

Hindu Spiritualism: The Ancient Hindu Way

A Study in Contrast

-Om Prakash Sharma, Former Governor Nagaland

It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in self-destruction of the human race. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history , the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family.

-Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee British Historian

The Ancient Hindu Way, in the above-quoted perceptive observation, is the soul of the Indian Nation and Democracy. Toynbee could as well say: The chapter which had an Indian beginning in pre-historical times will have to have an Indian ending as well. The ancient Hindu way stands for liberal outlook, constructive attitude and an accommodating spirit. Pursuit of universal values made it possible for world's greatest diversity that even now comprises more than two thousand ethnic groups, 652 languages & dialects and every major religion, to live in harmony. India continues to be a home to the third largest Muslim population, even after the birth of Pakistan as a separate homeland for them.

Unfortunately, the ancient liberal creed of India has been undermined in recent times. It is further mired in the turbid waters of narrow politics of pretentious secularism and intellectual dishonesty. There is an appalling disconnect from the Indian heritage of the large westernized segment of the society that tends to be more effete than elite in outlook. The object of this paper is to make a comparative study of the cardinal features of Hindu spiritualism that has shaped the Hindu Philosophy of life that went into making India a unique nation and a vibrant democracy. India is a dynamic democracy due to its liberal ethos and democratic traditions at grassroots level, nurtured over the millennia, and not because of the British legacy, as generally assumed. British parliamentary institutions succeeded in India because of the receptive environment. Will Durant rightly gives credit for this to the "democratic traditions of India through village communities of self-government." Indologists like T.W. Rhys Davids and R.C.Majumdar also endorse the view about the widespread political culture based on popular assemblies. Buddhism and Jainism contributed to the development of democratic institutions. The Buddhist Sangha was a democratic institution. The Buddhist canons were finalized during the three Synods of Buddhism, and of Jainism at Vallabhi in 456 AD after 800 years of Vardhman.

If the British influence was indeed a potent factor for the success of democracy in India, then many Afro-Asian countries that were part of the British Empire would have been practicing democratic values today. Nothing illustrates the fallacy of the assumption better than the failure of democratic experiments in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the successor state to East Pakistan, that were offshoots of India. Fired by fanaticism, they partitioned the assets without sharing the liberal Indian heritage. It is no coincidence that out of about 50 Muslim majority countries, very few have managed to establish

genuinely democratic form of governments. A section of the Muslim clerics, in a recent statement to the effect that democracy is not compatible with Islam may have confirmed the views of many scholars. In fact, some of the leading Islamic countries, like Saudi Arabia, figure among the worst governed countries in the world.

A study in contrast is quite revealing. Christianity and Islam, two major religions of the world grew out of Judaism. In India, Buddhism and Jainism, two great ethical religions, emerged against the Hindu background. But, the similarity ends here. The two Judaism-based religions have a long history of violent confrontation with each other and with Judaism. One can see the depth of their historical aversion in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Canto XXVIII), that puts Prophet Muhammad in Hell "among the sowers of discord and the schismatics, being lacerated by devils again and again." In contrast Gautam, the founder of Buddhism the rival religion to Hinduism, was merely brushed away as 'nastika'- an atheist (Valmiki Ramayana); as per Manu's definition, a non-believer of Vedas.

India has an ancient civilization, with the longest unbroken continuity. India had not witnessed religious violence until the Muslim invasions of India. "The Mohammedan Conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history", wrote Will Durant in '*The Story of Civilization*'. Koenraad Elst, the Belgian historian, estimates that between the year 1000 and 1525, eighty million Hindus died at the hands of Muslim invaders, "probably the biggest holocaust in the whole history of our planet. Likewise, historians write that Christianity as a group has murdered more people in the name of 'their God' and wiped out entire cultures, than probably any other group in history. Over the course of 200 years, some 2 to 5 million persons are estimated to have been killed during the crusades. Muslims still consider the Crusades to be a symbol of Western hostility toward Islam. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), author of 'Perennial Philosophy', further writes of "Islam's black record of holy wars and persecution - a record comparable to that of later Christianity." Swami Vivekananda wrote: "Mohammedans talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of that in reality? Why, anybody who is not a Mohammedan will not be admitted into the brotherhood; he will more likely have his own throat cut. Christians talk of universal brotherhood; but anyone who is not a Christian must go to that place where he will be eternally barbecued."

A canard was spread by western historians that the Aryans had wiped out the native non-Aryan populations and that the Hindus had finished Buddhism. The first charge seeks to cover up the guilt of the imperial powers for having committed massive genocide of the indigenous people in the lands they had colonized. B.R. Ambedkar, a Buddhist himself, has replied to the second charge. According to him, "There can be no doubt that the fall of Buddhism in India was due to the invasions of the Musalmans." He mentions in his book, 'Ends and Means'; "It is an extremely significant fact that, before the coming of the Mohammedans, there was virtually no persecution in India. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who visited India in the first half of the seventh century and has left a circumstantial account of his 14 years in the country, makes it clear that Hindus and Buddhist lived side by side without any show of violence."

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) German philosopher and writer, gives an account of fortitude shown by Hindus in the face of atrocities perpetrated by foreign invaders as follows:

“Hinduism remains a vibrant, cultural and religious force in the world today. To understand Hinduism, it is necessary that we examine its history and marvel at its sheer stamina to survive in spite of repeated attacks across India's borders, time and again, by Greeks, Shakas, Huns, Arabs, Pathans, Mongols, Portuguese, British etc. India gave shelter, acceptance, and freedom to all. But, in holy frenzy, millions of Hindus were slaughtered or proselytized. Their cities were pillaged and burnt, temples were destroyed and accumulated treasures of centuries carried off. Even under grievous persecutions from the ruling foreigners, the basics of its civilization remained undefiled and, as soon as the crises were over Hindus returned to the same old ways of searching for the perfection or the unknown”.

Islam and Christianity wiped out Pagans and maligned their intensely humanitarian religion. In a fit of extreme malice towards them the Bible created a Genocidal God that ordered the killing of every single man, woman and child during the conquest of Canaan by Moses and Joshua. It concludes that all the Canaanites and Amalekites were killed. The stated reason for the genocide was that God wanted to prevent the coexistence of His people with Pagans, which would result in religious syncretism and the restoration of polytheism. The burning of heretics by the Roman Church on stakes has its own chapter of ignominy. Lao Tse was closer to the Indian thought in saying in Tao The Ching: “The Way of Heaven is to help not harm.” The universal religion of Hinduism urges mankind to be the *sarva-mitra*- friend of every being. In the Yajur Veda, the devotee prays to look upon all created things as friends.

In a striking contrast, Hu Shih, a former Chinese ambassador to the United States, observed: “India conquered and dominated China culturally for twenty centuries without having to send a single soldier across her border.” It is worth recalling that two Chinese emperors had persecuted the Buddhist missionaries to China. When the succeeding emperor wanted to punish the persecutors, the Buddhist monks magnanimously dissuaded him from doing so. Religions of India reached other lands through enterprising traders and pacifist monks that promoted harmony instead of discord. The religions that entered India belligerently under the Imperial push could hardly be expected to be integrative. As a defense mechanism, Hinduism erected the walls of orthodoxy around it with ‘hundred exits and not one door for entrance’. This was to have a deleterious impact on the internal harmony of Hinduism.

The Hindus have welcomed and respected all religions with an open mind. St Thomas Church, the oldest Church at Palyar in Trichur, Kerala was established in 52 A.D. Christianity reached India three centuries before it reached Rome. Likewise, Cheraman Jama Masjid located at Kodungallur, about 37-km from Thrissur, built in 628 AD, 7 years after the Prophet's migration to Medina, is believed to be the second oldest mosque in the world after the Medina mosque. Hounded and persecuted in other countries, the Jews in India led a peaceful life in the coastal state of Kerala. The first

Jewish migration was around 605 BC when they landed in the ancient port town of Cranganore (now called Kodungallore). After that there were waves of migration in 586 BC, 68 AD, 369 AD, 486 AD and 490AD. Nathan Katz, in his book titled: 'Who are the Jews of India?' writes that India is the only country where the Jews were not persecuted. Zoroastrians, fleeing from the persecution of Muslim rulers in Iran made India their home as early as the 10th century AD. A population of 70,000 out of about one lakh Parsees live in India. Some 2.2 Million Bahá'ís of India - members of the largest Bahá'í Community of the world, persecuted in Iran, live here in peace. In their sheer liberal exuberance the Hindus even wrote *Allah-Opanishad*, probably during Akbar's reign.

Emperor Ashoka was the epitome of national integration. D.R. Bhandarkar commenting on Ashoka, observed that he perceived the fundamental unity of all religions as seen in his edicts. He summed it up in two words: self-restraint (*sanyama*) and purity of heart (*bhavaa-shuddhi*). He exhorted his people to cease praising one's own sect and decrying other's unnecessarily. On the contrary, they should show reverence to other sects for those aspects where they deserve it. His advice to mankind is: "Listen and desire to listen to one another's dharma." The consequence of all this would be that they would be *bahushrut*- more knowledgeable about *dharama* and they will also be *kalyanagam*-conducive to the welfare of the world.

In sharp contrast to the above, Christianity holds, that if a man does not follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, he shall be condemned to hell. Islam says the same about those who do not follow the teachings of Prophet Mohammed. Tagore had misgivings about the adverse impact of such religious views on the human psyche when he said: "It has become tragically evident during the course of human history that the religions that were to liberate soul have in some form or the other been instrumental in shackling freedom of mind and even moral rights. Much of the bigotry, fanaticism, and religious persecution, has risen in the world from our dogmatizing." Thomas Jefferson, an American President, seemed to echo the attitude of a liberal Hindu. He wrote his own Gospel minus the miracles. It was published 75 years after his death. He retained the teachings of the Bible through parables. He thought all miracles were added through the stupidity or roguery of Jesus' disciples. His Jesus was simply a praying man. In defense of religious freedom he wrote: "It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods or no gods. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

For several centuries, the men concerned with religious organisations, especially in Europe, imprisoned, tortured and even put to death the seekers of truth. The revolutionary theory of Copernicus about the earth revolving around the sun was published on his deathbed, sparing him conflict with the Vatican church. Bruno, born seven years after the death of Copernicus, published a book 'Infinity of universe and the Worlds.' He was burnt alive at the stake in Italy. He was produced before the Roman governor in 1600 who sentenced him with the usual directives to treat him "with as great clemency as possible and without the effusion of blood." He was burnt at the stake; there was no effusion of blood! Thousands of 'heretics' were done to death in Inquisitions by the Roman Catholic church in such a compassionate manner! Contemporary historians have given blood-curdling accounts of the Hindu killings during the Goa Inquisitions

carried out by the Portuguese. Francis Xavier sent to Goa by Ignatius Loyola of Jesuit order under the direction of the King João III of Portugal in 1541, came to the conclusions: "Hindus are an unholy race that they are liars and cheats to the very backbone, that the Indians being black themselves, consider their own color the best and also that they believe that their gods are black. On this account the great majority of their idols are as black as black can be, and moreover are generally so rubbed over with oil as to smell detestably, and seem to be as dirty as they are ugly and horrible to look at." He wrote to Rome to install inquisition in Goa immediately. The Goan inquisition is regarded by all contemporary portrayals as the most violent inquisition ever executed by the Portuguese Catholic Church. It lasted from 1560 to 1812 though in Europe it ended by 1774, (briefly restarted in 1778).

After the perspective account based on the observations of scholars, statesmen and historians, the stage is set to examine the rationale behind the 'The Ancient Hindu Way'- the amalgam that has galvanized India into a nation with its creed of tolerance. The Vedas, world's most ancient library of scriptures, hold the key to a proper understanding of the phenomenon that India is. According to Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, the Rig Veda is the first book of Hindus and also of mankind. Some observations that may appear in the nature of clichés need to be stated as a prologue to the narrative that follows. According to the Yajur Veda, the Vedas represented the first civilization in the entire world: *prathama sanskritih vishvara* (Ya. 7.14). The Yajur Veda further proclaims that the Vedic seers had the task of awakening mankind: *vayam rastre jagrayama purohitah-* with the purpose of ennobling the human race: *kranvantu vishvam aryam-*(Rig. 9.63.5); not through conquests but through the pursuit of truth. The Vedic Aryan had the vision of the world as one family: *Vasudheva Kutumbakam* or *yatra vishvam bhavati ek nidam* (YAJ. 3.8). In the *bhumi sukta*, he delighted in being the son, not merely of the Aryavrata, but of the Earth: *putro ahm prithviah*. The Sukta further hails the earth for giving shelter to numerous faiths: *nana dharmanam Prithvi yathanksam*.

The Vedas were envisioned by the seers who had seen the Truth: *Satya-Shrutah, Kavayah*. They are also referred to as *mantra- drasta*, seers who had divined the hymns. More importantly, what the seers could perceive is not the whole Veda, but part of the Veda - '*anantah vai vedah*'. There is no dogmatic finality about the Truth. The Upanishads also proclaimed the same, concluding that there is no end to it - '*neti neti*'. This is typical of the India-born religions. The Buddha told Anand, his chief disciple, that he "had given him a handful of truths, but besides these there are many thousands more truths than can be enumerated." The *syadvaad* of the Jains also deals with probability of the Truth, not the finality of it. Only Truth as per the Upanishads was that of the Self-existent- *braham eva satyam*. The second sutra of the Brahma-sutra defines *braham* as: *janmadasya yatah-* That who is the cause of creation etc. This observation is to be viewed in the light of a fierce debate that was going on between the Mimansakas who did not believe that God was the cause of creation and the Vedantists, who did.

The term for religion in the Rig Veda is '*rit*', synonymous with Truth personified (*ritam-* to go the right way, be pious or virtuous: RV- Sanskrit English Dictionary by M.

Monier- Williams). The religion of Hindus, a nomenclature tagged by Persians, had no founder. It sprang from the depths of surging spiritualism. The Nasadiya Sukta (RV X, 12 9), the poetic Hymn of Creation of the Rig Veda, is the core of monotheism of the Vedas. It states that in the beginning when nothing existed and it was like darkness wrapped in layers of darkness; only That **One (Tad Ekam)** breathed by itself: *aanid vaatam swadhaya tad ekam*. The Creator had no name, as Lao Tse said: You can not name the nameless. The Vedic Aryan was in close communion with the forces of Nature, which he deified as His divine aspects. The Veda, however, clarified unequivocally: **One alone exists though the sages call It variously- ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti.** (Rig. I. 164. 46). God is One without a parallel: *ekameva-advityam* or as interpreted by Sayana Acharya: There is only one supreme deity: '*Ekam eva Sat Tatva*'. That only one supreme being created the earth and the heaven. (Rig. X. 8.3). That the Truth was called variously supplied the genes to the liberal Hindu psyche. Significantly, one name for war in the Rig Veda is '*mam satyam*'- **my truth**. History is a witness to religious wars to settle scores over the claims of Truth. India has a long history of resolving spiritual and religious differences through enlightened debates.

Internal reform has been a regular feature of Hinduism. There was an opposition to ritualism within Rig Veda itself. It not approve of ritualism: *richa kim karishyati*- what can the mere recitation of the hymns do? The Gita admonished the *veda-vaada ratah*-those who paid mere lip service to the Vedas. There is a celebrated legend about Ashtavakra, an eight-humped scholar, during king Janaka's reign. While in his mother's womb he had the audacity to tell his father who was reading Veda to her mother, to look within for enlightenment, instead of reading scriptures which were only a storehouse of verbiage. The Sama Veda takes a stand against sacrifices of the early Vedic age. It says of famous Horse Sacrifice (*ashva-medha*): "O! Ye gods! We use no sacrificial stake. We slay no victim. We worship entirely by the repetition of sacred mantras". The Gita transformed the Vedic theory of sacrifices and reconciles it with true knowledge of the eternal as Manduka Upanishad observed: '*braham vid braham eva bhavati*- the knower of Braham is Braham Himself.

The freedom of thought is the hallmark of Hindu scriptures. The Mahabharata says: "There is no muni that has not an opinion of his own". The differences of opinion between Rishi Vaishampayan and Rishi Yagvalkya led to the division of the Yajur Veda into two schools of thought: The Krishana Yajur Veda and the Sukla Yajurveda. The acceptance of the Atharva Veda as the fourth Veda was a momentous development. It illustrates the Hindu genius to resolve conflicts in religious matters with great sagacity. There were polemics between the followers of the three Vedas, called *strotriya*, and those of the Atharva Veda, derisively called *mantrikam* (believers in magic), as they believed in *mantra vidya*. In many early scriptures only three Vedas were mentioned. (R.V., x. 90. 9.;v. 7. 1; Tait Up., ii. 2-3.) The Gita, Valmiki Ramayan and the Maha Bharata mention only '*Veda Trai*'. The canonical works of the Buddhists do not mention the Atharva Veda. Grammarian Panini who flourished in the 3rd century B.C mentioned only three Vedas and not the Atharva Veda. Brahadaryanak Upanishads also mentions three Vedas. Some Atharva-vedic Acharyas considered it as the first Veda or even as

brahmveda. Jayant Bhatt wrote in *Nyay Manjari*: "*tatra vedaschtvar prathmo Atharva Veda*"- among the four Vedas, the Atharva Veda is the first.

Ved Vyas, the compiler of the Vedas, can be called the first nation builder as he created the institution of *teertha yatra*- pilgrimages, for '*chitta-shuddhi*' that prepared the ground for national unity. He was a great harmoniser. He could see the threat of schism among the Vedas to religious harmony. He regrouped the four Vedas by accommodating the Atharva Veda as the fourth Veda. Sumantu, son of Rishi Atharvan (of Atharva Veda), was one of his four *shishyas*, whose chain of disciples founded 1180 shakhas: Rig Veda 21, Yajurveda 101, Samaveda 1000 and Atharveda 58. Four disciples of Vyas, representing four Vedas were Pail, Jaimini, Vaishampayan and Sumantu. Dr P.V. Kane in the 'History of Dharma Shastra,' highlights how, in every age, the social thinkers tried to adjust Hindu institutions to the requirements of the time.

The Vedic system came to have two schools of thought: of the *gyan-kand* (Upanishadic path of knowledge) of the *uttar-mimasa*, and *karma-kand* (path of ritual) of the *Poorva mimasa* of Jamini. Differences at times were acute but never violent. They called *karama-kandis* as '*devam priya*' which according to Panini meant idiot. Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita, were to draw the attention of the world to the greatness of the Hindu philosophy. The earliest translation of fifty Upanishads by Dara Shukoh attracted the attention of European scholars in the year 1775 when Anquetil Duperron received one MS of the Persian translation of Upanishads, sent by M.Gentil, the French resident at the court of Shuja ud Daula, and brought to France by M.Bernier. It was translated into Latin, published in 1801 and 1802, under the title of Oupnekhat. Schopenhauer proclaimed to the world 'the vast treasures of thought which were lying buried beneath that fearful jargon'. His philosophy is powerfully impregnated with the doctrines of the Upanishads. He wrote: "Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits. And oh, how thoroughly is the mind here washed clean of all early engulfed Jewish superstitions, and of all philosophy that cringes before these superstitions! In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Oupnekhat. It has been solace of my life, it will be solace of my death!" Max Muller fully agreed with him. Deussen, the German philosopher, explained the validity of the Vedantic message: 'Because all other selves are your own selves'. He used to keep a copy of the Oupnekhat by his bed-side and read it before going to sleep. The German philosopher Nietzsche was very much influenced by the Upanishads which he learnt from Schopenhauer and Deussen.

The Upanishads proclaim that *Brahman* is the only God-head. In Kathopnisad, it is Vishnu; in Mandukyaopnisad it is called Shivam. Staunch advaita monotheist, Adi Shankaracharya with his concern for unity, instituted six religious systems or *sanmata*: which included the prevailing worship of Shiva, Vishnu, Sakti, Ganapati, Kumar and Surya. Shankaracharya, a seer and a great nation builder, set four coordinates of the Indian nation by establishing four *mathas* at four geographical extremities at Puri, Sringeri, Dwarka and Badrinath, in 8th century when communications should have been extremely difficult. It is for every Indian to remember with pride that India owes its

status as a nation to the harmonizing influence of Hindu spiritualism and the great vision of Hindu seers.

The role of Bhagwad Gita, as an interpreter of the Upanishadic thought and a synthesiser of Hindu systems, deserves attention. Gita has been translated 1412 times in Indian languages and 191 times in other languages. Abul Fazal a scribe in Akbar's court translated it in Persian. Dara Shukoh translated Gita in 1656. Its first English translation was done by Charles Wilkins, the first librarian of the East India Company. Warren Hastings, a soldier and a statesman observed: "Gita and the Indian scriptures will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist." Thoreau observed about Gita that 'in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.' Oppenheimer, father of the atom bomb, who knew the Gita, on seeing the first atomic explosions in 1945, spontaneously quoted the Gita and described the spectacle as: **divi surya sahasraya** – brilliance of thousand suns.

The Gita had a role in nation building. It democratized the spiritual pursuit by opening the doors to all by taking to the devotional path. Besides, Shri Krishna gave freedom of pursuit of any faith, saying that 'what ever paths men have taken any where, all paths lead to Me': *mam vartma 'nuvartante manusyah partha sarvasah*-Gita.4.11.. The Hindu God does not emerge as 'a jealous God' or a sectarian like a 'Hebrew God' or a God with a regional bias. The Gita is a synthesis of prevalent thoughts. The Sankhya, an atheistic school of philosophy in the beginning was given an equal status by Shri Krishan in the Gita: (III.iv, V.iv and V.v)- *ekam sankhyam cha yogam cha yah pashyati sa pashyati*- he who sees that both the Sankhya and the Yoga, both paths, are the same, he truly sees (the truth).

How Jainism and Buddhism two great non-theistic faiths found a common meeting ground with theistic Hindu religion makes an interesting study. The Jain view is called Syadvada since it holds that all knowledge is only probable. It is a common feature of the Indian philosophies. As in the case of Buddhism, the founder of Jainism was a Kshatriya. Spiritualism was not a monopoly of Brahmins. Brahmanism was, however, too strong to be resisted. When the followers of the Krishna cult came into the fold of Jainism, a relationship was established between the 22nd Tirthankar (Aristanemi) and Krishna. Many Hindu gods crept in, so that there were divisions among Jains as Vaishnavas and non-Vaishnavas.

Hinyana Buddhism is a colourless religion denying God in doctrine. A religion more catholic and less skeptic was required. A readjustment to the emerging situation also became imperative. At the formative stage of Mahayana, there was an influx of nomadic tribes from outside the country. It imitated the success of Hinduism and imbibed the theism of the Yoga of the later Upanishads and of the Bhagvad Gita. Mahayan believes in a saviour God. Emancipation could be delayed for the good of humanity. Life of the people was dominated by Brahmanism. It came to dominate Buddhism as well. Buddhism included Indra, Brahma and other Hindu divinities in its pantheon. While the Brahmins accepted Buddha as incarnation of Vishnu, the Buddhists identified Vishnu

with Boddhisatva. Buddha represented the world as soulless. The religious instinct of man requires a God, so Buddha himself was deified.

The six Brahmanical schools of Philosophy, or *darshanas*, make the liberal Hindu approach to spiritual matters clearer. These are: Gautama's Nyaya, Kanada's Vaishesik, Kapila's Sakhya, Patanjali's Yoga, Jaimini's Purva Mimasa, and Badrayana's Uttara Mimasa or the Vedanta. First five of these do not regard God as the creator of matter. Early Nyaya was not theistic. Vaishesika does not openly refer to God. It traced the primeval activities of the atoms and souls to the principle of *adarshita*. Kanad held that the Vedas were the act of seers and not of God. For Sankhya, the world is not a creation of God. Theism is not part of Patanjali's creed. A personal god serves the practical purpose as an aid to Yoga. The central theme of Purva Mimasa is ritual; of the Uttara Mimasa, it is knowledge or Truth. Jamini doe not as much deny God as much he ignores Him. Later writers slowly smuggled God into it.

The Epic period, which falls prior to the sixth century BC, was the era of Charvaka as well as of the Buddha. Acharya Brahaspati, the founder of the Charvaks, did not believe in God or religion. The Buddha and the Charvaks strongly denied the authority of the Vedas. The Charvakas denounced the scriptures, priests and the rituals. The worshippers would merely laugh at their diatribes and move ahead. There was no head-hunting, no bloodshed, not even bad feelings. This is the greatness of Hinduism. The epicurean thought finds a mention in other religious books as well. In a famous argument in the Hindu epic of Ramayana, Javali, a minister told Rama ; "O Sagacious Prince, there is no world but this; let this thought be absorbed by thee. Concern yourself with what is evident and turn thy back on what is beyond our knowledge. Take the crown".

During the epic period Brahmanism adjusted to the revolt against it in the east, and to fresh changes in the west in view of the influx of communities with their new beliefs. The Aryan culture met the new entrants half way 'to build a new Aryan culture based on non-Aryan symbolism', as observed by Dr. Radhakrishan. The concept of Trimurti was evolved in the Mahabharata, when the Greeks (Yavanas), Parthians (Shakas) and the Parthians (Pahlavas) entered the country. The Mahabharata apart from becoming a Brahmanical theistic poem, was a multi-disciplinary encyclopedia. It earned the title of the Fifth Veda as all classes could have access to it. Sister Nivedita observed that there were two distinct features quite discernible in the Mahabharata: "One of Unity in complexity and second constant impression upon its hearers of the single centralised idea of One India, with heroic tradition of its own".

Durga Puja figures in Mahabharata. Durga soon became the consort of Shiva. The merger of three philosophic and historical streams in present day Hinduism, one of Vedic through Upnishads and Vaishnavism, the second of Shaivism from the South, with Agams (108) being the basic scriptures, and the third of the Shakta religion emanating from eastern India, was a vital homogenizing process that integrated Hindus.

The Bhakti movement that democratized the spiritual pursuit served as a strong stabilizing force through the length and the breadth of the country. The medieval saints of north India inherited the traditions set by Alavar saints of the south. Their compositions were in the local language instead of Sanskrit. Their faith was accessible to all without distinctions of caste and status. The Tamil Alavars were twelve in all and belonged to the Pallava and Chola times from the fifth to ninth centuries AD. They came from different backgrounds. They believed in monotheism. Alavar means one who is "immersed" in the experience of God, the omnipresent mysterious One. The Alavars composed approximately 4000 Tamil verses. In the 9th-10th century, the philosopher-saint **Nathamuni** arranged them as the **Divya Prabandham**, or **Divine Collection**, popularly called the Tamil Veda.

Hindu saints endeavoured to bring a social revolution through the medium of religion. Sri Basava of Karnataka, and Ramanujacharya in Tamilnadu in the 11th century took up the cause of the oppressed. Basava founded a sect in 1160. This sect led to social reforms, such as the elevation of the status of women, abolition of caste distinction, removal of untouchability, and inculcating the dignity of manual labour and simplicity of life in the community. These preachers, in many cases, came from the submerged classes of Hindu society. This trend was earlier set in motion by the *parivrajikas*, the itinerant religious teachers in Buddha's time, who often belonged to non-Brahmanic castes. In medieval times, the followers of Ramanand came from the lowest classes and even from outside the fold of Hinduism. This was the period when Muslim invaders were drenching the Indian soils with the blood of Hindu 'Kafirs'. According to the estimates of historians, nearly seventy Muslim invasions had taken place before Guru Nanak. He had witnessed the atrocities perpetrated by Babar, whom he called as 'yam', the god of death. These saints were the consolidators of the Indian nation in the true tradition of Rishi Vyas and Adi Shankaracharya.

After an overview of the Ancient Hindu Way spread over several millennia it is time to address the present-day reality. The Hindu society is experiencing a state of siege. The nation is facing two types of aggressions; one demographic, inundating the country with millions of illegal immigrants altering the demographic map of India, and second of Christianization by missionaries, of vulnerable chunks of the Hindu society. In both cases they get impetus from the vote-bank politics. If the Hindu society shows concern about infiltration and conversions they are dubbed as Hindu chauvinists. Even if they talk about reconverting the converts they earn the odium of being communal and divisive. Two different norms are applied to the same problem.

It is hard to ignore the subversive impact of missionary activities backed by powerful foreign churches. The nation is still feeling the subversive impact of Baptist missionaries in the northeast. Baptist Mission entered Naga Hills in 1872, when the Hills came under the British administration. The Baptist Missionaries in Nagaland infused secessionism, when Independent India was in an embryonic state. A senior British ICS officer who served in Nagaland had forewarned that the activities of the Baptists who were a source of inspiration for the terrorist outfit of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in America, did not augur well as they would be a source of trouble in times to come. He

proved right. Under the permissive political climate, the missionaries have further spread their tentacles in the north-east region, in recent times.

There is a clear ruling on conversions. In the *Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (AIR 1977 SC 908), the Supreme Court has held that Article 25 (1) of the Indian Constitution does not grant any right to convert any person to one's own religion. However, there is no halt to aggressive evangelization. While addressing missionaries in New Delhi on 7th November, 1999, late Pope John Paul II gave a call to convert Asia to Christianity as follows:- "Just as the first millennium saw the Cross firmly planted in the soil of Europe, and the second in that of America and Africa, so may the Third Christian Millennium witness a great harvest of faith on this vast and vital continent". His successor and present Pope Benedict XVI reiterated this agenda of conversion with the words: "The Church is by its very nature missionary; its first task is evangelization. Hindus in India and Nepal are prime targets for this harvest of faith". It was expected from a self-respecting nation to strongly rebuff such moves and additionally insist on getting an apology from the Pope for the Hindu holocaust in Goa Inquisitions, instead of listening to papal harangue about the aggressive evangelisation in the sub-continent.

Hindus had promoted secular environments and social harmony in ancient India. The present-day unprincipled politics, has regrettably replaced the British policy of 'Divide and rule' with the more sinister political tactics of 'Fragment and Rule'. Fragmentation of the Indian society on communal, regional and caste lines has been the most dubious contribution of politics of opportunism. The Indian society was never so fragmented with each group confronting the other as it is now. The word "Hindu" has become synonymous with 'communal'; Hindu bashing is considered secular. The process of social integration has given way to social engineering to meet demands of political expediency. The state has become a partisan by catering to the sectarian needs of certain religious groups with special dispensation. This is nothing short of state-promoted communalism. Under true secularism the state should stay neutral.

The nation is facing a new threat from modern day generation of iconoclasts from 'eminent historians' to pseudo intellectuals. Their efforts to deny and denigrate India's rich and liberal heritage is diabolic. Hindus that were burnt on the stakes are martyrs of their faith and of the nation. Millions of Hindus put to the sword by fanatic invaders are martyrs of the motherland. They deserve a memorial in the hearts of all true Indians if not in monuments. Not to recall their sacrifices for their faith and the motherland is an act of disrespect towards them. Vidiadhar Naipaul summed up the situation well: "In art and history books, people write of the Muslims "arriving" in India as though they came on a tourist bus and went away again. The Muslim view of their conquest is a truer one. They speak of the triumph of faith, the destruction of idols and temples, the loot, the casting away of locals as slaves."

Yet India is a nation, despite incongruities, fractious politics, and massive backlog of unfulfilled missions. It is on account of the indestructible, all-sustaining and ever rejuvenating soul- 'The Ancient Hindu Way'. India is a land of many creeds, customs and mores, and peoples savouring the munificence of mother India. It is the bounden dharma

of all Indians to contribute to an atmosphere of peace and harmony under which every one develops according to one's own peculiar genius, respecting the sensibilities of fellow citizens. It is befitting to conclude the exposition of the 'Ancient Hindu Way', by quoting the lines from the last Sukta of the Rig Veda, which is in the nature of an international anthem for its message of harmony to the entire humanity. Such sublime sentiments can be expressed only by a spiritually alive civilization. The thrust of the message in the Sukta is *Sahchittamesam*- to be of one mind, as a key to the harmonious living.

**Sangacchadhvam samvadadhvam
Samvo manamsi janatam
Samano mantrah samiti samani
Samanam manah Sahchittamesam.**

*"Let all men meet and think as one mind,
Let all hearts unite in Love,
Let the goal be common,
May all live in happiness with a common purpose".*