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Action Oriented Morality in Hinduism

In discussing the Hindu tradition of morality, one is automatically confronted with an interesting problematic. Hinduism is a rich tapestry of many traditions: some theistic, others not; some life-affirming, others ascetic. In this paper, I will attempt to survey some of the ethical vectors of Indian tradition as can best be reconstructed from textual and historical evidence, and then show how these themes have come to be understood in the modern era.

Most discussion of Hindu thought begins with the *Rg Veda*, and appropriately so: an often-used litmus test to ascertain whether a school of thought is authentically Hindu is whether it refers to the Vedas, even if in negative terms, as in the case of the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*. However, several cornerstone ideas of Hinduism do not have their origins in the Vedas, at least in any systematic fashion. These largely absent elements include notions of karma, rebirth, yoga and nonviolence, which in the later tradition became pivotal in the development of Hindu ethics, particularly as known to the West through the work of Ramakrishna, Mahatma Gandhi and others. These apparently have their origins in the so-called Śramanic traditions of India, which, according to some scholars, predate the Brahmanical traditions and perhaps are attributable to the civilizations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa¹. In order to understand social ethics in the later traditions, it is important to have a sense of these underpinnings of the broader Indian world view.

Karma and Rebirth

These twin notions are perhaps the most widely known and least understood hallmarks of Indian (and with the expan-

sion of Buddhism, Pan-Asian) traditions. Teachings on *karma* establish ethical norms; stories of rebirth offer cosmological explanations. As we will see, the former teaches responsibility for one's actions, the latter attributes a perdurance or continuity to action that goes beyond the boundaries of finite biography. The word *karma*, as I have explained elsewhere², means action. Derivative and additional terms have come to be seen as identical with the concept *karma*, such as *samskara*, which refers to the imprint or residue left by a particular action, and *vasana*, which seems to refer to indwelling habit patterns. Whether one considers these individually or collectively, one common strand is evident: our actions have repercussions beyond our individual experiences. Action in the present moment plants a seed (*bīja*.) This seed can lay dormant for an undetermined period of time; its arising at a later time may prompt occurrences that stem from a forgotten time, but nonetheless provide retribution or reward for an earlier action. In virtually all Indian traditions, *karma* takes two forms: afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) and unafflicted (*akliṣṭa*). The former causes repeated suffering; the latter allows one to be liberated from repeating the sufferings and frustrations (*duḥkha*) of the past. In either case, responsibility for one's actions lies within oneself; as proclaimed in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, it is indeed possible to overcome the negative influences of the past through concerted action in the present: "There are some men who, due to their (afflicted) desire, have incapacitated themselves to such an extent that they cannot squeeze their fingers together sufficiently enough to hold water, without scattering several drops. On the other hand, there are some who, by efficacious actions, take on the responsibility of seas, mountains, cities and islands, as well as families, for whom even the earth itself would not be too much... Without a doubt, the fault of the past is appeased by the attributes of the present. The aim of this is the destruction of yesterday's faults by today's attributes." (11:4:20, 11:5:12) When viewed existentially, the "karma" teaching is clearly a call for responsible action within the present moment, aimed at casting off affliction and suffering. The means to achieve this, as discussed below, are ethical in nature and thus also minimize the sufferings of others.

In addition to providing a rationale for the

performance of moral action, the doctrine of karma also supplied a view of the life process rooted in continuity. Rather seeing death as a finality, early Indian thinkers viewed death as in intermediary stage, with a life (*jīva*) returning through the force of past impressions into a new life form to create yet more activities. This early vision of conservation of energy made it virtually inconceivable that our lives are discrete and relatively insignificant. In both the Jain and Buddhist traditions, all life forms are tremendously ancient, existing since "beginningless time". For the Jains, this means that all life has at one time or another been born within the family of every other life form. The Lankavatara Sūtra, a Mahāyāna Buddhist text, similarly states that "in the long course of *samsara*, there is not one among living beings with form who has not been mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter or some other relative. Being connected with the process of taking birth, one is kin to all wild and domestic animals, birds and beings born from the womb". The late Brahmanical Hindu tradition, as we will see below, uses a more "personalistic" approach to the rebirth story. In all three instances, however, a vision of life is offered that goes beyond one's fixed, apparent biography, placing one's experience as an individual within a much broader continuum.

Yoga

The taking of repeated births is referred to as *samsara*, an aimless, afflicted wandering through one of five or six different realms³. The uniqueness of human life is that it provides sufficient incentive in the form of suffering to desire to transcend repeated existence, as well as sufficient time in order to cultivate unafflicted, meditative action that can counteract the deleterious effects of prior action. Throughout Indian traditions, the forms of Yoga were developed for the purpose of putting an end to repeated involvement in the *samsara* or *punarjanma* process. Yoga postures are seemingly depicted in the seals uncovered at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, and it appears to have been common to the Śramanic groups that gave rise to the Jain and Buddhist traditions. The Rg Veda, in fact, refers to bearded figures that place themselves outside of societal norms⁴.

Later Hindu texts such as the *Śvetāśvatāra Upaniṣad*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the much later *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali clearly demonstrate that certain aspects of the Śramanic tradition had become part of the Hindu tradition.

Whether in its Jain, Buddhist, or Hinduized forms, the goal of Yoga is to bring about a cessation (*nirodha*) of those thought propensities that lead to continued afflicted behaviour. The theological and cosmological bases for the practice of Yoga are diverse. For the Jains, there are said to be millions upon millions of individual, eternal life forms (*jivas*) that must disentangle themselves from the sticky effects of karma (said to have a physical reality) in order to attain a state of eternal, splendid aloneness (*kevala*), wherein one sees and knows all things yet remains unsullied. For the Buddhists, there is no discussion of individual selves. Reference is made only to the suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence (*anitya*) and lack of abiding nature (*anatma*) of things. For the Upaniṣadic Vedāntin, for the one of purified consciousness, all reality is seen as not different from Brahman. For the Samkhyan Yogi, life is seen to be composed of unconscious, repeated activity (*prakṛti*) and a mode of disaffected witnessing (*puruṣa*), with the goal being to establish oneself in the latter form, allowing the realm of activity to dissipate itself. Within this variegated theo-cosmological salad, we find a host of seemingly unreconcilable presuppositions: a plurality of identities, no identity, divine identification, and sublime detachment that mirrors divinized status⁵. Yet despite this ideological disharmony (well-recognized and widely debated amongst the respective schools), on the level of praxis there is an apparent agreement. All the schools of Indian thought emphasize moral action as an integral part of the path to liberation.

Nonviolence

Nonviolence or *ahiṃsā* is at the core of Indian morality from the aspect of the renouncer traditions. Within Jainism, renunciation was honed to a fine science out of a concern to avoid all forms of violence. Any form of agitated activity was said to impair one's innate consciousness, bliss and energy. In order to free one of this harmful, obscuring stuff, all acts of violence were to be eschewed. Furthermore, all things, in-

cluding what in non-Jain eyes are deemed inanimate, were in fact said to possess life force (*jiva*); by impairing the consciousness, energy and bliss of rocks and grass as well as air, water, and fire bodies through acts of violence, karma adheres to one's own *jiva*, preventing the ascent to pure aloneness. Consequently, the Jains took great care to provide a moral map of the universe, outlining a hierarchy of life forms and then prescribing practice to minimize violence to them⁶.

In order to clarify how life is to be protected, the Jains outlined four types of violence: intentional, non-intentional, related to profession, and performed out of self-defense. It is hoped that no violence whatsoever need to be committed, and to assist in this endeavour, five specific practices are listed: restraint of mind, control of tongue, carefulness on roads, removing things from roads, and eating in daylight. The first requires that one examine all thoughts to make certain that harm is not intended. The second demands attention to speech. The third and fourth have given rise to communities of Jain practitioners who always walk with a broom to remove insects from their path, and to a ban on long-distance travel. The last rule was applicable in pre-technological society, when poor illumination in Indian households made it impossible to detect forms of life which may have fallen into one's food.

Food consumed by a Jain must be vegetarian; all Jains, whether monastic or leading a secular life, are expected to subsist on only one-sense beings, hence limiting their diet to vegetables and milk products. Additionally, certain professions are deemed acceptable for the lay community. These include government and farming, which are the least acceptable due to their potential for causing harm; writing, arts and crafts, which are considered slightly less violent; and finally commerce, which is considered the least violent profession of all, provided that the goods traded are not obtained by violent means.

For those who choose the life of a monk or a nun, progressively more stringent limitations designed to minimize violence are imposed. For instance, at an advanced stage of monkhood, one is not allowed to dig in the earth, to avoid hurting the earth; nor to swim or bathe, in order to protect the water; not to extinguish fires or light a match, to preserve

fire; not to fan oneself, to prevent harm to the air; not to walk on or touch greenery thus cultivating nonviolence to plants. Hence, all areas of life are considered; no act for the serious Jain can be performed without respect given to the vow of *ahimsa*.

The Buddhists also advocated respect for life. Their opposition against the Hindu practice of animal sacrifice is illustrated as follows in an allegory found in *Jataga Tale 18*: "Once upon a time, a goat was led to a temple and was about to be sacrificed by the presiding Brahmin. Suddenly, that goat let out a laugh and then uttered a moaning cry. The Brahmin startled by this odd behaviour, asked the goat what was happening. The goat responded as follows: 'Sir, I have just remembered the history of what has led up to this event. The reason I have laughed is that I realized this is the last of 500 births I have suffered as a goat; in my next life I will return again as a human. The reason I have cried is out of compassion for you. You see, 500 births ago I was a Brahmin, leading a goat to the sacrifice. After killing the goat, I was condemned to 500 births as a goat. If you kill me, you will suffer the same fate. The Brahmin, visibly shaken; immediately freed the goat, who trotted away. A few minutes later, lightning struck the goat and he was free to become again human. The Brahmin likewise was spared, due to the goat's compassionate intervention.'⁷

Throughout Buddhist history, events have occurred which affirm reverence for life. The emperor Aśoka, who in the third century B.C. united much of India, converted to Buddhism and established several laws which required kind treatment to animals, in reflection of the Buddhist observance of noninjury to living beings. These included the restriction of meat consumption, the curtailing of hunting, and the establishment of hospitals and roadside watering stations for animals⁸.

Hence, from ancient times in India, there has been an indigenous concern for respecting life. The purpose of this is to minimize one's involvement in the world, with the ultimate intention of using techniques of Yoga to extricate oneself from the cycle of accumulating karma and repeated births.

The Vedic and Brahmanical world views

The entry of Indo-European peoples into the Indian sub-continent brought with it new cultural sensibilities, new gods, and a new social structure. As opposed to the more sedentary peoples of the Indus Valley cities (which apparently were in decline even at the start of the Aryan incursion), the newcomers were wanderers, eventually spreading their lore and language throughout India.

For the first thousand years they were primarily based in the northwest quadrant of India; archaeological evidence points to an eastward (and ultimately southward) movement taking place in approximately 500 BC⁹. The goals and activities of these Vedic peoples stand in marked distinction from the glimpses we have seen of the renouncers. The Vedas celebrate full enjoyment of life, including the use of inebriating substances such as soma and the consumption of beef. The many gods spoken of in the Vedas have direct parallels with European counterparts and similarly are invoked for purposes of love, conquest, knowledge, medicine, magic and more. Additionally, similar to the social structure found in ancient Europe and Persia, a self-conscious sociology was introduced and then adapted to the Indian context. These two aspects of Hinduism will be discussed briefly as providing an alternate model for moral action in India.

The Vedic world view

Max Mueller, the noted German Indologist, has referred to the Vedic system as henotheism or kathenotheism¹⁰, in which a deity appropriate to one's immediate needs is revered until such time as the object desired is attained. For instance, if one is in need of success in war, the deity Indra would become the deity to whom sacrifices are presented in order to invoke the power he symbolizes. In modern times this practice is continued, for instance, in the invocation of the goddess Lakshmi to enhance one's wealth and of the goddess Sarasvati to increase one's knowledge. Combining the multiple deity structure with an existential interpretation of W. Norman Brown's cosmogonic analysis of the Rg Veda¹¹, Antonio T. deNicolas has reconstructed a Vedic philosophical methodology. Out of an undifferentiated chaos (*asal*), symbo-

lized by the dragon Vrtra, structure (*sal*) arises. Sacrifice (*gajna*) within this context then allows for a full vision (*dhih*) and flow (*ita*) that proceeds from the power involved in the sacrifice. This then gives way to chaos, and desire once more yields a new sacrificial context. In the phenomenological and scientific terminology employed by de Nicolas, intentionality brings forth worlds that are seen not as competing but as complementary¹². Although this process as presented in the Rg Veda seemed widely accessible to members of society, the establishment of the Vedic peoples throughout India resulted in specialization: one group of the Aryan folk came to control this sacrificial technology and reserved for themselves exclusive access to its power, contributing to the full development of a fully stratified caste system.

Caste and Hindu dharma

The earliest record we have of the caste system in India comes from Rg Veda x:90, wherein the cosmic person, as symbol for the totality of society¹³, is divided into four transactional arenas, corresponding to tasks required for the operation of the world. At the top, associated with the head and speech, is the domain of the Brahmin, the teacher and priest. This caste commands the greatest respect and, as specialists in Vedic ritual, Brahmins are essential for the performance of world-maintaining sacrifice. The next group, the Kṣatriyas, are identified with the arms and serve as warriors and politicians. The Vaiśyas or merchants are associated with the thighs; the workers or Sudras with the feet. The use of the human body, which itself is an organismic totality, underscores the reciprocity of this social relationship. Without the feet, the head would become disembodied, deprived of food, and incapacitated. Without the protective arms of the warrior, the merchant would be unable to ply his trade. Rather than communicating a closed system wherein one group remains pure of the other, this image betokens a conscious recognition of interdependence amongst groups. The whole is impossible without its parts. Standing alone, the person seen as cosmos could be interpreted as providing a basis for the development of respectful, transactional society wherein each person knowingly and happily contributes through the performance of his or her

particular role. This ideal is lauded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the recent sociological analyses of Dumont, Mckim, Marriott, Inden and others likewise highlight the benefits of this structure.

However, the caste system met an interesting marriage partner in the form of the indigenous rebirth doctrine. The Sramanas, as we have seen, had come to view all life as continuous, with humans being the highest birth attainable. Within the Brahminical system, by contrast, humankind itself became hierarchized with some persons being regarded as less than human and others as useful merely in a menial sense. Only the highest three castes were deemed worthy of education and twice-born status, due to their superior action in past lives. This system proved very effective for social regulation. With the threat of a lower human or animal birth if one strays from one's dharma, there is little incentive to go awry¹⁴. As Norvin Hein has noted, this thorough and convincing cosmology contributed greatly to keeping Hindus in village India satisfied with their lot¹⁵. As true incentive for moral action, the caste system perhaps leaves much to be desired. In the analysis of Dumont, it might be argued that moral action is only possible for those who have renounced the social order. Persons within the caste structure do not possess the ego identity associated with the West European or American model of the individual, and derive their meaning only in terms of their group relationships, i.e., their role in the family and the role their caste plays in the village¹⁶. Certainly, from both the modern natural law and indigenous non-violence perspectives, the fatalism and docility and servitude bred by the caste system seem repugnant. Gandhi sought to rectify the abuses of this system, with some success and historians of religion have recently criticized similar abuses in East Asia¹⁷. However, it is important to keep in mind that the renunciation morality has continued to coexist and in some ways has altered the caste system from within, primarily as it has influenced epic literature and sensibility.

Amalgamation of traditions:

Liberation as universal paradigm

Within the Indian context we have two independent moral universes, which hold distinct ultimates. For the re-

nouncer tradition, non-involvement with the ways of the world is the ideal. Transcendence is achieved by ceasing activities and even thought itself (*citta-vrtti-nirodha*). The person at the highest state stands alone, with an individuality and identity separate from socially sanctioned structures. Conversely, the Brahminical model views the world in terms of interrelating, complementary components, not different from oneself. The pursuit and fulfillment of desire is seen as a celebration of life that is to be appreciated and encouraged.

Yet aspects of each system can be detected in the other. Both contain and express reciprocal relationships. The renouncer is dependent upon the education provided by his or her society in order to learn of the significance of renunciation. Without context, nothing can be given up, because nothing has been held. Likewise, the structure of the caste system has developed within a context that consistently has offered an alternative: dropping out. Ironically, renunciation is probably the most ancient of Indian traditions. The twice born consciously takes on a new identity at the time of initiation which then at a later stage is consciously renounced.

This dynamic tension between conformity and release has long been a theme in Indian literature and philosophy. As various historians have noted, *moksha* or liberation became an officially sanctioned goal promoted by the Brahmin caste, who themselves were encouraged to renounce the village life at the end of their careers, searching out higher meaning in an Ashram context. But what began in India from time immemorial and then was appropriated (along with non-violence and vegetarianism) by the Brahmin caste eventually percolated throughout the society. The great epic figures of Rama, Yudhis-thira, and Arjuna, all of them warriors, flirt with renunciation, return to their dharma, and then indeed renounce. The renouncer ideal of detachment becomes universalized in traditions of war and love¹⁸ and spreads with Buddhism throughout Asia.

As Madeleine Biardeau has written, 'the puranas... opened the mind to the idea of accessibility of moksha to all'. Citing various passages from the later sections of the *Mahabharata*, she observes that this new, liberalized conception of liberation

“gave every svadharna [one’s own societal duty] religious content and an access to ultimate salvation. The Brahmanic model was not lost sight of, but was generalized so as to fit all other categories of Hindu society, including sudras, women, and all impure castes. Once the kṣatriya gained access to salvation through his specific and impure activities, the generalization became easy. Every sort of impurity could be sacralized and turned into svadharna. Nothing was outside the realm of ultimate values, though at the same time the status of the Brahmins remains unimpaired”¹⁹. This infusion resulted in a heightened sense of moral responsibility. One is obligated to perform one’s *dharma* not merely because of the admonitions of the village Brahmin, but because such actions indeed hold the world itself together. The *puruṣa* that in Samkhya is the pinnacle of detached, liberated consciousness is also the silent omnipresent figure that encompasses and is identical with all the things of the universe: the renouncer image of aloofness is amalgamated with the Brahmanical universal form. To see the stoppage of the world generating process is in fact to see the world as it truly is.

For many this was a call to action, and continues to be so. In the *Yogāvasiṣṭha*, a late Gupta text combining aspects of renouncer, idealistic Buddhism with socially active Hindu forms, it is said that by overcoming impurities that cloud the mind one gains the strength to be creative in the world. Several hundred years later, the symmetry of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is similarly poignant. Ramakrishna stands as the renouncer par excellence of colonial and post colonial India: he left behind his family, he served at a temple of questionable lineage, specialized in reverie, and travelled very little. Yet he inspired a movement that transformed India and was felt worldwide through the very concrete work exerted by Vivekananda toward the uplift of Hinduism through the establishment of schools, missions and hospitals.

Another instance of action oriented morality is found in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi used the renouncer techniques of fasting, scrupulous nonviolence, and chastity to achieve a very this-worldly goal: the liberation of India from the colonial domination of Britain. His efforts may be interpreted as sacrifice (*yajña*) in the Vedic sense wherein his own

well publicized protests served to focus the attention of the world on India’s predicament. Though many have criticized his technique as an abuse of solemn religious practices, in a certain sense Gandhi continues a long tradition of action-oriented morality wherein the leader or *dharmaraja* comes to symbolize and enact the highest values. By using non-violence as his primary focus, Gandhi identified with the most ancient of religious practices in India, a practice that cuts across ideological borders. His articulation of *ahimsa* as a blueprint for society updates the practice in terms of economic theory: “I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and, therefore sinful... True economics... stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life. Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible. Indeed the very word non-violence, a negative word, means that it is an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in life. Therefore, whoever believes in Ahimsa will engage himself in occupations that involve the least possible violence”²⁰.

Gandhi’s economic ideal focused on the model of independently operating villages: “My idea of village *swaraj* is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet inter-dependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Thus, every village’s first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its clothes... My economic creed is a complete taboo in respect to all foreign commodities whose importation is likely to prove harmful to our indigenous interests. This means that we may not in any circumstances import a commodity that can be adequately supplied from our country.”²¹ Village intimacy is seen as a place where the accountability for one’s actions is automatically regulated by one’s direct involvement with all aspects of the economic process. In this model, which in a certain sense also reflects Confucian ideals, identity is gained through relationships with others, thus minimizing occasions for antagonism. Reflective of the Vedic

world as well, one's own prosperity is beneficial for the group as well; success is part of the rhythm and flow (*rta*) of life.

Both the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission and the social agenda of Gandhi share concern for action-oriented morality. Both follow a traditional model well established in Hindu tradition that combines concern for absolute truth (*paramartha*) with action in the world of relativity (*samvrtti*). By anchoring the intention of one's activity in the changeless, one gains a sense of detachment that further empowers one in the realm of change. In the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna urges Arjuna to continue to engage in action, but to do so free from attachment: "Know that action originates from Brahman, and Brahman springs from the imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman is eternally established in sacrifice. Here on earth he who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion is evil in nature; by indulging in the senses, he lives in vain, O Partha. He who delights in the Self alone, who is satisfied with the Self, who is content in the Self, for him no work remains to be done. He who has nothing to gain by actions done in this world, nor anything to lose by actions not done, he is not dependent upon mortal creatures for any object. Therefore, always perform without attachment the work that should be done. By doing work without attachment, man attains the Supreme."²² Krishna specifically calls for the perfection of oneself accompanied by benevolent action performed for others, invoking the famous king Janaka, who in earlier times is said to have presided over a perfect kingdom as *dharmaraja*: "Through the path of action alone, men like Janaka and others reached perfection. You should perform action also with the intention of guiding people in the right direction. Whatever a great man does, others will copy. The people will follow whatever standard he sets²³."

Moral action is attained when it is done in a spirit free from egotism and attachment: "As the unwise act with attachment to their work, O Bharata, so should a wise man act without attachment for the good of the world. Let no wise man create confusion in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to (selfish) action. He should, rather, inspire others to act by his disciplined performance of actions. All kinds of actions are done by the modes of nature but he whose mind is confused by egotism

thinks, 'I am the doer'. He who knows the true distinction between the soul and the modes of nature and their works, O might-armed, realizes that it is the modes which operate upon the modes, and he does not get attached." Hence, the *Bhagavad Gita*'s model of karma yoga makes any action a viable conduit for the enactment of higher knowledge.

In conclusion, we have seen that two primary ethical values have contributed to the Hindu moral universe. On the one hand, renunciation of involvement with the world, stemming from the ancient *sramanas* and enacted today in the lives of Hindu *sadhus*, Jain *munis*, and Buddhist monks throughout Asia, serves as a positive reminder of the impermanence of things in the world. On the other hand, activity in the world, performed in the spirit of sacrifice, is held also to be sacred, from the time of the Vedas and Dharmasastras up to the work of Vivekananda and Gandhi. The two seemingly competing models have come to complete one another in such a way that action itself can be seen as a path of liberation.

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Foot Notes

- 1 Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 33 and Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 10.
- 2 Christopher Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, Suny Press, 1986.
- 3 These "destinies" vary according to tradition. The Buddhists, for instance, posit six: human, animals, hell beings, titans, gods, demons.
- 4 Rg Veda X:136.
- 5 Yoga Sutra I:23-29 and II:4 for a description of *isvara pranidhana* where one aspires to assume the consciousness of the unfettered deity.
- 6 *Outlines of Jainism*, Jagmenderlal Jaini (Cambridge University Press, 1916), pp. 7-66.
- 7 Retold from H.T. Francis and E.J. Thomas, *Jataka Tales Selected and Edited with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge University Press, 1916), pp. 20-22.

- 8 Amulyachandra Sen, *Asoka's Edicts* (Calcutta: The Institute of Indology, 1956).
- 9 "Hinduism", by Hyla S. Converse, in *The Religious World: Communities of Faith*, Bush, et al, eds, (New York: MacMillan, 1988) pp. 63-64.
- 10 Max Mueller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, (London: Longmans, 1988).
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- 12 Antonio T. de Nicolas, *Meditations Through the Rg Veda: Four Dimensional Man* (New York: Nicolas Hays, 1976).
- 13 Marriott and Inden refer to this Vedic figure as Code Man. McKim Marriott and Ronald B. Inden, "Caste systems", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed. Macropaedia III, 983.
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- 15 Comments made during presentation at the IASWR Conference on Nonviolence, Stony Brook, New York, 1984.
- 16 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. (University of Chicago Press, 1970).
- 17 Winston Davis has offered a probing critique of Buddhist notions of karma and rebirth as employed in Meiji Japan. "Buddhism and the Modernization of Japan", *History of Religions*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (1989), pp. 304-339.
- 18 Lee Siegel, *Fires of Love, Waters of Peace: Passion and Renunciation in Indian Culture* (Honolulu. University of Hawaii Press, 1983).
- 19 Madeleine Biardeau, "The Salvation of the King in the Mahabharata" pp. 77, 96-97, in *Way of Life. King, Householder, Renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, ed. T.N. Madan (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982), 75-98.
- 20 M.K. Gandhi, *My Socialism* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), pp. 33-35.
- 21 M.K. Gandhi, *The Village Reconstruction* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidy Bhavan, 1966), p. 30.
- 22 B. Srinivas a Murthy, Tr. *The Bhagavad Gita* (Long Beach: Long Beach Publications, 1985), III: 15-19.
- 23 Ibid., III:21-22 24 Ibid , III: 25-28.

Fiqh and Shari'a: the Islamic Approach to Morality

The point of departure for Islamic morality and for Islamic religion itself and the central article of faith from which everything else flows is that God has spoken to man in the Qur'an. Ironically this is the point of agreement as well as of radical divergence between Islam and the religions of Judaism and Christianity. All the three religions accept the Bible as divine revelation. Here Islam and Judaism are in close alliance as opposed to christianity. As Vernon Ruland says: "Despite recent enmity over the state of Israel, Muslim and Jewish traditionalists share extra-ordinary religious affinities. Pure monotheists and iconoclasts, both reject the notion of an incarnate God as sacrilegious, even self-contradictory. Their spirituality centers on the revealed will of God, essentially as interpreted by a line of respected legal scholars... Each has grudgingly accepted various compromises with secularism, nationalism and socialism in building modern nation-states."¹

But the scandal and division comes when the average Muslim comes to read the Jewish Torah or the Christian New Testament: How can, he asks, God's patriarchs and prophets be portrayed as liars, murderers and fornicators? So Torah must be a corrupt version of the Mosaic original. The four Gospels clearly differing in details show a human tampering with God's unambiguous revelation. So the Qur'an exhorts "the People of the Book", the Jews and Christians, to retain and reinterpret the Bible in the light of the definitive divine revelation through Muhammad. In the final Qur'anic covenant, says, Islam, God links himself definitively, not to a single nation, but to the *umma muslima*, the universal community of believers.