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Modern Hinduism and the Nation-building Endeavour

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In this paper I shall first indicate briefly two main components of the going forward which constitutes Modern India. I shall then, after an attempt at defining Hinduism, suggest the way in which Modern Hinduism can integrate the nation-building endeavour. I shall conclude with some Christological considerations.

India Today

Modern India is a community of persons progressing towards the future.

Considered under a certain aspect, this going forward appears as an effort to eliminate poverty and transform India into a prosperous nation, it is a nation-building endeavour. This endeavour expresses itself in some way in the life of every Indian; on the scale of the whole country, it expresses itself in terms of economic, industrial, agricultural, social, cultural development. It is not a smooth and uniform process. The nation-building endeavour is shaken by tensions, sometimes by self-destructive conflicts; it is hampered by many obstacles, at times it seems to resolve into indifference and despair. Yet it remains a binding force which to a great extent shapes the secular India of today.

Considered under another aspect, the going forward which constitutes the Indian community of today forms that reality which we call Modern Hinduism.

Hinduism

We shall try first to characterize Hinduism and then to see its situation and bearing in reference to the endeavour constituting the secular India of today.

From the time of the Vedas, the world of the Hindu, while it is a world of objects, of instruments and tools, of phenomena, is also an interplay of Powers and Forces manifesting themselves in various ways. These Powers constitute for him the very

essence of nature, of his physical, biophysical, human environment. They are not entities which can be separated from the various beings which surround him, from the various processes which take place in nature; they are manners in which these beings and processes exist for him, in which they operate in his world—that is, in the world constituted by his subjectivity. This experience can be expressed in this way: while he perceives the various beings and phenomena which form his environment as objects, the Vedic Hindu lives them as ways in which transhuman subjectivities make themselves present and act in his sphere of existence.

These transhuman subjectivities form a world which *in itself* is transcendent to the world of the Vedic Hindu, a world which he cannot truly objectify—that is, reduce to a modality of his world. Every religion, let us note, testifies to the existence of this world. About St. Paul, Oscar Cullmann writes: 'Not only does he share with Judaism and the whole early Christianity the firm conviction that these Powers really exist (1 Cor. 8:5), but he is persuaded that, *behind all that happens before our eyes*, there are events in which the celestial Powers are involved.'

Whereas in Judaism and Christianity there appears a reluctance to give to the transhuman Powers an objective representation, in Hinduism, right from the beginning, an intense objectifying activity takes place. Though the Powers of which he experiences the presence in his sphere of existence—that is, in his body and in his world—remain in themselves transcendent to him, the Vedic Hindu names them and makes of them more or less distinct representations. Thus he builds a mythical world which he fills with innumerable characters. Many of these characters are ambivalent beings capable of being both benevolent and malevolent. The Vedic Hindu elaborates a complicated ritual to regulate his relations with the transcendent Powers.

About this mythical world, let us make two remarks:

(1) It exists entirely within the sphere of existence of the Vedic Hindu. It is made of his experience and affectivity, it is his existence expressing itself in terms of imaginative consciousness.

(2) It is meant to *represent* the transhuman world. It is therefore constituted by an intention which carries it beyond itself. It is the existence of the Vedic Hindu expressing itself in terms of imaginative consciousness in relation to subjectivities which are transcendent to it, yet deeply immanent in it. This relationship gives to the mythical characters and events which the Vedic Hindu shapes out of his own existence and experience a really transcendental character.

Among all the Powers, *Rta* occupies a pre-eminent place. In early Vedism, it is conceived as the norm of whatever in the world is just and good. In relation to man's activity and behaviour, it is both a dynamic Principle from which life and

righteousness proceed, and a Norm to which man must try to conform himself—it is both a beginning and an end, Alpha and Omega. *Rta* manifest itself especially in the right performance of rites and sacrifices, in the observance of *Dharma*. Submission to it produces health and harmony in the body and in the world. All the other Powers are in some way subordinated to *Rta*, they are servants and executors of *Rta*. Little by little *Rta* is absorbed by Brahman which already in the Brahmanas is described as the highest reality, the supreme Power, the foundation of all that exists.

The elaboration of the notion of *Rta* and, later, of that of Brahman is based on a fundamental experience. While, through the modalities of his body and of his world, he feels himself related to a diversity of cosmic Powers through the same modalities, everywhere, the Vedic Hindu experiences himself as related to a fundamental Power which is transcendent to all the other Powers, to which all the other Powers are subordinated in their existence and activity. He experiences this Power as both the Origin and the End of his existence, as operating both by itself and through the mediation of the other Powers. In the mythology which he elaborates the Vedic Hindu gives to this experience an imaginative expression.

Awareness of the presence of Powers, communion with Powers and fear of them have been constants of Hinduism throughout the ages.

At the centre of the Upanishadic message we find the concepts of *Brahman* and *Atman* elaborating the Vedic notion of *Rta*. The term *Brahman* designates the world as Absolute, it refers to the Absolute as it is in itself, beyond the human *jīva*, beyond the experiences and representations of the *jīva*. This term does not give to the *jīva* any objective knowledge of the Absolute, it conveys the idea that, whatever be the way in which the *jīva* conceives it, realizes it, the Absolute transcends the *jīva*, transcends any expressive form which the *jīva* may produce within itself. As Brahman, the Absolute is *nirguṇa*, *nirupādhi*, *nirākāra*, *avyakta*—it is *Omega*.

However, a name is given to Brahman. He is called, say, *Śiva*. Through this appellation, the *jīva* expresses the idea that its striving towards the Absolute must be a *bhakti*: a continual self-surrender in devotion and love. Though the Absolute as *Śiva* is considered to be Brahman as *avyakta*, a definite representation is made of him. The *Śiva*-representation (the mythological *Śiva*) is not Brahman itself; it is a manner in which the *jīva* expresses what it is in relation to the transcendent Powers, in relation to the Absolute towards which it strives; it is therefore an expression of the experience which, in relation to the Absolute, the *jīva* makes of its own existence as a self-transcending urge. To the extent that the Brahman would be identified to the *Śiva*-representation, this representation would

cease to be what it purports to be as a concept expressing the transcendental dynamism of the *jīva's* existence.

The *jīva's* self-realization in the Brahman implies an interiorization through which it illuminates and liberates itself, through which it becomes really a self-transcending subjective life. The *jīva* as interiorized, as transcendently self-transparent and free, is spirit—*jīvātman*.

According to the Upanishadic view, the *ātman*, the immanent unity, the essence of all 'internal' reality, is one with Brahman, the transcendent unity of the world, the essence of all 'external' reality. Both are eternal and immutable, beyond time and space.

The *jīva* is intimately related to the supreme *ātman*: it experiences the *ātman* in itself, it experiences itself as *ātman*. However, the supreme *ātman* remains transcendent to the *jīva*. As immanent in it, as lived and experienced by it, it is identical with it (with the *jīva* interiorized, personalized), it is *jīvātman*. Yet in itself—as *Param-ātman*—it remains beyond the *jīva*. The supreme *ātman* is not limited to that in which it abides. It transcends the *jīva*, it transcends everything, it is Absolute, *avyakta*—it is *Alpha*.

The *jīva's summum bonum* is its realization in Brahman—as Brahman—or its union with Brahman. To reach this end, the *jīva* must in some way make its own Brahman's Power. This appropriation implies for it a transcending of its earthly condition. It is as *ātman* that the *jīva* identifies itself with Brahman.

A close link is established between the *jīvā's* association with the cosmic Powers and its relation to Brahman. In this respect, some trends of spirituality attribute a very great importance and a central role to the body.

Through austerities and yoga practices, ascetics gain a supernormal mastery of their body. This mastery, because it actuates in some definite way their relationship to the trans-human subjectivities, fills them with extraordinary 'powers'. This energization can in no way be identified with their self-realization in Brahman. Yet, it is seen as an aspect—a sort of by-product of their main quest.

According to the Tāntric school, man must first practice in his own body what he wants to achieve on a cosmic scale. The implication of this prescription is that the elements of the universe are embraced by the Absolute and that the components of the micro- and macro-cosmos are substantially one. This unity finds its expression in the tantric 'mystical' physiology. The six *cakras* situated along the *suṣumṇa* are the seats of the cosmic Powers. In the lower *cakra* at the root of the spine resides the *śakti* or *prakṛti*—nature's fundamental Power—in the form of a coiled snake (*kūṇḍalinī*). Awakened by the practice of yoga, the *kūṅkalinī* rises from *cakra* to *cakra* till it unites itself to the *puruṣa* in the lotus *sahasrāra* situated in the upper brain. Let us note well that in all this there is no question of a description

of the objective body—that is, of the body as detached from the ‘subject’ and made into the object of a direct scientific study. The body with which the Tantras deal is the *jīva*-body, the body as an experience, as a subjective life, which is both the embryo and the recapitulation of a world.

According to the Tantras, the various aspects of corporeality as lived and experienced are ways in which the *jīva* relates itself to transhuman Powers. These different aspects must be used as stepping stones in the *jīva*'s ascent towards its supreme realization. When they say that man must make of his *bhoga* his *yoga*, the Tāntric teachers imply that the experiences of corporeal existence must be used as means towards an end which transcends them. The acts by which man lives his corporeality must be a *sādhana* (a practice aiming at a spiritual realization) which makes him rise to the level of the divine through the mediation of his natural functions and dispositions.

According to the Tāntric theology, Śiva is the transcendent ‘static’ aspect of Brahman, Dūrgā or Kālī, his Śakti, is the Brahman in its kinetic aspect, as immanent in the *jīva*-world, in the *jīva*-body, as identical to the *jīva*. The *jīva* as Śakti is not simply the *jīva* in its ordinariness, the *jīva* or superficial and unenlightened daily existence; it is the *jīva* as constituted in all its dispositions and operations by an urge for union with Śiva, the Transcendent Principle, or for identification with Brahman, the Supreme Power. This urge has its source in Śiva, so that the *Śakti* is all from Śiva; however, there cannot be any Śiva-realization in the ‘lotus’ *Sahasrāra* without the full awakening of the Śakti: Śiva is nothing without his Śakti. The Śakti being immanent in each aspect of the *jīva*'s existence, spiritual perfection must be pursued through means of ‘nature’, not by rejecting it: each function and disposition of the *jīva* must be lived and exercised as a particular expression of the Śakti's impetus towards union with Śiva.

Though the unity between Brahman, Śiva, the Śakti and the *jīva* is emphasized, the Brahman is intuited as a Being which in itself—that is, in its transcendence—is inaccessibly beyond. Neither the Śiva-concept nor the Śakti-concept contains the absolute fulness of Brahman. These two concepts are the Brahman expressed in terms of human existence; as such, they are not the transcendent Brahman as being in its absoluteness, essentially relative to man, they are man as being in his manhood essentially relative to the transcendent Brahman, they are Brahman as *jīva*.

However, they must not be simply identified. The Śiva-concept expresses the *jīva*'s highest potentiality, its supreme actuation: what man must become in relation to Brahman—it is a teleological concept. The Śakti-concept expresses the *jīva*'s impulse towards its realization as Śiva, the fundamental and transcendental dynamism of its incarnate being. The Śakti

receives from Śiva its intent, but it is through the Śakti that Śiva can come to himself. Śiva is the Śakti's fulness to the extent that it is in Śiva that the Śakti must find her own fulfilment; the Śakti is Śiva's fulness to the extent that it is through the Śakti that Śiva must fulfil himself. This mutual fulfilling takes place in essential relation to the absolute Brahman.

Modern Hinduism and the Nation-building Endeavour

Let us come now to a consideration of the present scene.

Today, in India, the life of millions of people is still determined by their belief in the presence of Powers playing a decisive role with regard to their destiny. Volumes could be written about the current practices and behaviours attesting this belief. In spite of the interest of many for scientific studies and the general acceptance of the scientific view of the world, the majority of the people belonging to the Hindu fold manifest by their comportment that they do not accept what science teaches about nature as a comprehensive explanation of reality. They admit that behind or within natural beings and phenomena there are Powers at work which can be either benevolent or malevolent and must, therefore, be propitiated; therefore they admit that, before and while being substances and phenomena explainable in terms of science, all worldly objects and processes are embodiments or actions of transhuman subjectivities, instruments of a communication between themselves and those subjectivities. Therefore, in their explicit or implicit belief, the fundamental explanation of reality is of a type which transcends any explanation obtained through direct observation of things. Even though they accept the scientific view, they acknowledge, explicitly and implicitly, that there is much more in reality than catches the scientific eye.

However, the presence of this belief leaves a fundamental problem unsolved. This problem, connected with the nation-building endeavour, has been put in these terms by Fr. Samuel Rayan in an article in *Jeevadhara*: 'On the one hand the young men and women of India want to build a great modern nation with all the help that science and technology can give; meanwhile they are aware of the heavy secularist, even materialist and marxist bias which these aids have in modern history. On the other hand our youth have a natural, though not well-informed, love for their ancient culture and spiritual heritage, from which they dread being uprooted; but they also are afraid that this heritage can make little or no contribution even by way of motivation, towards the country's industrialization and economic growth. The agonizing problem, then, of India's growth is to reconcile these two yearnings and these two fears of their spirit. Nothing can meet this crisis with success but an integrated vision of life and reality, in which spirit and matter, time and eternity, earthly concerns and the service of God, are at once affirmed and

maintained in a unity that moves through human sorrow into the power and glory of God'.¹ Fr. Ryan adds: 'The spiritual dilemma of young India is solved only in a full historical Incarnation blossoming into the Resurrection'. While accepting fully this statement we may suggest that an integration is possible within the Hindu religious perspective.

Towards an Integration

I have pointed out at the beginning of this paper that the nation-building endeavour and that reality which we call Modern Hinduism are two aspects of the going forward which constitutes the Indian community of today. The meaning of this is that both must be understood in relation to a future. This future is on the one hand the building of a prosperous India, on the other hand the realization of a spiritual destiny. These two ends fuse into one to the extent that the striving after the first is shown not only as not opposed but as subservient to the striving after the second.

There is in Modern Hinduism a predominance of Tantrism and Śaktism. As we have seen, this trend, characterized by a concern for concreteness, is based on a fundamental awareness which, from the Vedic times, is at the centre of living Hinduism. Whereas the various *darśanas* are based on speculations often of a very abstruse type, Tantrism is antispeculative and intent on direct personal experience. The t̄antric practices are based on the conviction that, in the universe, each element is linked to the eternal Cause of the world and, therefore, to all the other elements, that the smallest element (e.g. the human being) can act on the biggest.

The phenomenal universe is the embodiment of the Śakti of the Supreme Lord. Through his various activities and practices the t̄antric *sādhaka* must realize in a personal way the unity of Śakti and the Supreme Lord; he must identify himself to the Śakti in the Lord. The meaning of human endeavour may be seen in this perspective. Since the t̄antric *sādhana* implies the regulated exercise of the various faculties and functions, the building of the human world has a role to play with regard to the attainment of salvation. But this building itself must be a *sādhana*—that is, an activity directed towards a transcendent end and capable, in some way, to bring about the realization of that end.

What about the community awareness in Tantrism? Though it is far from conspicuous, adumbrations may be found pointing in a definite direction. A first point to be mentioned is the importance which Tantrism gives to the guru as the representative of the Supreme Lord who is the unique teacher. The adept

¹ 'An Indian Christology: A Discussion of Method,' Vol. I, No. 3, p. 216.

must receive in him the vital force of his guru at the time of his *dīksā* and obey him as a god. This high function may be exercised by a woman. When the t̄antric *sādhaka* reaches the fifth stage of his spiritual journey—the stage of *vāmācara*—he is admitted to the *śricakra* rite. This rite is performed by an equal number of men and women sitting in a circle without any distinction of caste. In the act of union the *sādhakas* achieve a communion enabling them to make the experience of a trans-substantiation through which the act of the body becomes a participation in cosmic and divine realities. After completion of the *vāmācara*, the *sādhaka* is fit for the *kaulācāra*, the comportment of the one who, having gone through the various stages (or ‘directions’), no longer belongs to any of them. At that stage, whatever be the tendency to which he belongs externally, he has the appearance of a man who lives in the world in order to save it.

These various points, however limited and ambiguous they may appear, suggest that the Tantrists are fundamentally aware of the dignity of each individual person, of the fact that, in his spiritual striving, each individual depends on others, of the duty which each individual person has of leading the others towards their fulfilment. It would, therefore, be in accordance with the principles of Tantrism to admit the possibility for men of making of their world-building and community-building endeavours an authentic *sādhana*.

From all these data it appears that the idea of secularization is at the heart of Tantrism. This idea means not the desacralization and levelling down of human activity, but the acknowledgement and realization of the deeper finality of the various aspects of incarnate and communitarian existence. Union to the Lord is achieved not through practices implying a depreciation of life but through behaviours which give to the various human functions and activities their authentic meaning, through a real appreciation of the whole of human existence.

Hindu Experience and Christian Experience

Let us conclude this paper with a few Christological considerations.

The Logos incarnate is the Transcendent Lord, both supra-cosmic and cosmic; he is the Transcendent End of human existence, the Perfect Man beyond any finite human individuality. These attributes are those of the t̄antric Śiva. In his transcendent being, Śiva is a *Presence* beyond any concept or mythological representation. As such, he is the One with whom man must unite himself in order to attain his fulfilment.

As an idea present in men’s mind and inspiring their life, Christ is not identical to the Transcendent Logos incarnate. As such, he is a concretion of men’s experience and of men’s projects, he is the Transcendent Lord as expressed in terms of human

existence. However, he is not a mere expression of men's *daily life*, of men's ordinary concerns; he designates the highest potentialities of existence, what man is ultimately, what he must become, in relation to the Transcendent Lord. Similarly, the Śiva-representation, as distinct from the Transcendent Śiva, designates men's ultimate aspirations, the summit of his spiritual endeavour; he is man in relation to the Supreme End of his existence.

Through faith—that is, through self-commitment to the service of all in answer to the call of Christ in view of the Kingdom—man realizes himself in relation to his Transcendent End, he makes of his existence a Christ-existence. As the community of all believers the Church is the world building itself in Christ in a dynamic way. St. Paul calls her Christ's body, Christ's bride. She is Christ building himself through our daily efforts, struggles, joys and sufferings, successes and failures. Christ is the fulness of the Church in so far as he is the One in whom the Church attains her fulfilment; the Church is the fulness of Christ in so far as it is through her that he fulfils himself. The Church is the mother of men in so far as she generates them into the life of faith—that is, into the fulness of their human life. Therefore, in a true sense, the Church is the *Śakti* of Christ, the *Śakti* of the Supreme Lord. She is the power of God immanent in men, immanent in the world, operating through men's endeavours, giving them their regenerative efficacy. The Church experience and the Śaktic experience complement and enrich each other. A further study should point out the way in which the Church should discover and realize herself as *Śakti* and the *Śakti* as Church.