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HINDU REALISM

India's Cultural Imprint in Asia*

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Abstract

This paper looks beyond the conventional study of international relations in terms of the idealist, realist or constructivist approaches and explores pathways for understanding and explaining India's foreign relations in terms of complementary probability rather than two-valued certainty in Western approaches. India's approach to international relations is embedded in its cultural values derived from the *Vedas*, the *Upanisads*, and the *Epics*, which focus on proactively engaging and harmonizing empirical paradoxes rather than avoiding or rejecting empirical paradoxes. In this approach uncertainty and interdependence inherent in international relations is sought to be managed through intentionality, activism, engagement, and participation. Global presence of Hindu civilization is substantiation of India's policy of spiritual realism in foreign relations.

India's rich legacy of statecraft and statesmanship over thousands of years shows us how Indian kings and emperors had the ability and wisdom to safeguard the interests of a sub-continental civilization, and leverage them abroad in the form of thought, religion, trade and culture. Indian civilization has influenced the cultural life of other nations far beyond the boundaries of India, in Southeast Asia and far away in the islands of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, Tibet, China, Japan and Korea and in Sri Lanka. In the West, the tracks of Indian thought may be traced far into Central Asia.

Given the way our textbooks currently give the impression that India was a land conquered successively by the Greeks, Mughals, Portuguese and the British, it's hard to imagine that ancient India had political, economic and cultural presence beyond the South Asian sub-continent. It is widely believed that India has traditionally had a 'non-aggressive' and a 'non-interventionist' policy with an emphasis on idealism, isolation and 'non-violence'. It needs to be recalled that Ahimsa was propagated by the Mauryan Emperor, Ashoka, only after many military victories that led to strength, prosperity and spiritual awakening. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is proclaimed by India on the basis of its material and spiritual strength. *Moksha* or freedom from suffering is to be achieved here in this life by the combined pursuit of knowledge and action which builds strength to pursue peace and prosperity.

Hindu Realism

When we think of the Hindu religion, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to define or even adequately describe it. This is not surprising, because Hindu dharma (religion) is primarily about the un-manifest, infinite and absolute reality, and its interaction with the manifest, and finite reality. Unlike other religions in the world, Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one God; it does not subscribe to anyone dogma; it does not believe in only one philosophical concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performance; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life.

Dr. Radhakrishnan has explained how Hinduism has steadily absorbed the customs and ideas of peoples with whom it has come into contact and has thus been able to maintain its supremacy and its youth. The term 'Hindu', according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, had originally a territorial and not a religious significance. It implied residence in a well-defined geographical area. The Hindu thinkers recognized the striking fact that the men and women dwelling in India belonged to different communities, worshipped different gods and practised different rites. (Radhakrishnan, 2018, p. 2).

As Dr. Radhakrishnan has observed; "The Hindu civilization is so called, since its original founders or earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the Sindhu (the Indus) river system corresponding to the North West Frontier Province and the Punjab. This is recorded in the Rig Veda, the oldest of the Vedas which give their name to this period Indian history. The people on the Indian side of the Sindhu were called Indian by the Persian and the western invaders". (ibid.). That is the genesis of the word "Hindu" and "Indian". "In all the fleeting centuries of history", says Dr. Radhakrishnan, "in all the vicissitudes through which India has passed, a certain marked identity is visible. It has held fast to certain psychological traits which constitute its special heritage, and they will be the characteristic marks of the Indian people so long as they are privileged to have a separate existence". (ibid.).

Beneath the diversity of philosophic thoughts, concepts and ideas expressed by Hindu philosophers who started different philosophic schools, lie certain broad concepts which can be treated as basic. The first amongst these basic concepts is the acceptance of the Veda as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters. This concept necessarily implies that all the systems claim to have drawn their principles from a common reservoir of thought enshrined in the Veda. The Indian teachers were thus obliged to use the heritage they received from the past in order to make their views readily understood. (SCR, p. 17)

Secondly, *Brahma*, the Being, known by various names-such as Param Brahma, Bhagwan, Purshottama- is the Absolute Reality. In the Hindu tradition the first gods that were worshipped in Vedic times were mainly Indra, Varuna, Vayu and Agni. Later, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh came to be worshipped. It has been declared in the Vedas that Narayana and Siva are forms of Brahma, the Supreme Spirit. In course of time,

Rama and Krishna secured a place of pride in the Indian tradition, and gradually as different philosophic concepts held sway in different sects in different sections of the Indian community, a large number of gods were added, with the result that today, the Indian tradition presents the spectacle of a very large number of gods who are worshipped by different sections of the Indians. (ibid. p.18).

“The same God is worshipped by all. The differences of conception and approach are determined by local colouring and social adaptations. All manifestations belong to the same Supreme. "Visnu is Siva and Siva is Visnu and whoever thinks they are different goes to hell". "He who is known as Visnu is verily Rudra and he who is Rudra is Brahma's One entity functions as three gods that is Rudra, Tigris and Brahma. " Udayandcarya writes: "Whom the Saivas worship as Siva, the Vedantins as Brahman, the Buddhists as Buddha, the Naiyyayikas who specialize in canons of knowledge as the chief agent, the followers of the Jaina code as the ever free, the ritualists as the principle of law, may that Hari, the lord of the three worlds, grant our prayers." (Radhakrishnan, 2014, p.184).

The third basic concept which is common to the diverse systems of Hindu philosophy is that "all of them accept the view of *Rta* the great cosmic order and rhythm. Vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession. This theory is not inconsistent with belief in progress; for it is not a question of the movement of the world reaching its goal times without number, and being again forced back to its starting point..... It means that the race of man enters upon and retravels its ascending path of realisation. This interminable succession of world ages has no beginning. "Our life is a step on a road, the direction and goal of which are lost in the infinite. On this road, death is never an end or an obstacle but at most the beginning of new steps". (SCR, p.19). It may also be said that while all the systems of Indian philosophy believe in rebirth and pre-existence, yet they remain sharply focused on the value of the past and the future in the present.

The development of Indian religion and philosophy shows that from time to time saints and religious reformers attempted to remove from the Indian thought and practices elements of corruption and superstition and that led to the formation of different sects. Buddha started Buddhism; Mahavir founded Jainism; Basava became the founder of Lingayat religion, Dnyaneshwar and Tuk-aram initiated the Varakari cult; Guru Nank inspired Sikhism; Dayananda founded Arya Samaj, and Chaitanya began Bhakti cult; and as a result of the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Indian religion flowered into its most attractive, progressive and dynamic form. If we study the teachings of these saints and religious reformers, we would notice an amount of divergence in their respective views; but underneath that divergence, there is a kind of subtle indescribable unity which brings them within the sweep of the broad and progressive Indian religion. (SCR, p.20)

Absolute Reality

The Vedic civilization in India had established a golden age of knowledge and prosperity more than five thousand years ago. Vedic culture had created a harmonious

relationship between the manifest and un-manifest world. The manifest world with all its diversities and natural surroundings was seen and perceived as the divine gift of the un-manifest by the Vedic sages. They did not see the world as place of suffering and sadness. The creative, and bountiful nature gave to the industrious and insightful plenty to work with and celebrate. In the Vedic age, pure ecstatic practice and contemplation of human speech echoing in the atmosphere through the sacred chant merged easily with the flow and sound of the divine river, on the banks of which such chanting and contemplation took place. “With the river’s raging as the background to the rhythmic recitation of the inspired hymns on the banks of Sarasvati, the association with speech on the one hand and music on the other can hardly be overlooked” (Ludvik, 2007, p.35).

In order to explain their visionary experience of the Absolute Reality, the Vedic sages chose the style of symbolism. The Vedic mantras use the names and forms of the objects and events to indicate the nature of the Absolute Reality. “The Ocean, Sky, Air, Water, Fire, Sun, Mountains, Rivers, Trees, Animals, Humans, Clouds, Rain and many more are objects in nature which stand out as alphabets of world language robed in silence, yet eloquent with exploding meaning that can be deciphered according to the intellectual attainment of each individual. The human body, eyes, ears, hands, feet, in breath, out breath, light, sound, movement—all these introduce us to a rich world of symbolical significance” (Agrawal, 1953, p.iv). The objects of Absolute Reality are an integral and essential part of all Vedic rituals and they are considered as the connecting points of the relative and the Absolute Reality. The idea that nature and language are integrated has been for ages well known in Indian culture which has maintained historical continuity much longer than western culture (Whorf, p. 249).

The origin of the worship of *Devatas* like *Indra*, *Varun*, *Agni*, and *Mitra*, can be traced back to the times before the *Rg Veda*. While it continues in *Rg Veda*, there is an underlying recognition of an Absolute Reality, preceding the *Devatas* which is the cause of their creation. That all pervasive, indivisible, infinite and eternal cosmic energy is termed in *Rg Veda* as *Aditi*. There are many such *Devatas* in the *Rg Veda* from which any one could be considered to be the foundation of the Jew, Christian, or Islamic religion. In fact, the *Vedas* are a treasure of such creative thought and philosophy that they consist of spiritual power to generate universal systems of faith. The *Ekam Satya* mantra in the *Rg Veda*, enunciates the principle of cosmic coexistence and harmony which has given a distinct identity and direction to the Indian religion:

They called him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni; and he is heavenly Garuda, who has beautiful wings. The truth is one, but the sages call it by many names or describe him in many ways; they called him Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan. (Rg Veda 1.164.46)

This fundamental principle of *Brahma*, or absolute reality, or cosmic energy as the unified source of all existence, which was enunciated in the *Rg Veda*, considers all existence to have been created from the same cosmic source, including the creation of the *Devatas* or gods. It is the distinguishing feature of Indian religion that it recognizes and respects the value of all religions of the world. All faith in the divine creator, all modes of worship of the creator, and all modes of representation of the creator are considered as valid means to comprehend the Absolute Reality which is beyond words and thoughts. All religions are different ways of reaching the same goal of experiencing and expressing the same

fundamental Absolute Reality which underlies all existence. This principle of unity in diversity in matters of matters of faith is the unique and earliest contribution of the *Vedas*.

Brahma the absolute reality, cosmic, transcendent principle and immanent source of everything that exists, one of the most fundamental and pervasive concepts of Hindu knowledge tradition, escapes every clear definition, and yet the Hindu texts are full of attempted descriptions of the undescrivable. As the fundamental basis of all existence it is the One without a second (*Rg Veda* 10.129); its implied meanings are 'greatness, sacredness, inner power, sacred Word and wisdom, and it has been characterized as Being (sat), Consciousness (cit) and Bliss (ananda). It is by nature eternal, foundational, and contains all powers. It is the source of everything and also all pervasive. *Brahma* is both being and non-being, it is far and also near, it is form and also formless, name and nameless, and creator and creation. It is complete wholeness and yet cannot be completely described by any concept. Above descriptions of *Brahma* in the Indian literature show that it is practically impossible to treat *Brahma* as a unitary concept. It defies all definitions. *Brahma* is a mystery, an enigma, a mysterious power which is effective and produces objects and processes which have form and name and which can be located in space and time.

In *Rg Veda*, *Brahma* is used in the sense of sacred knowledge, or a hymn, or speech, the manifest expression of the character of spiritual consciousness. The role of *Brahma* in the *Rg Veda* possesses characteristics of relationality, interdependence and co-creation. *Brahma* can refer to hymns or poetic formulae that contain a certain mysterious, enigmatic power, which, symbolizes the hidden potential life-giving power contained within the silence of the primordial undifferentiated, undivided, uncreated world. Such hidden power is embedded relationally within the wholeness of the world, which in turn is interdependent with the power of *Brahman*, for the life-giving power of *Brahma* requires the presence of the undivided world in order to act and thus create the manifest world. The Vedic seers held a deep understanding of cosmic inter-connectedness and expressed this consciousness using metaphors of relationality, interdependence, and co-creation in their hymns describing the relationship of manifest and un-manifest reality.

The Upanisads provide more fertile ground for metaphysical representation of *Brahma*. While the Vedic *Brahma* is seen as the creative energy, in the Upanisads, the concept gradually acquires meaning beyond its concrete associations, cosmic connections, and various other realities. It becomes more and more an abstract, all-pervading, transcendent supreme Principle (Baumer, p. 3). While this concept has rarely been personified or idolized, it retains its impersonal and metaphysical nature and immanent fluidity, thus making its twofold nature of fundamental importance. Jan Gonda (1950), who devoted an entire book to *Brahman*, describes it in terms of its dynamic creativity, as "the potency or principle of cosmic energy from which all things are derived, as the ultimate basis of the world, as one with the true immortality and eternal reality" (Gonda, p.10). He associates *Brahman* with two aspects of power, both "personal" and "impersonal" (Ibid. p.62-63, 66).

Brahman is not merely a featureless Absolute. It is all this world. Supra-cosmic transcendence and cosmic universality are both real phases of one absolute reality. In the former aspect the Spirit is in no way dependent on the cosmic manifold; in the latter the Spirit functions as the principle of the cosmic manifold. The supra-cosmic unmanifest reality and the cosmic integration are both real. The two, *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman*, Absolute and the relative, are not exclusive. It is the same *Brahma* who is described in different ways. The two are like two sides of one reality. The Real is at the same time being realized. The nirakara (formless), and the sakara (with form), are different aspects of the same Reality.

The seeker can choose either in his spiritual practices. Knowledge of both is considered supreme salvation. When an individual rises to full awareness, he knows himself to be related to universal consciousness, but when he turns outward he sees the objective universe as a manifestation of the universal consciousness. The withdrawal from the world is not the conclusive end of the human quest. There has to be a return to the world accompanied by the awareness that the objective reality is relative and it is sustained by the absolute reality. The objective reality has to be experienced and shaped to be in harmony with the absolute reality from which it emerges and into which it merges.

The central concept of Hindu realism, *Brahma*, appears in four levels or aspects in the course of its evolution from the earliest Vedic texts: as the transcendental universal Being, preceding any immanent reality; as the causal factor of the differentiation; as the innermost essence of the particular beings determining their individual existence; as the dynamic essence of spiritual knowledge reconnecting the differentiation to the original unity. Thus, *Brahma* is the known, the knower, the knowledge, and the path of knowledge. The one who knows *Brahma* becomes *Brahma*. It is *Sat Chit Ananada*, the bliss of the knowledge of the truth.

The authors of the Vedic hymns regarded themselves as channels of something greater than they knew, instruments of a higher soul beyond themselves. They do not so much create the contents as contemplate them in their moments of deepest insight. Their creative spirit and its activity are so unlike the conscious mind that the latter feels itself to be inspired and raised above its normal power by the breath of spirit. These inspired souls speak from a centre of consciousness that has transcended the limits of its finitude and so claim an authoritativeness which it is not within the power of the normal individual to bestow. They do not think so much as thoughts come to them. (Radhakrishnan, 2018, p. 188).

This is the justification for the ancient view of philosophy as an insight (dharana) of the whole experience. To mistake it for an intellectual discipline which deals with highly abstract concepts is to make it irrelevant to life. In any concrete act of thinking mind's active experience is both intuitive and intellectual. Mere intuitions are blind while intellectual work is empty. All processes are partly intuitive and partly intellectual. Intuition of the whole is sustained by the different steps. (ibid. p. 183).

The insight does not arise if we are not familiar with the facts of the case, the contradictions and the half views which intellect throws up. The successful practice of intuition requires previous study and assimilation of a multitude of facts and laws. We

may take it that great intuitions arise out of a matrix of rationality. When a region of blurred facts becomes suddenly lit up, illuminated, it is due not so much to a patient collection of facts as to a sudden discovery of new meaning in facts that are already well known. The genius discovers the meaning which binds the facts which remain distinct and separate for the ordinary understanding. It is the intuitive grasp of the dynamic principle which enables one to organise the facts successfully. (ibid. p. 178).

Intuitive life, spiritual wisdom at its highest, is a type of achievement which belongs only to the highest range of mental life. It is synthetic insight which advances by leaps. A new truth altogether unknown, startling in its strangeness, comes into being suddenly and spontaneously owing to the intense and concentrated interest in the problem. When we light upon the controlling idea, a wealth of uncoordinated detail falls into proper order and becomes a perfect whole. (ibid. p. 177).

Cosmic Order

The concept *ṛta* or cosmic order, along with the concept of *Brahma* constitutes the conceptual core of the Vedic culture and tradition. *Ṛta* is a multidimensional concept which is connected to other fundamental concepts like *sat*, *satya*, *dharma*, *brahma*, and *atma*, in the *Veda*, *Epics*, *Upaniṣads* and the *Dharmaśāstra*. In its most fundamental sense, *ṛta* is the law, right way, order, system, binder and harmony underlying all natural phenomena. *Ṛta* is the all-pervasive universal order that is same at all levels of existence, and the objective world is the expression of that order. The field of *ṛta* is physical, mental, spiritual, and ethical. Nature as it is known to us is not seen as a chaotic occurrence of events and objects. While it may appear as random and disorganized, the fundamental processes of nature that underlie all objective, and subjective realms too, function as a complex system in which all parts are coordinated and integrated into a larger whole.

Vedic sages and scholars realized the overarching presence of a cosmic order or way that held together in a complex and adaptive system at the different levels, forms, and phases of all the objects and processes that comprised the cosmos. All the forms of being existing and developing in harmony within an interconnected web of relationships were seen as organized in a system which integrated all the parts into an undivided whole in flowing movement. The cosmic order which extended to all levels of existence from the infinite to the infinitesimal was seen as inviolable, never to be broken, even by the Vedic divinities who were in fact considered as the guardians of *ṛta*.

This universal principle of creative unity is revealed in some of the earliest stages in the evolution of multi-cellular life on this planet. A multitude of cells were bound together into a larger unit, not through aggregation, but through a marvelous quality of complex inter-relationship maintaining a perfect co-ordination of functions. The larger co-operative unit accommodates greater freedom of self-expression of individual units, to develop greater power and efficiency in the organised whole. It is not merely an aggregation, but an integrative interrelationship, complex in character, with differences within of forms and function. There are gaps between the units, but they do not stop

the binding force that permeates the whole or the dynamic identity of the units. The most perfect inward expression of such organization has been attained by man in his own body. But what is most important of all is the fact that man has also attained its realization in a more subtle body outside his physical system in the universe. (Tagore, 1931, p.2).

The question how a particular entity functions as a coherent whole sub-system within a coherent system has exercised generations of biologists and physicists dissatisfied with the mechanistic approach. Since the twentieth century, concepts of quantum coherence and the related systemic intercommunication have been used to convey the wholeness of the organism, where the whole and the parts are mutually integrated, and every part is as much in control as it is open and responsive. This internal coherence of energy underlies the unity of activity and the identity of the particular organisms. Every single organism from the tiniest quark to the largest quasar in the infinite cosmos seems to be able to exist and work autonomously while perfectly keeping in step and tune with the whole. There is no choreographer orchestrating the dance of the particles and waves in all the systems. Ultimately, choreographer and dancer are the same (Ho, 1997, p.360).

Īśa Upaniṣad brings out the systemic aspect of cosmic order most succinctly and clearly. It says that the Absolute Reality is both universal and particular. The creation of the particular from the universal does not affect the integrity of the universal. The principle or quality of wholeness and integration is prior to the principle of particular and diversity. Oneness becomes many in the image of the oneness. That is whole, this is whole, taking out a particular whole from the absolute whole leaves the absolute whole integrated and creative as before. Every particular entity has to be an integrated whole to maintain its identity amongst an integrated system of infinite entities. The wholeness or integrity of each part is the bedrock of the wholeness of the universe and the order of the cosmos, and the order of the cosmos is the bedrock of the wholeness of the particular (Radhakrishnan, 2007, p. 566).

Rta is the principle whereby the Absolute Reality becomes manifest and perceptible to human senses. In *Rg Veda* it is said that, 'heaven and earth exist in close unison in the womb of *rta*'. (*Rg Veda*, 10.65). *Rta*, thus, is the one single system that embraces the cosmic order. The concept of *rta* explains the course of the evolution and sustenance of the natural and human world in terms of rhythm, time cycle, seasons, and biological growth. It refers to three basic elements of birth, growth, and transformation as the components of the complex cosmic system which functions according to its own self-organizing principles and law. Scholars, scientists, and poets in all ages have always found it amazing that the Absolute Reality is so well-ordered.

Rta is closely connected to the later concepts of *satya* and *dharma*. While *rta* may be seen as the structure of the cosmic reality at its both manifest and unmanifest levels, *satya* is the practical and operational aspect which is integrally connected to the Absolute reality. It is because of these two principles that in Indian tradition the cosmos is considered as ordered and not disordered or disorganized. These two concepts also connect the cosmic level of order to the human and social levels of life. At

the human level, moral and legal order is expressed through the norms of truth, non-aggression, freedom, and ecological alignment of human existence with the cosmic order. Thus, *Brahma*, *ṛta*, *satya*, or *dharma*, uphold the essential unity of the immanent and transcendental reality of the cosmos.

Greater India

Hindu conceptualizations of *Brahma*, *ṛta*, *dharma* and *satya*, are not comparable with Western principles in the sense that they provide specific ethical permissions or prohibitions. Truth in the Western sense is the sum of what can be isolated and counted, it is what can be logically accounted or what can be proved to have happened, or what one really means at the moment when one speaks. While the Indian conception of truth is marked by an inner realization of the wholeness of reality, the Western view of truth is better described in English dictionaries as truthfulness or veracity of individual explicit statement. In Hindu tradition, on the other hand, truth is best defined in *Mahābhārata* when it says, '*Satya* is *dharma*, *tapas* (austerity) and *yoga*. *Satya* is eternal *Brahma*, *Satya* is also the foremost *yajna*, and everything is established on *Satya*', (MB, V, p.497). In an illustration of this principle, *Mahābhārata* says that speaking truthfully to a criminal is not acceptable as the truth. Verbal truth is only one side of the concept which is much more general. Truth is signified by virtue of conformity to the order of righteousness, interdependence and cohesion and harmony on which the cosmos is founded.

It needs to be emphasized that *ṛta* or cosmic order does not absolutely determine the life of an individual. It is only one of the five factors involved in the accomplishment of any act, which are *adhithana* or the basis or centre from which we work, *kartr* or doer, *karta* or the instrumentation of nature, *chesta* or effort and *daiva* or fate. The last is the power or powers other than human, the cosmic principle which stands behind, modifying the work and disposing of its fruits in the shape of act and its reward. We must make a distinction between that part which is inevitable in the make-up of nature, where restraint does not avail and the part where it could be controlled and molded to our purpose in speech and action. (Radhakrishnan, 2014, p. 48).

Thus has wisdom more secret than all secrets, been declared to you by Me.
Having reflected on it fully 'do as you choose.

The above verse from the closing chapter of Bhagavadgita highlights the role of human will in shaping the destiny of individual and society. The essence of Hindu religion is that we are free to use our intelligence and exercise our discrimination to act truthfully. We can co-operate with cosmic reality but we can also refrain from it. Even error is a condition of growth. Neither nature nor society can invade our inner being without our permission. We need not act from simple and blind beliefs acquired from habit or authority. Inarticulated assumptions adopted inevitably and emotionally have often led to individual failures and caused untold human misery. It is therefore important that the human mind should seek rational and experiential justification for its beliefs and actions. We must have a sense of real integrity within ourselves and with the cosmic reality. (ibid., p. 445).

The concepts of *Brahma*, *Rta*, *Dharma* and *Satya* enfold and unfold the fundamental essence of Hindu realism running through Hindu spiritual tradition. This essence is the umbilical relationship of relative and the Absolute Reality. The concept of *Brahma* belongs to the realm of the Absolute Reality which includes the relative manifestations. As Rabindra Nath Tagore put it, “the consciousness of the reality of *Brahma* is as real in Indian tradition as a fruit held in ones palm” (Radhakrishnan, 2018, p.941). The Absolute Reality is knowable not on the basis of mere perception, but on the basis of *Pratibha* or insight into the essence of the objective world. *Pratibha* is not merely intuition or vision. It is an experience based on both reason and intuition, and may be called rational intuition. *Sabdanusanam* or the discipline of words as established in the Vedic texts by learned scholars and sages is seen as a means to achieve conscious experience of the Absolute Reality. The concept of *Brahma* emphasizes the freedom and creativity of action that is rooted in the Absolute Reality.

This cultural conceptualization of the nature of Absolute Reality has far reaching implications for Hindu religion and philosophy. Whatever the form of particular and manifest reality, it emerges from and merges into Absolute Reality. Since the immanent arises from and exists in the transcendental *Brahma*, it gains its power, freedom and creativity from that source. When human activity is illuminated with the light of *Brahma*, then the limiting aspect of its separateness loses its locality, and our action is not in a relationship of competition and conflict with others, but of accommodation and integration in conformity with the *Rta*, the order of nature. Action stemming from an awareness of the source of all activity, *Brahma*, the Absolute Reality, unfolds and uses complete awareness to create cooperative and integrative activity for the welfare of all.

The relevance of the concepts *Brahma*, *Rta*, *Dharma* and *Satya*, which constitute the essence of Hindu realism, can be seen in the context of the social, economic, political and problems of all times which require solutions at the global level through mutual interaction and cooperation. *Brahma* is the conscious experience of the dynamic and interconnected Absolute Reality. Every nation, every government, every society, every race, every culture, every religion is essentially a manifestation of *Brahma*. Individual and social interactions which are of the nature of Absolute Reality connect them all in a dynamic web of unity in diversity. *Brahma* is the infinite, dynamic and emergent cosmic order, and this dynamism is the source of its freedom and creativity. Hindu realism has the power to bridge the gaps that separate nations, communities and people, and bring them together in the global family.

It is in this wider context that we need to see Indian knowledge tradition as one of the great civilizing and humanizing factors evolved by man. For the greater part of a millennium, the spiritual life of the larger part of Asia meant mainly its interaction with the call of the eternal ideas discovered, systematized and humanized by the sages and saints of ancient India. India was undoubtedly a spiritual and cultural force in many parts of Asia. India as the *Vishwa Guru*, or fountainhead of knowledge, is indeed a fitting description of Hindu realism, that influenced India civilisation for at least two thousand years from about the beginning of the first millennium B.C. down to the closing centuries of the first millennium A.C. , and its imprints can still be seen in the culture and traditions in the region.

During this period the cultural unification of India went on simultaneously with the cultural expansion of India into Ceylon and Burma, into Siam, Cambodia and Cochin China in Indo-China, into Malaya and Indonesia, and, to a large extent, into Afghanistan and Turkistan in Central Asia. We note also the transformation of China and Korea and Japan through their contact with the spiritual forces from India. In many regions of Asia, social order and organization of that was more inclusive and tolerant, as well as arts and crafts and general training of the intellect, seem to have dawned for the first time with the advent of the merchant and the Brahmana sages from India in the centuries preceding Christ, and probably also preceding Buddha. It was not a mere material uplift that was brought to the indigenous peoples — Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian in Indo-China and Indonesia, Iranian and Ural-Altaiic in Central and Northern Asia, and Tibeto-Chinese in Tibet, Burma and Siam. (Chatterji S.K., p.88-89)

Not only were there existing intellectual and other factors which were rejuvenated and brought to more active life with the contact of the mind and work of India, but they were enabled to attain the fulfillment of their potential without any hindrance, without the imposition of an alien mentality which would not or could not take into consideration and treat sympathetically the local mind and the milieu of local emotions and attitudes. Since Hindu civilization itself is broad-based on a spirit of harmony and inclusiveness it does not regard anything human as essentially alien or repugnant either to man or to God; and this basic openness and inclusiveness of the Hindu mind brought self-respect with civilization to the peoples inside and outside the geographical limits of India who came in touch with its invigorating influence and brought their own contributions to make it richer and more universal, while they themselves participated in the deeper and wider life presented by it. (ibid.)

Assimilation, and not suppression by an official type, was the keynote of Hindu cultural influence; and hence its achievement was something more than that of a mere force of material civilization or civilized organization. This is quite apart from the service rendered by Hindu culture, in bringing to the Asian nations its own spiritual ideals and values. In the case of an ancient and highly cultured people like the Chinese, contact with Indian thought gave the finishing touch in the formation and in the highest expression of their own culture. This was done in a way which merged seamlessly with the existing cultural beliefs and practices of the people of this region. (Ibid. p.90). There was no destruction of the existing religious structures and institutions in Asia to implant Hindu culture.

It is easy to understand cultures spreading in the wake of conquest or commerce. The spread of Hindu culture in Indo-China and Indonesia certainly began through commercial relations between India and these lands. These commercial relations, it has been presumed, were the expression of the formation of realist Hindu culture in India. This culture was carried to the outlying lands of Indo-China and Indonesia and to Central Asia as a sort of overflow from India, as a most natural thing, and in the earlier stages probably there was not much conscious effort in it. And yet the spread of Hindu culture was due to the *purushartha* or human endeavour and was not like the operation of some blind natural force or unconscious inertia which had its course because there was no serious opposition anywhere. (ibid.).

There are ample indications that those who built up the Hindu culture in India and those who helped to disseminate it abroad were moved in their efforts by a conscious will and were impelled by a well-understood spiritual urge to reach out to the lands beyond, to carry the message of the good life and of the realization of the highest good that they had found out through a deliberate quest for the cultural heritage of India. The Hindu religion and culture that was born in India was born under a great internal inspiration from the Vedic tradition, the life-giving force of which is still flowing with its waters of immortality. With the rise of this composite culture in India came into being the highest wealth of India in the realm of thought and the Indian sense of sacredness of all life. Few things in human thought can be mentioned as approaching the sublimity of these ideas, and the profundity of these philosophical speculations upon the nature of being.

Empirical evidences of this interaction of cultures abound throughout the region and can be witnessed to this day through the architecture, art, customs, ceremonies and performing arts in Asia, all of which reflect a distinct Hindu stamp along with a blend of local colours, temperaments and manners. There are 'positive evidences' of a very high degree of Sanskrit scholarship all in the region consisting of Malay Peninsula, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in Indo-China, and islands of Sumatra, Java, Bali and Borneo. Kings, officials and other individuals in this region were highly proficient in different the four Vedas – specifically Rg, Yaju, Sāma and Atharvaveda-six Vedāngas, six systems of philosophy...Dharmaśāstras, Arthaśāstra, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda etc. (Majumdar, 1977, p.7). These evidences show how spirit of Hindu culture reached this distant corner of Asia, it inspired people to build monuments whose massive grandeur still excites the wonder of the world, how art and institutions, created on Indian models, grew and developed a unique character. (Majumdar, 1944, p. 1).

For all Indians who want once more to bring back to life the latent or dying forces of their own people, the history of this Greater India as an achievement of the Indian spirit should act as an uplifting and a compelling inspiration. The study of an old achievement of India in which are present the conscious will and intellect of the Indians of old can only be expected to give us, modern Indians, a new courage and a new hope, and a fresh desire for action, after it has filled us with a due humility in a sense of our present unworthiness. Fortunately for ourselves, the attention of thoughtful Indians has been drawn in this direction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can do no better than reflect on what Tagore had to say about the cultural heritage and future of India. Tagore believed that the Hindu social ideal that had evolved over centuries has never been presented before the people as whole, so that most people have only a vague conception of what the Hindu has achieved in the past, or can attempt in the future. The partial view, before us at any moment, appears at the time to be most important, so we can hardly bring ourselves to believe that it is this very aspect which, not only hides from the true ideal, but tends to destroy it. And we have thus come to imagine a picture of the Hindu society continually bathing, fasting and

telling beads, emaciated with doing penance, shrinking into a corner from the rest of the world.

We forget that Hindu civilization was once very much alive, crossing the seas, planting colonies, giving to and taking from all the world. It had its arts, its commerce, its vast and strenuous field of work. In its history, new ideas had their scope, social and religious revolutions their opportunity. Its women also had their learning, their bravery, their place in civic life. In every page of the *Mahābhārata* we find proof that it was no rigid, cast-iron type of civilization. The men of those days did not, like marionettes, play the set over and over again. They progressed through mistakes, made discoveries through experiment, and gained truth through striving. They belonged to a free and varied samaj, quick with life, driven into ever new enterprise by its active vigour.

Is it impossible to utilize the supreme ideas of the Hindu dharma, forming on a daily basis ties between the whole country and every member of our community? Doubt not the nations's capacity for self-help, know for certain that time has come. Remember how India has ever kept alive her power of binding together. She has ever established some sort of harmony amidst all kinds of difficulties and conflict, and hence she has survived till now. I have full faith in that India. Even now that India is slowly building up a marvelous reconciliation of the old order with the new. May each of us consciously join that work, may we be never misled by the dullness or revolt into resisting it. (Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 5).

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