

Hindutva -- ethics and morality.

by Lama Shree Narayan Singh

*"Without civic morality communities perish,
without personal morality their survival has no value."*

Bertrand Russell.

I

Ramanand Sagar, in his epic recreation of the life of Shirdi Sai Baba, televised Sunday evenings, is playing a welcome and prophetic role in India. In effect he has created a *Sai Baba Purana*. Typically, he has taken tremendous liberty with the life sketch of the great saint of the previous century but has imbued it with a powerful message.

He has succeeded in distilling the essence of humanity as propounded in various great religions, into fascinating episodes, each highly instructive, portraying the ethics which are integral to civilised living. There is sufficient magic and mystery incorporated into it to keep the viewer enthralled. Most importantly, he has carried out an integration between the messenger and the message to a respectable degree making spirituality a living personal experience.

These episodes revolve primarily around the fundamental principal of 'as one sows, so one reaps', demonstrated through various everyday events of ordinary people. There exists a tremendous imperviousness in the Indian psyche to this extremely simple and yet deeply profound truth. It is sad indeed that active members of the business community, who'd benefit the most from watching them, are far too busy with their daily engagements to spare time for this saint!

The tremendous power women exert to make or break families is also explored in these episodes. It is true that in India women folk have an enormous appetite for putting their families through unimaginable confabulations and spins resulting in an inordinate amount of chaos, confusion and its collateral -- suffering! It is also true that they excel in nurture!

These are skills only asians can understand or appreciate. Western upbringing does not equip its peoples with asia craft! It is an art which needs to be learned separately and is essential for understanding and interacting with asians!

The Prophet Mohammed had once said, 'People are asleep, they will wake up only when they die.' All of a sudden, death will bring one standing face to face with God at which time one will be held accountable for all one's deeds. That will be the moment one will realise that what one was doing was one thing and that what you should have been doing, another.

He also said that on the Day of Judgment a man's foot will not move unless he has answered four questions: Where he earned his money from; where he spent it; how he spent his youth and how he used his knowledge!

The medium of the television is extremely potent and truths revealed skillfully in these episodes leave a lasting impression on the minds of both young and old. TV serials such as this one on Sai Baba are both immensely educative and transforming.

II

Indians are fond of repeatedly telling the story of a Soviet engineer who, after an extended sojourn in India, had said that before coming to India that he had never believed in God. However, now that he had lived in this country for so many years, he was convinced that God did exist, otherwise this country could never continue to run!

Unfortunately the story concludes at that. There has never been an attempt to introspect and remedy the anomalies which have made India a decidedly difficult place to live and work in.

N. R. Narayana Murthy, founder of Infosys, following India's ignominious exit from the Cricket World Cup, writes: "The tragedy of India is that instead of seeing what's wrong with us and taking steps to correct it, we indulge in hysterics and look for scapegoats.... The real problem I believe, lies with the system (i.e. Hindutva). Not just in cricket but in virtually any walk of life, we are unwilling to put in hard work and live with discipline. Other countries are so neat, clean and well-organised but Indian cities are a mess, because we're simply not willing to respect the rules. We can succeed, not only in cricket, but also in everything else if we only follow four basic principles: strictly adhere to meritocracy, be willing to work hard, adopt global best practices in training and follow absolute discipline." Excerpted from TOI, Patna 29-3-07, article titled 'Don't mock process, follow it.']

It is only recently that institutions are being made more people friendly. The inspiration for this derives simply from the liberal humanism of the west. Older generations had and for that matter still possess, an unenviable track record of leaving behind a trail of unhappiness as their legacy deriving from a culture of authoritarianism, capriciousness, selfishness, obduracy, obfuscation, inscrutability and opacity. These are what characterise a patriarchal society where the rule is by diktat not consensus! This is Hindutva at its glorious best!

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Nor is the establishment under the Dalai Lama any different! Even though it was crystal clear that he was directly involved in the assassination of His Eminence Jamgon Rinpoche of Rumtek April 24, 1992, his family and Tibetan society in particular, out of sheer deference to his purportedly unassailable authority, preferred to swallow its grief rather than openly condemn him. The Dalai Lama is in fact a highly confused personality with an exceptionally chequered track record which is in direct conflict with the teachings of Buddhism he supposedly espouses!

Similarly when the Dalai Lama asserts contrary to scientific medical evidence of a person medically about 24 years of age, that he is 15 on the basis of a birth certificate illegally issued by him, his followers blindly accept it as the gospel. And when he subsequently goes on to assert that Urgen Trinlay Dorje is the 17th Karmapa, on the basis of this fraud, as if he is still the God King of Tibet, even though he has no kingdom to rule nor any jurisdiction to do so, Tibetan society and his followers throughout the world, oblivious to this reality, unquestionably accepts it as the truth and blindly follow him. E ma ho!

In actuality the Dalai Lama represents a highly sophisticated tradition which specialises in rhetoric and posturing rather than substance. Fortunately for the world, other Buddhist traditions primarily stress substance rather than the sophistries at which the Gelugpas excel!

In actuality the Dalai Lama is none other than a super glorified and pampered tribal chieftain of a fast vanishing tribe known as Tibetans. He is actually the symbol of Tibetan Nationalism and nationhood -- the source of their identity, their bread and butter in the modern world! One does not need a keen sense of smell to detect the sulphur trail he lives behind much as his godfather, the present President of the USA, does!

He claims to be a Buddhist monk but conveniently forgets that nowhere in the Vinaya or Rules of Discipline is it permitted that a monk may be a king or vice versa. Even the famous King Indrabhuti to whom the Buddha Shakyamuni had manifest the Guhyasamaja, had become downcast at first when the Buddha had suggested he renounce his kingdom to follow the path to enlightenment. The Dalai Lama is welcome to follow in his footsteps, but for that he must renounce his robes, for the two are blatantly incompatible according to the time hallowed traditions of Buddhism both in India and elsewhere.

The other issue which needs to be dealt with is as to whether the Dalai Lama can actually call himself a monk or a Vajrayana Master any longer. It is no hidden secret that he has used the Karmapa Affair to create a vertical schism in the Buddhist sangha or congregation. The teachings of the Buddha emphasise that any person who does so automatically loses his ordination and ceases to be even a Buddhist.

But then, the Dalai Lama is impervious to such subtleties of logic. He transcends even the teachings of the Buddha and abides in a realm of his own creation! This is Hindutva in its fully blown glory where the feudal, tribal patriarch is a law unto himself which none dare question but must blindly follow!

The reader is referred to the works of the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and other writers of the Indian renaissance for validation. Clearly the legacy of this sub-continent is that of flawed leadership. How then can ethics and morality be even conceived of, given such adverse circumstances, let alone be implemented!

Sauvik Chakraverti in Second Republic TOI, Patna 21-4-07 opines, "Nandigram, Naxal and Maoist insurgencies, Kashmir, Manipur and the sealing drive in Delhi -- all point to the fact that we in India are living in a state of 'unlaw'. We are ruled by decrees, whims, diktats, military might -- anything except by the rule of law. The reason why this great nation has come to such a sorry pass is because the founding fathers of the Republic were almost entirely socialist and collectivist ideas on law are the root cause of disorder and injustice.... In other words, the government itself must be placed under the law if the rule of law is to prevail over the rule of arbitrary rulers. The 'unlaw' we suffer from today is entirely because of the fact that the sovereign's ministers, bureaucrats, judges, policemen and soldiers are above the law and are breaking it with impunity. It is time now for the birth of the new league of Indian Liberals."

IV

This leads on to the core issues attempted to be discussed in this short essay -- that of ethics and morality in India. The question needs to be asked at this juncture as to what could be the reason that deceit, fraud and subterfuge form the hallmark of the Indian as also the Tibetan experience? Why is it that the term '*goodness*' has all but vanished from the Indian lexicon?

Last autumn, two visiting NRIs, Non Resident Indians, had cautioned this writer saying that he needed to be careful of the people in Munger as they were vicious! The reader will agree that this is a strong indictment of Indian society particularly in Bihar; in itself a sufficient reason for Indians to settle down and remain abroad. The cultural gap and dilemma experienced by NRIs is highlighted in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, a book immensely worth reading. As the book draws to its end, Ashima Ganguly, the protagonist's widowed mother, has accepted her life in the US, having evolved into an American Bengali!

It is therefore immensely surprising, that expatriates would actually wish to return home, as it were. Could it be that they have an overly romanticised view of life in India, from across the seas, distanced as they are from the daily travails and tribulations of the ordinary person for mere survival? Could it be that the squeaky clean law and order situation in western nations and the orderly manner in which people in these countries ordinarily live and conduct their affairs, remains subconsciously alien to their Indianness?

Could it be that they actually yearn to return to being treated whimsically and irresponsibly by other Indians or getting the better of them through money power? Is it the chaos and the complexities integral to life in India, they actually miss as also the challenge of daily existence?

There certainly exists a vast chasm between perceptions and reality! What they seem to actually miss is familiarity of culture, of relatives, of locale and so on! Some actually clothe their yearnings in the garb of helping the people where they come from and so return to turbulence in their existence!

V

All manifestations of phenomena necessarily derive from the coalescing of various factors. Thus, the fact that corruption is blatantly practised in India, in fact little moves without the greasing of palms, that the Supreme Court is compelled through western jurisprudence to

institute the Sealing Drive in New Delhi, in an attempt to curb the chaos perpetrated by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the MCD -- these and countless others, compelling the system to work in accordance with the vision of the Founding Fathers, much to the chagrin of the criminals who form the majority of legislators in India and patronised by self serving bureaucrats, are simply a reflection of the malaise handed down generation to generation in India -- all in the name of glorious Hindutva.

The tragic Khairlanji atrocities on Dalit women in Maharashtra perpetrated by members of the upper castes; the collapse of the Ulta Pul in Bhagalpur; the continuing revelations of the Nithari killings implicating police officers and politicians; the army atrocities in Manipur; female foeticide, the extent of which is just emerging in the precincts of the Christian Missionary Hospital at Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh; the murder of Prof. Sabharwal in Ujjain, MP and its sequel -- these are clearly symptomatic of a dysfunctional society. And these instances are merely the tip of the iceberg.

In the last, BJP legislators -- members of the party which is known as the 'upholder of Hindutva' -- are actually obstructing the trial of the six assassins who are being given VIP treatment in jail. The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that witnesses are now no longer willing to even depose.

Each one of these phenomena has its own set of causes. The proposition is that it is necessary to analyse the source of these aberrations and corrective measures applied accordingly.

VI

The formation of the personality of an individual takes place primarily at home! Parents represent centuries of tradition handed down to them by their sub-caste and caste which are actually segregated ethnic groups or tribes. These may be partially modified in response to current needs. This is a function of the larger society which defines such unique groups. Society itself derives from and is an expression of a nation's culture, which itself is a direct function of the religions of the ethnic groups which inhabit a country, or that of the majority group in a country.

It is evident thus, that a person's religion forms the corner stone of the process of individuation! It is this which imbues in its followers a sense of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, acceptable or otherwise. It may be deduced thus, that the preponderance of particular traits in a group of people in any country, would be a direct function of their religious as well as social upbringing! Thus, one must look deeply at Hindutva, which forms the core of the Indian psyche irrespective of the persuasion of any individual.

From all accounts, the earlier Vedic religion of India underwent a tremendous transformation at the hands of Adi Shankaracharya c. 450 or 650 CE, depending on the historian one follows, and subsequently thereafter. The thesis proposed is that what is termed Hinduism today is actually the creation of this revered scholar saint on the foundations of the Vedic tradition of this country. He called it Sanatana Dharma!

Ever since, it has evolved into a mosaic of traditions with varying perspectives and philosophies, assimilating into it a large number of extraneous religious and spiritual influences both indigenous and otherwise. These symbols, rituals and mythology remain the cohesive force which bind Hindus throughout the country and for that matter the world.

It is no secret that the Dalai Lama feels extremely comfortable within the Hindutva fold and this for the simple reason that it reflects his own approach to life! Strongly influenced by the Saffron Brigade, he even spurns Indian Buddhists and their legitimate concerns! He very conveniently uses the Indian tradition of Buddhism garbed in its Tibetan robes, as a facade promoting universal peace and harmony. In actuality he spares no attempt to create disharmony amongst his own peoples, an art at which Hindutva excels, besides turning a blind eye to the child abuse rampant in his own monasteries!

Moreover he is overly willing to play the Chinese and American card and thus the Pakistani card against India. No, gratitude to this sub-continent, first for the Buddhism his country received from it and secondly for the political asylum granted to him and his one lakh compatriots mid twentieth century when they had nowhere else to flee other than India! These rarely feature in his psyche except for his expressions of bland and meaningless platitudes intended to bemuse and befuddle his ardent admirers in India! Such have absolutely no inkling concerning the truths about him, content as they are to worship supposed prophets!

It is no wonder then that treason and treachery are integral to Hindutva! The country and its national interests are clearly up for sale. How else could it be explained that the establishment in Sikkim has become pro Dalai Lama and pro Chinese? Neither does he pay any taxes to the Govt of India in spite of the fact that he garners hundreds of millions of dollars every year under various pretexts including the cause of Free Tibet! What happens to this money is anyone's guess!

The recent revelations of the release of LeT jihadis by the Indian Coast Guard for a sum of Rs. 10 lakhs is merely the tip of the iceberg. Given the above, the Dalai Lama will never even consider relocating to outside India for the simple reason that he and his ardent followers will then be required to live in accordance with the laws of the civilised world! Here he may confabulate as he wills!

VII

It would be common sense to acknowledge and accept that firstly any human situation, however deeply impregnated with divinity, continues to remain human, hence culpable. Similarly the entire gamut of the experience of Hindutva, both the desirable and undesirable, are a direct manifestation of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in this tradition! And if one is to realistically assess oneself as a Hindu and be proud of one's heritage, one needs to be able to simultaneously appreciate both its strengths and weaknesses.

These necessarily derive from the scholar saint Adi Shankaracharya and the Brahminism founded and perpetrated by him. The genius of Brahminism lies in the inordinate success it has had in displacing the once ubiquitous Buddhist consciousness and permeating its own vision in each and every aspect of human life in India! The unkindest cut is when, after having itself authored this mess, Brahminism blithely maintains that the world is a terrible place in any case, as it always has maintained. Anyone who wishes to make sense of one's life must necessarily detach from *samsara* and seek liberation away from society!

This is vastly different from the western perspective where the thrust is the creation of a humane society. It is therefore that the Roman Catholic Church has been seeking to reinvent itself as it were ever since the two Vatican Councils of the sixties. The reader is referred to the Jesuit monthly Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Research published from Delhi. It ranks amongst the most intellectually challenging journals extant. It clearly reveals as to how deeply the church is involved in the welfare of humanity.

Similarly the Church of England continues to explore ways and means to remain pertinent and topical in this fast changing world promoting universal brother-sister hood.

Not so with Hindutva! Unfortunately its agenda has come into the hands of people who certainly do not possess any spiritual training. It has nothing new to offer to the world! It no longer possesses the agility to adapt to modern realities but wishes to fetter individuals to its constricted philosophy of divisiveness! Its leadership certainly lacks in spiritual training of any type, hence in spite of their high levels of scholarship, its leaders remain woefully incompetent to lead the country. Its problems are compounded by the fact that Hindutva is completely amorphous and lack any coherent and centralised leadership as does the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

This is evident from the ruckus being created in Bhopal over the wedding of a Hindu Sindhi girl to a Muslim who has incidentally converted to Hinduism. Similarly participants of

intercaste marriages are issued threats of death by these very same *upholders of righteousness!* The pettiness of the Saffron Brigade is evident when it raises objections to the motif on the new Rs. 2 coin attempting to interpret a work of art, a functional Braille symbol, as a cross! Perhaps these are expressions of exasperation that the age old message of Hindutva is fast losing its relevance in a fast changing world!

In this process it has created a polity which relegates people into the background! Its legacy is there for all to see -- *sacred* rivers such as the Ganga and Yamuna have become little else than over glorified drains; garbage is accumulating in the towns of Munger and Gaya in Bihar with drains choked and filth overflowing on to the streets!

Open air cremations merely add to the degradation of the ecology in the country all in the name of Hindutva! Even the UK is now permitting such cremations, thus adding to global climate change! A recent study in Australia has revealed that an average male corpse during cremation in a crematorium releases 50 kg. of carbon dioxide.

The impact of open air cremations on the environment using wood is clearly mind boggling. A tree is required per cremation at the very minimum. Should not then a more realistic and environment friendly manner of respectfully disposing of the dead needs to be devised now within the Sanatana traditions!

VIII

A critical appreciation of any tradition and its progenitor can only occur when it is dispassionately understood and analysed in its entire spectrum. It is not scientific, neither is it correct to attempt to highlight only its good and virtuous aspects whilst concealing its darker sides. It would appear that the proponents and adherents of Hindutva are not willing to look deep within to understand and correct the weaknesses inherent in it, as Mr. Narayana Murthy suggests.

This is so as it questions the fundamental issue of their personal identity! Thus Indians remain content to perpetrate various myths concerning themselves and actually believe in them, unwilling to look within for where they have individually gone wrong. It is extremely easy to shift the responsibility for their personal dysfunction to centuries of foreign subjugation, for all that is currently undesirable. Such an orientation however, is hardly conducive to the improvement of the quality of life in India. It is true however, that this tradition has a tremendous resilience and continues throughout the centuries in spite of it all the vicissitudes it has been subjected to!

Hindutva has created what in effect is a clash of communities and tribes within its own fold, its own country, each caste and religious group vying with each other for lebensraum. This clash of civilisations has been going on for centuries in India, as if the world and the universe is so limited that it cannot accommodate infinite variations of humanity.

On a larger scale it takes the form of perennial tensions between various religious traditions in India be it between communities within one particular religion or between different religions themselves. Horror stories deriving from caste continue to be reported ad nauseum in the media of the day!

The clash between Hindutva and western values and disciplines is also integral to life in India. These two streams have totally different histories and are the products of vastly differing events and circumstances. Yet it has been found that the latter has developed a tremendous amount of practicality particularly during the preceding century whereas India continues to lag behind burdened by the inertia of its ancient and supposedly glorious culture.

It is to the country's benefit that western models are being adopted in India for its industrial and economic growth as also for the creation of a civic society. These are spheres for which Hindutva can provide no plausible direction! It is simply not equipped to do so given its penchant for disorder and chaos!

Western disciplines remain alien to the Indian consciousness per se, as they do not seem to bring about a basic transformation of the Hindu psyche. Rather a schizophrenia seems to develop with the Indian compelled to adopt western models for sheer survival his/her heart rooted elsewhere. This creates tremendous insecurities leading to a resurgence of religiosity to which one turns for security and solace.

IX

Religious teachers are quick to sense the mood of the people and only too willing to pamper their devotees regaling them with stories and anecdotes from a mythical past, applying the balm of culture in a vain attempt to address current issues and problems. The individual however emerges hardly the more convinced from these forays into mythical imagination and rapidly reverts to one's behaviour patterns upon return to real life with hardly any transformation having taken place!

It becomes irrelevant as to whether one's continuing actions are termed good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, engendering happiness or otherwise. The continuing thread remains as to how to disadvantage the other for one's personal selfish gains! Morality and ethics are confined to erudite expositions of philosophy intended to impress the other, never however, to be translated into one's personal life.

Clearly it is proving insufficient merely to have faith in one's tradition, devotion to one's deities and saints and God-people, going on pilgrimages, worshipping in temples and making offerings, taking dips in holy rivers and so on. These do have their own value, though. Similarly it is proving insufficient to being brought up in a culture which draws its inspiration from epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, although one may talk of cultural and historical depth.

These epics portray a tremendous amount of belligerence, bellicosity and violence extolled and expounded as the war of good on evil and the inevitable victory of good over evil! The model proposed however, is that simply neither will one remain at peace oneself, nor will one permit another do so! The means employed could be as questionable as black magic available aplenty in this country! This is an art the Dalai Lama and his precious followers simply excel at!

The Dalai Lama had applied it successfully Nov-Dec 2002 to destroy Ven. Dinchhen Lama of Mungpoo, Darjeeling! This benevolent Rinpoche was a non-Tibetan practitioner of the Nyingmapa tradition. He had, through his dedication to the welfare of the poor and ordinary person of the Darjeeling hills, developed a tremendous following. This was evidently unacceptable to the Dalai Lama -- he could never permit a non Tibetan beyond his kingdom, to ever flourish. Thus he felt it best to have him removed!

Ven. Dinchhen Rinpoche had complained to his doctor in Gangtok Nov 5 & 6, 2002 that he'd been having extremely disturbed dreams indicating he would not live much longer! These dreams indicated that the black arts were being used against him! He died of a burst portal vein at the Sir Gangaram Hospital, New Delhi at 4 p.m. Dec 15, 2002 after a brief illness! This writer was present by a sheer coincidence!

The question must necessarily be asked as to whether life is actually a constant battle as these epics suggest? Perhaps it is now time for a paradigm shift on life -- love and positive thinking as propounded by Buddhism and new age systems such as the Louise Hay Method, Robin Sharma for example, amongst many others! After all it is simple common sense that *'an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind!'* It is a moot question as to who were actually victorious in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata epics!

This is what is being witnessed in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East every day -- an unending and vicious cycle of terror! And all these killings are being carried out supposedly according to the teachings of Islam creating tremendous suffering throughout the

world! This is a sport at which the Dalai Lama too excels, carrying out his plans under the name of Buddhism!

X

Clearly it is the training and purification of consciousness which is the requirement of the day, a topic rarely if ever touched upon by Hindutva! And even though the Dalai Lama waxes eloquent on this particular topic, the extent to which he lives in accordance with it is highly questionable! This must be the pinnacle of achievement under Hindutva -- to eloquently render philosophical expositions but to practise none of it in one's daily life!

Another aspect these epics highlight is the Indian penchant to complicate even the simplest of issues unnecessarily. This *is* the common experience throughout the country. Could it not be asserted that the continuing Indo-Pak strife is yet another manifestation of the cultural heritage of this sub-continent as depicted in various epics, deeply ingrained into the psyche of all its residents, irrespective of their religious persuasions and national identities?

It is not possible to ascertain with any amount of certainty as to whether these epics actually depict human traits or whether people derive behavioural patterns from them, thus validating their purported verities! It is certainly erroneous to treat them as historical documents as they are little short of religious fiction, creations of a highly fertile Brahminical imagination, as is also a tremendous amount of that which passes as religious scriptures within the Sanatana tradition!

If anything, Hindutva clearly represents the skill with which Brahminism has succeeded in displacing the Buddhist culture of the sub continent. It has captured the heart and soul of Indians so that its vision now permeates every aspect of daily life with Buddhism having been completely obliterated from its collective memory!

This has resulted in serious lacunae exist in an Indian upbringing, resulting in the creation of an inordinate amount of *dis-ease* throughout the country.

XI

There is yet a vast difference between maintaining that some thing is true simply because one believes it to be so; and the truth being a precursor for one's belief. Unfortunately religion for the most part, seems to deal with one's beliefs rather than truth per se! This entire business is invariably mixed up with all sorts of normal human vectors such as politics, power, wealth, ambitions and so on, thus creating a heady brew.

It certainly adds tremendous colour to life, of this there can be no doubt, requiring the ardent pilgrim to develop, hone and utilise one's faculties to the fullest possible extent. There is no surety concerning one's life situation in India and the manner in which it will develop presently, where each is merely engaged in attempts to undermine the other.

The issue of the transformation of the individual's personality is rarely if ever addressed as forming the crux of religiosity. Rather traditions are presented in such a way so as to make people believe that the mere following of rituals and adherence to social norms, form the heart of the matter, the panacea for all problems and the definition of rectitude. Nothing could be further from the truth!

One is left wondering as to whether listening to discourses on the Srimad Bhagavad or sponsoring Chandi Paath for ten days and so on, actually purifies one's sins and then subsequently empowers one to commit them further until the next occasion one might perform yet another religious and pious act. Or can it be possible that the women folk of a home actively propitiate deities seeking forgiveness for the sins being continually committed by their men folk.

Or can it be possible that invoking such deities and appeasing them for such short periods of time, actually lead the householder patron to prosperity, giving one the license to continue one's errant ways? If this is the understanding propounded by Hindutva, then surely its

leaders need to rethink their philosophy of life! There is also a belief that one can buy one's way to heaven much like the dispensations issued by the Catholic Church in medieval Europe. The Hindu consciousness is happy to make large donations to temples. It does not have a sense of the urgency of the poor, the lonely and the unwanted!

Currently it is understood that one prays to one's deities and saints for the fulfillment of one's wishes irrespective of the desirability of its outcome. The relationship invoked is similar to a business deal -- if this wish is fulfilled the Lord will be offered so much money or some form of penance!

It is indeed a blessing from the Divine that one's wishes are not fulfilled. Were the Divine to fulfill each and everyone's wishes, there would simply be chaos! And if the creation of chaos is an art, surely Hindutva excels at it sans compere!

It is simply amazing as to how people engaged in business actually interpret it to imply the liberty to engage in unethical and immoral practices which invariably harm others. The high level of adulteration of food and drink in India, much to the detriment of its peoples is a burning issue currently. It is ingrained in the very pores of the ordinary business person in northern India. Even the sugar sold in the country has traces of sulphur in it which is highly toxic even in micro amounts!

It is mind boggling to even conceive of a concoction of urea, trans fats -- hydrogenated vegetable oils -- and emulsifiers being used to create synthetic milk and then being added on to and being sold as *milk*! These would simply not be permitted in the western hemisphere! Why then are such anti social manifestations rampant in the Gangetic belt in particular and throughout the country in general?

Similarly the noble art of healing has become transformed into an industry leaving the hapless patient vulnerable to exploitation in multifarious ways under the sham of medical treatment. Modern medicine has become the mantra of the day in spite of the flaws integral to it. People regale each other with stories of their involvements with it resulting in inordinate expense and wastage of human resources! Modern medicine has an octopus like grip over Indians much to their own detriment as also contrary to the national interest!

It is only gradually that an awareness of alternative systems of therapy such as ayurveda, homeopathy, acupressure and acupuncture, including the various new age ones available at Auroville, is gradually creeping into the Indian consciousness. The philosophy which now needs to be adopted is that of preventive medicine which is extremely practical. It is less expensive and certainly not as disruptive for one's family as is modern medicine.

The question which must also be asked is that can any good come out of wealth accumulated through deceit? Is it any wonder then, that almost every Indian fall sick? What then, could be the correlation between the achievements of the late and highly reputed industrialist, Dhirubhai Ambani and the fact that during the last decade of his life he had suffered from various illnesses?

Clearly the entire concept of religiosity needs to be redefined. The question thus emerges as to whether religious piety is sufficient for character building? Can religious piety alone be a substitute for a person's proper motivation or good, ethical and moral conduct?

XII

The issue of where exactly is this country heading certainly needs to be addressed properly! Clearly Hindutva needs to be reinvented under the guidance of saints and thinkers rather than the '*upholders of righteousness*' who currently lead the Saffron Brigade! For this purpose a think tank would need to be created which could include for example a Shankaracharya, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and others with sufficient *sadhana* and erudition behind them, steeped in Hindutva but simultaneously dedicated to the welfare of their following and the country in particular.

Hindutva needs to reconsider the continuing validity of personal gratification at the expense of each and every other consideration. It needs to reevaluate as to whether it is more realistic to be a honest taxpayer whose intent is to economically support the country from which he/she draws his/her very existence!

Evading taxes and engaging in black market transactions are considered a sport in this country much to the detriment of the nation. This is actually in direct conflict with the expositions of *raja dharma* in Hindu scriptures where it is enjoined that it is the duty of each person to support one's country economically! If we as Indians do not care for our own country and nurture the very soil from which we derive our very existence and well being, then how can the country care for us?

It needs to reconsider that validity of the pettiness which characterises the manner in which it is being manifest throughout the country in response to various events unavoidable in the modern world. The Shilpa Shetty - Richard Gere show is merely one example. It would stand to reason that the most vocal of protests would have come from those who possess the inherent desire to become like them and actually resents and is envious of their levels of success!

Such tremendous human resources could well be harnessed to care for and protect others following the example of the blessed Mother Teresa. She was and continues to be successful in a realm which Hindutva refuses to even look at! Can the vocal supporters of Hindutva not do the same by caring for the poor, the sick, the dying, the orphaned, the farmers caught in debt traps. Cannot Hindutva care for the cleanliness of its own neighbourhoods?

It needs to reconsider as to whether it is more important that towns and cities are kept clean, free of garbage, with drains which are functional, an environment which is being nurtured and bon homie amongst Indians, than it is to build a temple at the purported birthplace of Rama! Clearly priorities have gotten askew and the country needs to be brought in line with modern sensibilities expressed eloquently in time honoured phrases such as 'ask not what your country can do for you; but what you can do for your country;' and 'with malice towards none, with justice for all, with firmness in the right....'

XIII

Politics in this country too, even though it derives from western liberalism, has been redefined to mean its exact opposite in India. Democracy in India is completely destroyed when criminals and the characterless stand for elections and win by handsome margins through a thorough debauching of the entire process! Can such people ever create the rule of law in this country or anywhere?

It is laughable to see seasoned and highly corrupt politicians in India eventually turn to divine intercession to protect them against the processes of law, for all the sins they have committed against their country and its peoples. It is heart rending to see such criminals then lecture young management students from abroad on honesty as a principle.

Similarly industrialists, business establishments and individuals invoke the blessings of divinity for all their actions both misconceived and otherwise. Business competitors invoke the same deities for victory over each other as have done the Catholics and the Protestants in distant lands over the centuries and the semitic peoples over millennia resulting in tremendous human suffering!

This begs the question as to whether the Divine is really stupid or that actually that stupid! And if it be that the deities worshipped by Indians are unable to discern between right and wrong and good and evil, then the question arises as to what sort of deities may they be! Certainly they cannot be enlightened or beyond the processes of birth and death!

XIV

Motivation provides the impetus behind an individual's life. This is only too evident from the *jehadis* being churned out particularly across Indian borders and now in India as well. It is

commonly known that such people do not hesitate to kill whom they refer to as non-believers or those they perceive as enemies. They even kill their own co-religionists on various pretexts! The recent and terrible tragedy on the Samjhauta Express at Attari in Haryana, being a stark reminder of the suffering which can be wrought by people incorrectly motivated.

The European Union and now the Peoples' Republic of China have finally openly affirmed the complicity of the Pakistani establishment in the nurture and perpetration of international terrorism! Various agencies in the US too are now highly vocal in attributing blame to Pakistan for the violence in Kashmir and the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan!

It is indoctrination both of children and young adults, which is directly responsible for suicide bombings -- they have been so powerfully motivated that in the name of religion that they willingly give up their own life for their supposed cause, wreaking tremendous devastation in the process! It is sad to see precious human lives snuffed out in an instant for a highly questionable purpose and that too with tremendous negative consequences for all! Similarly it is devastating to see children trained in the art of being vicious!

In actuality these are merely an extension of the religious wars fought repeatedly throughout mankind's tumultuous history! This very same human energy can certainly be harnessed in positive ways as well to further the welfare of others as has been repeatedly emphasised by saints throughout the world.

The redoubtable U. G. Krishnamurti who died recently in Italy, maintained, 'A messiah is the one who leaves a mess behind him in the world,' and that 'Religions have promised roses but you end up with only thorns.' Nothing could be more applicable to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 1989.

Currently substantial investments are being made in human resource development and management stressing the creation of proper motivation by its employees. Unfortunately however, in the Indian family, this principal issue does not feature at all: younger generations are left to their own devices to evolve their own morality. This they do through the examples of their parents, interaction with peers and of course the ubiquitous media. It is therefore that during the preceding three decades bride torture and dowry deaths, amongst so many other social malpractices, have come into vogue. Clearly HRD needs to be introduced at the school level itself!

Similarly it is due to lack of proper motivation that individuals consider it their prime objective in life to cheat each other and/or the exchequer of public funds and grow rich at the expense of other people and the country. They are not told by their Gurus, parents, teachers and professors, that to amass wealth in these ways, besides harming one's country and peoples, creates karmic indebtedness which will not only bring them and their families unhappiness and ruin but will also need to be repaid multifold in the future.

Evidently a Hindu upbringing does not result in a sense of rectitude being instilled in its adherents! Similar is the case with the followers of the Dalai Lama! The reasons for this are not difficult to find. Hinduism it would appear, falters primarily on this one count.

In spite of its purported and vaunted glorious past, its countless divinities and the colourful episodes of their lives and the extremely subtle logic and philosophies which claim to lead the individual to *moksha* or liberation, Hinduism has failed in a practical sense. It has failed to motivate its adherents towards goodness and rectitude other than the mere observance of customs and rituals and the mouthing of philosophical platitudes which don't even have any relevance in their lives.

These hardly serve any transformative purpose. Theories remain mostly in the realms of abstraction rather than actual activation; Indians remaining content to claim being inheritors of a highly sophisticated legacy! It is true that engaging in religious and/or spiritual practices does bring about a slow and gradual transformation of the individual. It is simultaneously

true that when these are performed together with proper motivation, the results are far more speedy and evident!

The contribution of countless saints have manifest on this soil and laboured to instill an awareness of righteousness needs to be acknowledged and emphasised at this juncture. The level of transformation such divine manifestations have brought about amongst their followings is a subject far too vast to be addressed here. Suffice it to state that the impact each of these had during the course of their natural life was extremely powerful. What happened subsequently is entirely a different matter.

XV

It is not enough currently to subdivide society into the religious and laity alone, even though such distinctions are necessary. Earlier the laity had been left to its own devices and resources such as culture and caste or tribal heritage, with them content to merely being patrons of the religious class. It has become evident now that the lay people themselves thirst for and are in need of spirituality to stabilise their lives as individuals.

This has given rise to what is termed new age spirituality in India, spearheaded by Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Swami Satyananda Saraswati Paramhansa of Rikhiya, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar from Karnataka and Swami Ramdeo based in Haridwar. Each of these Masters is contributing tremendously to the welfare of people throughout the country as also across the globe. Mention must also be made of Sri Asaram Bapuji and various expounders of Hindu scriptures, too many to count.

Currently religiosity too has become a highly lucrative profession attracting more and more into its fold!

Devotion to them is merely the starting point to the real pilgrimage of personality transformation and evolution. It appears that these God-people actually side step this principal issue of personality transformation possible only through corrective motivation and behaviour. Even where such issues are raised, they are invariably ensconced within the context of magic, parables and allegories that their import is entirely missed. Reports suggest however, that Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has been successfully addressing this issue. This is indeed welcome!

Even the internationally acclaimed citadel of Hindutva, the Bihar School of Yoga, BSY, has faltered particularly since it inducted a retired Indian bureaucrat of questionable repute to lead it into the new millennium. Its stress on '*aryanism*', referring to the '*aryan*' origins of Hindutva, is certainly misplaced and takes one back to the usage of that term in Europe not so long ago with drastic consequences! It continues to remain functional primarily due to the expatriate *sannaysins* at the ashram.

Left to Indians alone, the place would have simply disintegrated! The BSY is a living testimony to the fact that even Paramhansa yogins are human and culpable rather than infallible! This '*aryanism*' manifests as ethnicity and caste politics. An insightful trustee of the BSY had once confided to this writer that Swamijee had failed to create a viable second rung of authority in his establishments! But then is one's *Sadguru* above and beyond questioning? Must a disciple or follower necessarily follow blindly surrendering even one's own innate ability of discernment to what is essentially a human situation?

But then each person and institution is entitled to create and nurture and live in accordance with its own myths and inscrutability for which none can really be faulted!

XVI

The issue is actually one of a change of heart, termed *metanoia* in Greek. And this cannot be imposed. The thirst for change must come from within the individual; the desire to become a better person needs to be inculcated from childhood and nurtured throughout the formative years until it becomes integral to one's persona -- 'having been taught, one follows the higher

things'. It seems that it is this desire which is sadly missing in the Indian context. Success, as understood currently, does not incorporate the creation of a wholesome personality.

The reader would agree that one's life is fairly meaningless if it is spent on material gains alone whilst simultaneously neglecting the finer aspects of the human psyche. It is the timeless issue of choosing between God and mammon! People are too busy living out the functions of the left cerebral hemisphere, neglecting the right. Is it any wonder that psychologists state that people use a mere 9% of their complete faculties! Were they trained by their Gurus, scriptures, religions and educational processes to do otherwise, the world would be a totally different place to live in! It is certainly possible for every person to work through the web of mental confabulations and aim for a balanced, creative and meaningful existence!

Can it be possible that these divine manifestations as God-people, actually are unaware that each and every disease has a powerful psychosomatic component? In spite of this, it is amazing that few if any, are actually active in drawing the attention of their devotees to this fundamental aspect of life.

Perhaps they fear loss of popular appeal if they ever broach the topic of good behaviour, reflecting in personal or social morality. Possibly they purposely dilute their message so as to make it acceptable to the ordinary person and ensure that the person remains at least minimally associated with one's intrinsic divinity.

XVI

India has been blessed by the repeated manifestations of the Divine in the form of various saints throughout its millennia of recorded history. Unfortunately however, the Indian would much rather elevate the messenger to the status of the Divine but neglect the message. The Hindutva attitude is one of vicarious spirituality rather than its direct experience through personal transformation and emulation of an ideal. This is perhaps its greatest weakness.

For India to progress in meaningful terms, these are the major issues which need to be addressed. Clearly a paradigm shift is now required! Mahatma Gandhi, it will be remembered, exerted a moral force which had initiated the disintegration of the British Empire compelling it to grant India its independence. He was a frail person clad merely in a *dhoti* who successfully challenged the mighty British Empire using the simple tools of non cooperation and non violence. It is this which is now missing in India!

Some maintain that western cultures have become decadent. It is true that personal relationships in the west leave much to be desired. However, it is simultaneously true that nowhere in the developed world will one find a criminal *elected* as a legislator, that through dubious means, leave alone appointed a cabinet minister. The proper place for such is behind bars, rather than being shielded by security forces as purported Ministers, MPs and MLAs!

In fact one of the key issues facing presidential candidates in the USA is their individual character! It is common practice in the west that the moment a minister or MP is exposed of being characterless, that person immediately resigns. One's political party too does not want to have much to do with such. Why is it that Hindutva overlooks this crucial aspect of life?

Neither will one find politicians using terror as an instrument of policy as is being evidenced here. All these so-called *ultras* or naxalite groups such as the Maoist Communist Centre, the Peoples' War Group, ULFA &c. -- they are all the creations of political leaders. Neither could they even continue to exist had it not been for the active participation of misguided politicians and bureaucrats!

XVII

Clearly Indian culture is in an irreversible decline! One merely needs to look at the incredibly high levels of acrimony which can exist between adult members of the same family for confirmation. Perhaps the west is spared such anguish!

There is certainly no where in the Christian west that garbage would be permitted to litter, pile up and putrefy in high streets and downtown as is the case currently in Gaya and Munger. Nor would any city there leave its employees unpaid for months!

Are these not symptomatic of Hindutva, of a patriarchal society where authority matters merely for the sake of authority and the ordinary person an object of abject apathy and neglect and merely a target for exploitation by those who wield power?

There is yet, a principal difference between these two sets of cultures. The west developed a tradition of liberal humanism based on the corner stones of justice, equality and fraternity -- the motto of the French Revolution. It is up to the reader to deduce for oneself their relevance in the Indian context!

The resurgence of spirituality in India moreover, draws its inspiration from the new age spirituality of the Hippie period, which brought the latent Indian spirituality on to the world stage in the sixties and seventies of the previous century.

Thus, in the USA for example, there exist various new age movements, including the Sanatana traditions, which constantly remind people of the urgency to transform themselves into wholesome personalities. The preceding half century has seen many systems develop there catering to this fundamental human need.

It is amazing indeed that the Sanatana traditions have failed to deliver this same message of love, peace and harmony in the country of its very origin.

It is this message which is clearly missing in India currently and it is this which needs to be focussed upon in particular as well as being integral to Hindutva!

Postscripts:

'There are two criteria for right livelihood. First, it should not be necessary to break the five precepts in one's work, since doing so obviously causes harm to others. But further, one should not do anything that encourages other people to break the precepts, since this will also cause harm. Neither directly nor indirectly should our means of livelihood involve injury to other beings.

Thus any livelihood that requires killing, whether of human beings or of animals, is clearly not right livelihood.... Selling liquor or other drugs may be very profitable, but even if one abstains from them oneself, the act of selling encourages others to use intoxicants and thereby to harm themselves.

Operating a gambling casino may be very lucrative, but all who come there to gamble cause themselves harm. Selling poisons or weapons -- arms, ammunition, bombs, missiles -- is good business, but it injures the peace and harmony of multitudes. None of these is right livelihood.'

Even though a type of work may not actually harm others, if it is performed with the intention that others should be harmed it is not right livelihood. The doctor who hopes for an epidemic and the trader who hopes for a famine are not practicing right livelihood.'

-- Satya Narayan Goenka, The Art of Living from Everyday Mind,
edited by Jean Smith, a Tricycle book

Hindustan Times, Patna 21-4-07

The Buddhists of Lanka

by Bhartendu Sood

There is a growing interest in Buddhism world wide. What is so special about this religion? I got an answer when I spent fifteen days in Sri Lanka where about 80% of the population are Buddhist. My stay was mostly in monasteries and with Buddhist families in Colombo, Kandy and Anuradhapura, the old capital of Sri Lanka.

What appealed to me most was that both lay people and monks had a very liberal attitude towards other religions in line with the Buddha's teachings that one should not just honour one's own religion but have the same respect for other religions too. This spirit of tolerance and understanding was evident in both monasteries and homes. In almost all Buddhist temples and in homes, I was images of Ganesha, [*who is actually a Mahayana Buddhist deity*], Vishnu and Lakshmi [*also Buddhist in origin*], along with most adored idols of the Buddha.

Their religious heads sustained a casteless society by their actions. For a few days, I stayed as the guest of the Venerable Kolonnawa Dammika Thero, the Chief Incumbent and Head Monk of Purana Rajamaha Viharaya, Kollonnawa, Colombo. Every morning he would be out there with a broom cleaning the courtyard, rooms and toilets. The monks also washed their own dishes. This was so in every monastery.

Acquiring seniority did not mean freedom from these daily chores. Rather, the seniors performed these acts more meticulously. Cleanliness, rightly hailed as next to godliness, was the hallmark of all religious places in Sri Lanka and it contributed to making the ambience serene. No work was looked down upon, a welcome change from our caste ridden Indian society. Monasteries run schools to impart religious values. Most families send their children to these at least once a week. This dose of spiritualism definitely blunts the sharp edge of materialism affecting young minds. Another thing that struck me was their discipline in eating habits. Only three meals a day, not keeping the mouth busy all the time as we do in India. Devotees sent food to the monks in Viharas. Lanka recalled the Vedic precept, "Let good thoughts come to you from every side."

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Hindu, New Delhi 20-4-07

SOCIETY

When skeletons tumbled out

*Stalin K's documentary "India Untouched"
is all about an India many thought did not exist.*

By Naresh Gulati.

Timed with Ambedkar's 116th birth anniversary, "India Untouched -- Stories of a People Apart", premiered at Ahmedabad this past week. Then New Delhi saw a couple of shows this week. A documentary on the plight of 'untouchables', the film bares the unabated tales of insult in the 60th year of the country's independence supposedly poised for the big league.

Produced by Drishti: Media, Arts & Human Rights and presented by Navsarjan Trust of Ahmedabad, the documentary opened to an audience left muted by 110 minutes of chilling accounts of segregation,

discrimination and oppression, while the urban middle class, now concerned with debates about creamy layers, though untouchability in caste ridden India was a thing of the past.

With its footage shot over a period of four years, based on extensive research, the film, directed by Stalin K., an activist film maker, takes you on a revelatory journey to places across eight States, including Kerala with such a high rate of literacy, only to leave you shocked. Ironically, it depicts untouchability through children prevalent in several modes across regions, religions and more pathetically, within the folds of the Dalit community where the artisan or pastoral castes would discriminate against someone from that of the village menials when it comes to *pani* [water], *roti* [food] and *beti* [giving daughters in marriage].

The myth of equality

Even as the film takes head on the prescriptions in the Manu Smriti for the practice of the caste system and brings forth the unashamed chauvinism of the likes of Batuk Prasad Sharma, the so called leader of the Scholars' Association of Benaras, in so much as dittoing these discriminatory prescriptions till today, it also exposes the myth of equality in non Hindu religions, at least in India. Accepted by its recipients as *maryada* [honour and prestige] and practiced by its perpetrators in the name of *shastra* scriptures], the *guna* or the *karma*, the descent or occupation, the bizarre indignity even after conversion to Sikhism, Islam and Christianity, religions that do not profess any *varna* [colour and caste] system. While sociologists might attribute the phenomenon to the accompanying caste baggage, the inference is that alternative faiths also fail to bind such people in their fold.

In that backdrop, the film aptly captures the anguish of this Ravidasiya Sikh who is an *amrit-dhari*, recites verses from the *Guru Granth Sahib* by heart, is no less a *Panthic Sikh* and is yet made to play second fiddle to the 'mainstream' *Panth*; of the lowly Mohammedans who cannot stand up to Syeds, Sheikhs and Pathans outside the confines of a mosque; and of the convert Christians who are looked down upon by Catholics and eventually pray in separate churches.

It is claimed that the film has captured several firsts, say Dalits dismounting from their cycles while moving through the village areas inhabited by Thakurs and Brahmins, even removing their footwear.

The film is a must watch for every sensitive being.

Indian Express, Chennai 12-3-07

Presidential hopefuls ride on character card

Washington, March 11: For all the policy blue prints churned out by presidential campaigns, there is this indisputable fact: Americans care less about issues than they do about a candidate's character.

A new Associated Press-Ipsos poll says that 55% of those surveyed consider honesty, integrity and other values of character the most important qualities they look for in a presidential candidate. Just one third look first to candidates' stances on issues; even fewer focus foremost on leadership traits, experience or intelligence.

"Voters only look at policies as a lens into what type of person the candidate is," said Ken Mehlman, chairman of President George W. Bush's 2004 re-election campaign. That campaign based its voters targeting and messaging strategies on the character first theory.

The AP-Ipsos poll of 1,001 adults, conducted Monday through Wednesday, found that honesty was by far the most popular single trait volunteered by 41% of voters in the open ended questioning. The result might have been different had respondents been forced to choose between either issues of character. But this survey allowed people to volunteer any 'qualities and characteristics' and a minority seized on issues.

The findings are consistent with an AP-Ipsos poll from September 2004 when 38% of voters chose honesty as the most important quality when picking a president. That was more than any other factor. At the time of that survey, a majority of voters found Bush to be honest.

But in an AP-AOL News poll conducted in January, only 44% said they thought Bush was honest. His decline in the category of trust is widely attributed to the fallout from the Iraq war and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The drop is most prominent among people 30 to 39, suburban women, married women with children and people with household incomes in the \$50,000 (euro 38,000) to \$ 75,000 (euro 57,000) bracket. Bush's collapse in the character test should serve as a warning to the 2008 presidential candidates. Character matters, voters say and they already are sizing up the field.

Among the Republican and Republican leaning voters, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani leads Arizona Sen. John McCain 35% to 22%. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich had 11%. AP

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