forced to make any concessions to the freedom fighters.

By the time Mahatma Gandhi appeared on the scene, the Muslim League had acquired a position which the British could play up on every bargaining counter between Indian nationalism on the one hand and British imperialism on the other. The mischievous message conveyed by the British rulers was that it was not they who were blocking India's progress towards freedom but the Hindus themselves by their refusal to come to terms with the "Muslim minority". At the same time, the British made it clear that they were not going to quit under "Hindu pressure" and leave the "Muslim minority" to the "tender mercies of a brute Hindu majority". It was this stalemate that the Mahatma tried to break by his sudden decision to support the Khilafat agitation.

The agitation ended as a farce when Mustafa Kamal forced the Turkish Sultan (who was also the Khalifa of Islam) to abdicate and sink into oblivion. But it had created an illusion of Hindu-Muslim unity in India for as long as it lasted. The streets in most Indian cities resounded with the emotionally surcharged slogan of Hindu-Muslim-Bhai-Bhai which frightened the British authority, at least for the time being. Not many Hindu nationalists were able to notice that the Khilafat agitation was just another recrudescence of Islamic revivalism which was now making a bid to use the national movement for its own imperialist purposes. The few doubting Thomases, who raised their voice of warning, were silenced by the prevailing euphoria for communal amity.

The curtain was raised on the reality behind the rhetoric when the Moplah Muslims of Malabar started another jihad against their Hindu neighbours who were caught uncautioned and unprepared. The British had to send some armed forces before the Muslim butchery of innocent

Hindus could be brought under control. The Moplah violence was the opening scene of unprecedented riots staged by Muslims all over India. The Muslim leaders were once more taking it out on the Hindus for their frustration over Khilafat. It was the same story all over again - music before a mosque, or a pig in a Muslim mohalla, or a private fracas between two toughs belonging to the two communities. The Muslims have never needed a more substantial excuse whenever they are in a nasty mood. Nor has the nasty mood been able to mend itself for long because of the continued Muslim failure to recapture power all over India and re-establish their 'lost empire'. In case the Hindus failed to provide the necessary provocation, the Muslims could always slaughter a cow in the presence of Hindus, or abduct and molest a Hindu girl in keeping with the best behests of Islam, or take out a rowdy tajiya procession through a thoroughfare thickly populated by Hindus.

The need of the situation was to remind Hindu society that Muslim objection to music before the mosque was a legacy of Islamic imperialism under which the kafirs were not allowed to celebrate their religious and social festivals loudly, and that cow-slaughter and tajiya processions through Hindu mohallas were discriminatory privileges enjoyed by Muslims during the days of their dominance. Muslim society had to be told in no uncertain terms that Islamic rule in India was no more, and that the privileges enjoyed by the Muslim and the disabilities imposed on the Hindus were not going to be tolerated. At the same time, Hindu society had to prepare itself to meet effectively the violence to which Muslim society had become addicted under inspiration from the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

GENESIS OF SECULARISM IN INDIA

But Hindu society did not take any of these steps, though there were several voices which warned this society to mend its fences while there was still some time. The Indian

National Congress came to be increasingly dominated by constitutionalists who wanted to settle with the Muslim League on terms of the latter's choosing in order to be in a better position to bargain with the British. And failing to persuade Muslim society to shed its separatism, these constitutionalists started training all their guns against those who objected to Islamic revivalism, or criticized it as an obstacle in the path of national progress towards freedom. The Congress started undergoing a transformation which was fraught with fatal consequences. In the process, the phrase 'Hindu communalism' gained currency as a pejorative phrase.

The constitutionalists were soon reinforced and then replaced by a brood of Leftists most of whom were educated in the West where they had caught the contagion of Communist thought-categories. Their animus against Hindu society to which they belonged by accident of birth was incurable because they had pawned their brains to what they glorified as progressivism. It was these Leftists who branded Indian nationalism as Hindu communalism, and then placed this swearology at the service of Islamic separatism in India. It was these Leftists who converted the Hindu-Muslim conflict into a class conflict in which Hindu were presented as the parasitic landlords and capitalists and the Muslims as the poor peasants and the proletariat whom Hindus were out to exploit and oppress. It was these Leftists who started the game of parading Islam as the champion of social equality and human brotherhood while pooh-pooing Sanatana Dharma as the bulwark of brahmin domination and caste discrimination. And it was these Leftists who divided the Indian National Congress into "progressives who stood for eradication of poverty" and "reactionaries who were out to safeguard and extend the Birla empire". Most Congressmen who had any feeling for Hindu society and who saw the menace of Islamic imperialism were in this

“reactionary” camp of the Congress. The Leftists started lampooning them as “Hindu communalists” as soon as the “reactionaries” opened their mouths.

The Leftists were small in number to start with. But they were ideologically equipped and spoke in a language which was prestigious in the eyes of the fast multiplying English-educated Hindu elite. They were supported by university professors and student leaders who had become fascinated by Marxist phraseology with which the country was being flooded by both Soviet Russia and Western democracies, and which the British authorities patronised to wean away the nationalist revolutionaries from what was described as terrorism. But what was most significant, the Aligarh school of Islamic imperialism in particular and the Muslim League leadership in general picked up the refrain in no time, and converted Islamic separatism into a peasant and proletarian protest against “Hindu exploitation and oppression”. The wolf was now going about in sheep’s clothing, and the poor sheep was being portrayed as a man-eater.

Hindu society was not ideologically equipped to meet this new challenge. The language of nationalism was the only language it knew and could speak with conviction. But the doublespeak devised by the Leftists had already made this language of nationalism sound like the language of “reaction” and “sectarian self-interest”. Nor did Hindu society suspect that the Leftists were, by and large, being financed and made to function in the service of Soviet imperialism. Hindu society was taken in by the loudness of their language against British imperialism. Traitors were stealing a march on the patriots, and those who failed to jump on the bandwagon were left by the roadside.

What followed was inevitable. The Indian National Congress surrendered to Islamic separatism in stages, and finally sold millions of people to slaughter and slavery on both sides of the border. And the Leftists who had worked

untiringly to bring about this disaster and bloodshed blamed it on “Hindu communalism”, while they themselves slipped into positions of power for which they had bargained with the British in the meanwhile. The leader of this perfidious operation was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the Prime Minister of truncated India. The erstwhile Muslim Leaguers who failed to find a berth in Pakistan flocked to the Indian National Congress to strengthen “secularism” which was now proclaimed as the new religion of India that is Bharat.

SAPPERS AND MINERS OF SEVERAL IMPERIALISMS

This is the genesis of the Nehruvian Secularism. A concept which was evolved in Europe in order to free societies from religious fanaticism has been converted by the Nehruvian ruling class into a cover for furthering the cause of religious fanaticism. The verbal shell is the same. But it has been surreptitiously stuffed with the potent poison of Islamic imperialism. Secularism in India today is the single most powerful shield for protecting the further progress of Islamic imperialism in the truncated Hindu homeland.

It is small wonder that the Muslim leaders in independent India have revived in stages all the old strategies of Islamic imperialism - contrived grievances, the posture of being a persecuted minority, street riots, and so on. The Leftists who now style themselves as secularists are again shouting themselves hoarse against “Hindu communalism”. Only the whipping boy has changed. It was the Arya Samaj, Purushottam Das Tandon, the Hindu Mahasabha, and Sardar Patel in pre-independence India. It is the RSS and other patriotic organisations in the post-independence period.

What is worse, the success of Islamic imperialism in dividing India and in continuing to steal another march on

the Hindu homeland, has encouraged another Indian community, the Sikhs, to copy the Islamic model as well as the Islamic methods. The Ek Omkar has been converted into Allah. The *vani* of the Gurus has been converted into *wahi* which is supposed to be the latest and the best. The Gurus themselves are being paraded as prophets who proclaimed exclusive power for the Panth. And the Panth itself has been made into an Ummah which claims a monopoly of virtue for its members simply because they swear by a book and wear a distinctive hairdo.

The Panth now proclaims that its scriptures do not permit it to separate religion from politics. It accuses Hindus of a conspiracy to destroy its religious and cultural identity. It is uncontrollably angry with the “brute Hindu majority” for denying to it what it “more than amply deserves by virtue of its achievements in the past”. It has passed a resolution which demands an exclusive domination over a well-defined area without reference to the wishes of other inhabitants of that area. And it is increasingly taking to violence to frighten the “*lālās*”³ into surrender. It will not be long before the Panth opts for a separate homeland “after having exhausted all peaceful methods of an honourable accommodation with the Hindus”. The slogan has already been raised by a section of the Panth. Meanwhile, the Panth has grabbed and is enjoying more than its fair share in the economy, polity, and administration of the country. Here is another wolf prowling around in sheep’s clothing.

The response from the secularist ruling class is bound to be the same old stereotype which was evolved in the face of the Muslim wolf. The secularists have started by being concerned over the “communal situation” in the Punjab, and have thus already placed the aggressor and the victim of aggression on the same pedestal. In the next round, the “legitimate” demands of the Panth will be conceded. And “illegitimate” demands will go on becoming “legitimate” as

the tempo of violence increases. In the final round, the demand for separation is bound to become fully "legitimate". The dreadful deed will then be blamed on "Hindu communalist" which "refused to see reason at the right time".⁴

HINDUS SHOULD REJECT THIS SHAM SECULARISM

Hindu society will fail to defend itself unless it sees through this Secularism and rejects it not only as a counterfeit coin but also as high treason to the Indian nation. Hindu society will never be able to defeat this gangster game unless it stops going on the defensive every time a secularist shouts his subversive slogans. Hindu society will have to tell the secularist that a Hindu cannot be a communalist in his own homeland. Anyone who accuses a Hindu of being a communalist is like the thug who accused the brahmin of buying a dog while, in fact, the brahmin had bought a calf. The thug is out to hoodwink and steal.

An honest Secularism had a lot to learn from Hindu history and culture. It would have held up Hindu society as the model of a secular society. It would have informed Muslim society, in very firm language, that the seeds of its trouble lay not in "Hindu communalism" but in the exclusiveness of Islam. It would have tried to re-educate Muslim society so that this society shed its self-righteous aggressiveness, and learnt to live peacefully with non-Muslim societies. And it would have carried the same meaningful message to the Christian and Sikh communities. In short, an honest Secularism would have been a defender of Hindu society instead raising a brood of the sappers and miners of Islamic imperialism in particular and of other imperialisms in general.

Footnotes:

¹ It was in 1963.

² Thank God, the cult of Socialism is now dead except for some orphans of the Soviet Union and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia.

³ A term of contempt coined by the Muslim League for Hindus in general. Now the Sikhs had made it a part of their swearology.

⁴ This section was written in 1982, before the rise of Bhindranwale and the demand for Khalistan.

Ch 10 - The Trap and the Way Out

It was my intention to include in this series a few essays on Hindu Sociology and Hindu History as I see them after many years of study and reflection. But these themes would have to wait for some time. I will return to them later and discuss them with reference to Hindu Spirituality as I have presented it so far.

I have received many letters from the readers of this series as I did when I wrote some earlier ones. Most of the readers have appreciated what I have said. A few friends have reacted against my repudiation of Monotheism. It has not been possible for me to reply to these readers individually in spite of a strong desire to do so. But I have felt immensely encouraged. The appreciation as well criticism confirms that there is a large number of my countrymen who are conscious of their spiritual and cultural heritage, and who are moved by more than mundane matters.

Before I conclude, I should like to summarise what I have said so far in the context of Hindu Spirituality.

1. Hindu society has been sustained by its spiritual center throughout the ages, particularly in the face of Islamic and Christian barbarism. Countless Hindu heroes and heroines have defied death rather than renounce their ancestral religion. Hindu society will be revived and revitalised only by recovering its spiritual centre which is Sanatana Dharma.

2. Hindu society has been thrown on the defensive by blood-soaked bigotries, clay-footed creeds, and a mercenary modernist culture because **Hindu society is suffering from self-forgetfulness**. A re-awakened Hindu society will not evaluate its own heritage in terms of ideas and ideals projected by imperialist ideologies. On the contrary, Hindu society will process these ideologies in terms of its own vision and world-view. That will restore the self-confidence of Hindu society as also Hindu pride in the ancient Hindu heritage.

3. The self-forgetfulness of Hindu society is symbolized by a wide-spread misinterpretation of the Vedic verse *ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti* to mean that the Vedas also advocate Monotheism. This misinterpretation is motivated by a psychology of surrender as signified by the Hindu slogan of *sarva-dharma-sambhav* vis-à-vis Christianity and Islam. A psychology of imitation is also at work. It has led some Sikh theologians to cast into monotheistic moulds the Vaishnava spirituality of the *Adigranth*.

4. Monotheistic creeds like Christianity and Islam view Sanatana Dharma as chaos and anarchy because Sanatana Dharma does not (1) swear by a historical prophet or saviour, (2) grant a monopoly of truth to a book (*al-kitab*), (3) prop up a True One God against False Many Gods, and (4) seek the intercession of a prophet or saviour for escape from an eternal hell and get admitted into an eternal heaven. But that is not the fault of Sanatana Dharma. That indicates only the limitations from which the monotheistic mind suffers. A monotheist feels lost in the spiritual freedom of Sanatana Dharma like a Soviet citizen who fails to understand the functioning of a democratic society.

5. Evaluated by Sanatana Dharma, Christianity and Islam turn out to be constructs of the outer human mind, drawing upon dark drives of the unregenerate unconscious. Sanatana Dharma stands for self-exploration, self-purification, and

self-transcendence, while Islam and Christianity stand for self-stupefaction, self-righteousness, and self-aggrandizement.

6. The central message of Sanatana Dharma is that (1) the spiritual aspiration for absolute Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Power is inherent in every human being, everywhere, and at all times, (2) the spiritual striving cannot come to rest till a seeker overcomes all limitations of human and universal nature, and emerges as master of himself as well as of the universe, and (3) the way to world-discovery and God-discovery is through self-discovery. At the same time, Sanatana Dharma proclaims that there are as many ways of spiritual seeking as there are seekers, and that spiritual seeking does not express itself in any single and set doctrine or dogma. This is the basis of true universalism enshrined in Sanatana Dharma, as opposed to the counterfeit universalism of Christianity and Islam which prescribes one fixed, fossilized, and uniform system of belief and behaviour for everyone.

7. Sanatana Dharma is ingrained in the Hindu psyche which sees the same divinity in everything and everywhere, and which invests our entire environment with innumerable Gods and Goddesses. The mullah and the missionary denounce this Hindu psyche as poisoned by Pantheism and Polytheism. But that is the language of Monotheism which is incapable of understanding any type of spirituality whatsoever. Monotheism is disguised materialism which makes God extra-cosmic and denies divinity to God's creation. The God of Monotheism is soon replaced by the only son or the last prophet who, in turn, is replaced by a monolithic Church or Ummah out to conquer the world by force and fraud.

8. Hindu spiritual consciousness is expressed in terms of a plurality of Gods. These Gods are many a time symbolized by concrete images such as Sûrya, Agni, Marut, etc. This is

because Sanatana Dharma allows many variations on the same spiritual theme, and does not put Matter in an irreconcilable opposition to Spirit. The forms and features of Hindu icons have a source higher than the normal reaches of the human mind. Idol-worship is the only way by which the sense-bound human mind reaches something of the higher spiritual knowledge.

9. History is a witness that the spiritual consciousness of mankind everywhere had expressed itself in a plurality of Gods and in widespread idol-worship, before Christianity and Islam destroyed many ancient religions by fire and sword and imposed monotheistic materialism on large sections of mankind. Hindu spirituality which still retains its ancient intuition and genius has to help many societies in Asia, Africa, America, Europe and Oceania to reject these impositions and revive their old Gods. That is the only path towards their spiritual and cultural emancipation from the imperialist and inhuman yoke of Christianity and Islam.

10. Monotheism of Christianity and Islam is not only an impediment on the path of spiritual progress; it also divides mankind into warring camps by giving currency to a number of hate-filled words such as infidel, *kafir*, heretic, idolater, polytheist, etc. What is worse, Monotheism promotes the most degenerate type of idolatry by manufacturing myths and miracles about its all-too-human apostles and prophets, saints and sufis, and by seeing the supernatural in dirt and dross such as the hair, the saliva, the shoe, the shirt, and the shroud. It expects the idols of the infidels to perform the same supernatural miracles, and breaks them when the miracles are not forthcoming. Monotheism thus turns out to be the most abominable superstition.

11. Hindu sages and seers could tap the sources of universal spirituality because they did not start with an *a priori* assumption of an Almighty God as the creator and

controller of the cosmos. Their starting point was the human person. That is why Hindu spiritual literature abounds in psychological and psychic terms. Hindu sages and seers explored human consciousness till they discovered the highest dimension of humanhood. It is seldom that Hindu spirituality speaks in the language of Theism. God as the creator and controller of the cosmos is unknown to the Vedas, to the Upanishads, to Jainism, to Buddhism, and to the six systems of Hindu philosophy. Hindu spirituality never renounces its base in humanism; it only raises humanism to its highest meaning and significance.

12. Christian mystics and Muslim sufis continued to travel on the same path of universal spirituality because the new creeds sat lightly on them, and discovered the true fount of freedom from bondage. But Christianity and Islam used the power of theocratic states to suppress this natural and spontaneous mysticism and Sufism. In due course, the mystics and sufis were made to serve the imperial establishments of the Church and the Ummah, and they became degenerate accomplices of predatory imperialism. Hindu spirituality has to rescue Christian mysticism from the clutches of Christian theology, and salvage Sufism from servitude to prophetic Islam. That is the only basis on which Hindu society can come to terms with Christian and Muslim communities in India.

13. **The true character of Christian theology and prophetic Islam is revealed when one studies the genesis of Christianity and Islam in the Gospels and biographies of the Prophet. Such a study leaves no doubt that Christianity and Islam are not religions but political ideologies pregnant with imperialist ambitions. Their appetite has been whetted by their conquest of a large part of the world by the power of the sword. Hindu society is making a serious mistake in treating Christianity and Islam as religions and by extending to them the**

same *sambhav* as has always prevailed among the various sects of Sanatana Dharma.

14. Hindu society has never had an established church, nor ever known a theocratic state. This society has always been a secular society. This society, therefore, does not need lectures on Secularism such as are delivered to it daily by the Nehruvian ruling class. An honest Secularism would have addressed itself to Christianity and Islam, which are the strongholds of exclusiveness and the advocates of a theocratic state. This has not happened because the Nehruvian brand of Secularism arose out of surrender to Islamic separatism. Having failed to overcome Islamic separatism, a section of the national movement, particularly the Leftists under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, blamed their own frustration on what they called Hindu communalism. As a consequence, Nehruvian Secularism is no more than the embodiment of an anti-Hindu animus. The secularists serve as the sappers and miners of Islamic and Christian imperialism. They are also encouraging the imperialism of an Islamicized Akali clique which has been allowed to control gurudwara revenues and thereby dominate Sikh society which is only a section of the larger Hindu society.

15. Hindu society should see through this perverted Secularism, and reject it not only as a counterfeit coin but also as high treason to the Indian nation. That is the only way to defeat the gangster game which goes on all around Hindu society, and which threatens to reduce it to a minority in its own ancestral homeland. The secularist who accuses Hindu society of communalism is no more than a *thug* who wants to hoodwink this society into believing that its nationalism is communalism. He has to be unmasked and isolated.

HINDU SOCIETY STANDS TRAPPED BY ITS OWN SLOGAN

What is the situation at present?

The Hindu elite continue to shout its slogan of *sarva-dharma-sambhav* vis-à-vis Christianity and Islam. It is rare to meet a member of the Hindu elite who does not shout from the housetops that Christianity and Islam are as good religions as his own Sanatana Dharma. There is no dearth of dim-witted but sanctimonious scholars who line up quotations from the Bible and the Quran alongside quotations from Hindu shastras in order to prove the “essential unity of all religions”. Matters have come to such a pass that a Hindu who does not subscribe to this slogan suffers ostracism from the elite circles of Hindu society. Hindu politicians are the worst culprits. They are mortally afraid of being branded as “Hindu communalists”. And they have neither the knowledge nor the courage to change the universe of public discourse. The secularists have only to invent a new slogan; the Hindu politicians are the first to fall in line. The only purpose they serve is to keep Hindu society always on the defensive.

Neither the missionary nor the mullah subscribes to the slogan of *sarva-dharma-sambhav*. Each one of them is convinced and proclaims publicly that his own creed is the only true one, and that to equate it with Sanatana Dharma is the height of blasphemy. Each of them claims that Hindu society cannot stop him from converting as many Hindus as he can, by all means including force and fraud, without repudiating its own slogan and thus knocking the very bottom out of Secularism. Every Hindu objection to conversions, they say, exposes the Hindus as hypocrites who do not mean what they say. But if you ask the Hindu leaders to renounce this mischievous slogan, they denounce you as one who is trying to upturn an established Hindu tradition. They do not know that this slogan was coined by Mahatma Gandhi, and that it stood totally defeated in his own lifetime. The future of Hinduism and Hindu society is dark if

this is not debunked, and Islam and Christianity are allowed to march as they are doing at present.

What is the treatment prescribed for Hindus in case Christianity or Islam acquires state power in India? The prescription provided by the missionary as well as the mullah is again unequivocal.

The mullah says: "Allah has mandated the lands of the infidels to his last prophet who, in turn, has bequeathed them to the Ummah. India continues to be a *Dar-ul-Harb*. It is our Allah-ordained duty to convert it into a *Dar-ul-Islam*. Our scriptures prescribe a total destruction of *kufr* (infidelism) and *shirk* (idolatry). Allah is very jealous of his own position as the only one worthy of worship. He cannot stand the sight of these Hindu idols imitating his majesty and trying to share his divinity. These idols have to be destroyed and trodden under the feet of the *mumins* in order to propitiate Allah. The temples which house these idols have to be demolished and converted into places worthy of our own way of worship. We will, of course, invite all idolaters in India to embrace Islam, willingly and voluntarily. But if they do not come round of their own accord, we are afraid we shall have to use force in furtherance of the only true faith. Allah had sent his last prophet to save all mankind from perdition. The 'divine duty' has devolved on the Ummah after the departure of the Prophet. We cannot turn traitors to his mission."

If a Hindu protests at this revelation of the 'divine duty', he invites an angry howl from the Ummah. And the whole of it thunders: "So you do not want us to be true to our religion as revealed by Allah to his last prophet, as enshrined in our sacred scripture, the *Quran*, and as enjoined by our sacred tradition, the *Sunnah*? What sort of a Hindu are you? Have you not read the books written by your own scholars and sages such as Dr. Bhagwan Das, Pandit Sunderlal, Rahul Sankrityayan, and Vinoba Bhave about the sublimity of Islam? Have you not heard the

lectures on sarva-dharma-sambhav delivered by your own leaders, day in and day out, and over all these so many years? It seems that you are not secular. It looks as if you are a Hindu chauvinist out to deny to us the fundamental right of religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of the country. We appeal to you to shed your narrow Hindu communalism, and be true to your Hindu Dharma. We assure you that we shall not fail to be true to our Islam. This is the only basis on which our two communities can coexist peacefully till, in due course, the true faith triumphs."

The Christian missionary also talks in the same vein, though his language is less crude than that of the mullah, and his manners are more sophisticated. His methods of salesmanship are more mature. Also, the mullah is aggressive because he knows that a whole Islamic world supports his onslaught against Hindu society and culture, and because he finds that the Indian ruling class gets really frightened by his threats to mobilize frenzied Muslim mobs for committing gangster acts. He has demonstrated any number of times that his threats are not empty. The Christian missionary, on the other hand, knows that he does not enjoy such solid support in the West, and cannot mobilize Christian mobs on the requisite scale.

Hindu society is thus trapped by a slogan which it has itself coined and made current countrywide. It is the same sort of trap in which a democratic society finds itself the moment it grants that the Communist fifth-column or a fascist phalanx is a legitimate political party entitled to enjoy freedom to function and expand.

THE WAY OUT

What is the way out?

Hindu society has to realize that Christianity and Islam are not religions but political ideologies inspired by imperialist ambitions. These ideologies came to India as accomplices of Islamic and Western armies. Those armies

have been defeated and driven away. The ideologies which came with those armies should now find no place in India. They, too, have to be defeated and dispersed. Hindu society has to recover the ground that was lost to these ideologies during periods of Islamic and Christian expansion and domination. Those sections of Hindu society which were forced or lured into the folds of these ideologies have to be brought back into their ancestral fold. This is the minimum task which Hindu society has to set before itself. The maximum task is to carry the campaign against these ideologies into their own homelands, and to free large sections of mankind from the abominable superstitions which breed intolerance and aggression.

The cultural climate in the modern West is favourable for the spread of Sanatana Dharma. The West has repudiated Christianity and returned to rationalism, humanism and universalism, all of which are values cherished and promoted by the Hindu view of life. But the West does not realize that the massive finances which the Christian missions collect over there in the name of doing social service in "a poor, starved, diseased and illiterate India" is used by the missions for the nefarious work of subverting the only sane society which has survived the depredations of genocidal creeds. Hindu society, particularly the Hindus settled or working in the West, have to provide this information to the West so that the menace of Christian missions is challenged in their own homelands.

It is true that Christian missions are involved in the foreign policy maneuvers and intelligence networks of the various Western nations. The systematic building up of a Christian missionary like Mother Teresa by the U.S. State Department provides an obvious pointer. But Western foreign policy establishments are using Christian missions because Hindu society has made them respectable in India. The day that respectability is destroyed and Christianity and

its missions are exposed for what they are, the Western nations will have no use for them.

Islam is a harder nut to crack. The Islamic countries everywhere are closed societies presided over by theocratic states which do not permit any scrutiny of Islam or the propagation of a rational and humanist view of life. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in many Muslim lands has let loose a reign of terror against all those enlightened sections which have tried to free their people from the stranglehold of a fanatic falsehood. The Western democracies, particularly the United States of America, are encouraging this fanaticism in the fond hope that it will stand as a bulwark against Soviet imperialism. ^[1] A dark night envelops the Islamic countries at present due to a combination of historical circumstances, and there seems to be little hope that the Muslim masses will be able to emancipate themselves in the near future.

But it is also a fact that the rise of fundamentalism in a closed creed is a sign of panic, and sounds its death-knell. Christian fundamentalism which surfaced in Europe in the form of Protestantism proved to be the death-gasp of Christianity. For, fundamentalism brings to the fore, in one fell sweep, all the crudities of a closed creed - crudities which normally remain hidden under borrowed cultural trappings.

There is a large number of Muslim students, scholars, scientists, technicians, and other sections of Muslim intelligentsia who find no place in their closed societies, and who have fled to other countries including India. Here is a fertile field in which Hindu society can sow some seeds which will bear fruit in due course. These refugees from Islamic terrorism have to be convinced that it is not the politics of their motherlands that has become perverse, it is the culture cultivated by Islam which has poisoned their societies.

But before Hindu society can perform these minimum and maximum tasks, it has to revive its own spiritual centre and reawaken to its own ancient heritage. The rest will follow.

Footnotes:

[1] The Soviet Union is dead and gone, but the US support for Pakistan, one of the front rank promoters of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, continues. The aim of US foreign policy now is no less than the disintegration of the truncated Hindu homeland. Nehruvian secularists are now waiting to be hired by the US establishment, as they were by the Soviet establishment in the past.

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