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R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology*, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978. (The quotation is from pp.143f.).
(Mention should also be made of the forthcoming volume by the Society for Old Testament Study: G.W. Anderson (ed.): *Tradition and Interpretation*, OUP, which will continue the series of survey volumes of which the last was H.H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (1951). Publication has been delayed, but is expected during 1979.)

SOME REFLECTIONS ON INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

> 'The dominant character of the Indian mind which has coloured all its culture and moulded all its thoughts is the spiritual tendency. Spiritual experience is the foundation of India's rich cultural history. It is mysticism, not in the sense of involving the exercise of any mysterious power, but only as insisting on a discipline of human nature, leading to a realisation of the spiritual. While the sacred scriptures of the Hebrews and the Christians are more religious and ethical, those of the Hindus are more spiritual and contemplative.'[1]

This quotation from one of the great myth-makers about India, which I selected almost at random from his voluminous writings, could be discussed in a number of different ways. It could be criticized for the facile stylistic transition from 'Indian' to 'Hindu' and the thereby insinuated identification of the two. One could ponder over the somewhat odd contrast between 'religious/ethical' and 'spiritual/contemplative', or explore what is meant here by 'spiritual' which occurs four times in this brief passage. But for our purposes it is sufficient to say that a very specific hierarchy of values is assumed here, from the material, via the 'religious/ethical', to the 'spiritual', and that the drive towards the last-mentioned is regarded as the quintessence of 'India's rich cultural history'. Thus it seems that Radhakrishnan is proposing here the ultimate abstract or formula which can summarize the intellectual history of a large country over a period of three and a half millenia, with all its social ramifications. It is this kind of generalization which is widely made by exponents of the Indian religious traditions and which is, for the most part unconsciously, accepted by Western seekers of 'Eastern forms of wisdom', people who are dissatisfied with religion whilst they search for the 'spiritual' or 'mystical' (notice how also Radhakrishnan contrasts these notions),—it is this generalization that there exists a teleological drive towards the spirit, away from ordinary reality, as the defining factor of Indian culture, which has stimulated the present reflections.

However, my aim here is not to 'test' in an empirical manner the validity of Radhakrishnan's interpretation. The knowledge which we in the West have accumulated of the Indian traditions, through the research of scholars, the expositions of Indian *gurus*, the practice of religious or 'alternative' communities and the imagination of novelists[2], is still far too limited to allow for a complete survey of these traditions. What I shall attempt here is to trace some of these 'tendencies' of 'India's rich cultural history', which Radhakrishnan so easily reduces to a drive towards the 'spiritual', in their development, social position, and mutual interaction. The trends selected here for scrutiny, along with the examples adduced to illustrate them, are not to be understood as 'most typical' or representative of the variegated traditions of India, but as a few signposts scattered over a vast landscape. My usage of the word 'spirituality' is intended to draw attention to the fact that the 'landscape' mentioned in the metaphor constitutes a realm which the more systematic disciplines of philosophy, theology and psychology reflect upon. In other words, an only partly reflex interpretation of reality and man's role in it, the functions of

the spirit in the organization of, and in relating itself to, the full range of the existing. This kind of approach has the advantage that it avoids the limitations of a more conventional compartmentalization, viz. that we can bring together a variety of -isms which are becoming increasingly disjointed in the Western awareness (Buddhism, Hinduism, Vedanta, Tantrism, etc). Moreover, such an abstract realm of 'Indian spirituality' allows itself to be compared to other such 'spiritualities' far more easily than school-specific dogmas, cults and meditation techniques.

I When all has been achieved...

> 'With this sense of freedom came the realisation that... the great journey which he had pursued through so many existences had reached its end, and all that was to be done had been done.'[3]

This description of the Buddha's enlightenment employs expressions for which many parallels can be found in later Indian writings. Thus for instance the medieval Hindu theologian Vedantadeshika (13th/14th century) says that 'there is nothing more to be done here' and that the man who has surrendered himself to Vishnu 'has done what had to be done'[4]. In spite of the chronological and ideological distance between the Buddha and this Hindu theologian, a similar experience of complete freedom, achievement, and happiness is suggested by both. They imply the same claim that there exists a realm or centre of human reality which provides a profound meaning to it, stimulates a feeling that things now are all right and consists of the awareness that nothing now can detract from this fulness. When we compare the paths that are said to lead to this central realization, we notice further similarities. In both cases an inner reorientation takes place: the elimination of selfish desires and narrow concepts of what I am and what is mine, and the surrender of oneself to some transcendental state. Finally, underlying both conceptions is the common assumption that ordinary human existence is unsatisfactory and contingent, and that 'something must be done' to overcome these painful limitations.

The apparent vagueness of this description is intentional, and in fact unavoidable, for it attempts to abstract from the concrete, and as we shall see presently very different, expressions of early Buddhism and late medieval Vishnu religion a common structural pattern. But it is not an arbitrary abstraction, because in both cases we are dealing with the same technical term (in Sanskrit *krta-krtya*), 'who has done what has to be done'. We have here a good illustration of how certain key-terms, belonging to an Indian spiritual heritage, are employed by different schools quite differently, while preserving at the same time their fundamental significance. Not to draw this vital distinction of two levels, a structural pan-Indian function and concrete, school-specific connotations added to this, accounts for a not infrequent confusion in both Indian and Western writings on the Indian spiritual traditions.[5]

When we turn now to this second level, the concrete significance of the term *krta-krtya*, or, in other words, its meaning within the general framework of the branches of spirituality concerned, important differences emerge. Thus for most forms of Buddhism, 'what must be done' consists i.a. in lengthy and complex meditational exercises (coupled in most cases with stringent ethical observances), while the final state of achievement is consistently left undescribed, since—understood as transcending all human limitations—human language is felt to be incapable of grasping it. Vedantadeshika, as mentioned above, happens to be one of the representatives of theistic Hinduism, a devotee of god Vishnu (who, already for the sake of differentiating him from other god figures known to the Hindu traditions, like Shiva, requires specific mythical and iconographic attributes). According to this theologian, 'what must be done' is reduced to a minimal human effort, which is basically to hand oneself over in total faith to Vishnu's grace. The state of him 'who has done what must be done' is the being sheltered and safe in an inseparable union (with a minimum of individuality left) with Vishnu. The contrast seems now almost total, that between an 'atheistic'[6] spirituality and a mythologically inspired theistic religion, and the structural similarities suggested above now seem feeble and external indeed. But things are never that simple in India; like a thrifty old lady, she never seems to lose anything in her spiritual history. Since Vedantadeshika conceives of Vishnu as a god of grace, he is interested in reducing the human contribution towards salvation to a minimum—the (well-

defined and ritually performed) act of surrender is regarded as sufficient. But it is a step taken on trust alone. For various reasons Vedantadeshika nevertheless allows also for the possibility of a fully conscious realization of what this act of surrender constitutes, viz. through the meditational exercises of yoga.[7] Although we are still far away from a scientific understanding of Indian meditational techniques, at least it can be said that the contrast which had emerged between Buddhism and Hindu theism is now once again considerably softened, because Vedantadeshika also participates in the general tradition of Indian meditational exercises.[8] Moreover, as a philosopher the same theologian is quite capable of employing (again deriving it from a common Indian heritage) a far more abstract and hesitant language when speaking of the absolute Vishnu, as 'from whom all words return, not having encompassed him'[9]. In fact, the complex fusion of the concrete and abstract characterizes medieval Hindu theism as much as it constitutes one of the key topics of its metaphysical discussion.

We shall now move a step further back from this curious blend of contrasts and similarities which distinguish and interconnect two different schools of Indian spirituality, and turn to a more general exploration of the term *krta-krtya*. It presupposes a definite two-tier structure of reality: ordinary human existence, which is envisaged as lacking in essential qualities, and a second tier on which these limitations are transcended or cancelled. In addition, it assumes that something must and can be done about moving from the first to the second tier (whether through ethical observances, rituals, meditation, or faith). When put like this, it appears of such a general and almost commonplace character that it could serve as a definition for most religions and ideologies. Additional features now render this two-tier conception specifically Indian. These features can be described with terms that are also becoming well-known in the West: *samsara* which denotes a theoretically endless round of births, deaths, and rebirths (transmigration); *karma* which refers to the quality of one's actions in one life as the determining factor of the kind of life in a subsequent rebirth; and *moksha* as the (state of) liberation from the painful cycle of rebirths. The man 'who has done what must be done' is he who has escaped from *samsara* through the performance of the right method, has obtained *moksha* and rendered all his *karma*, both positive and negative, inoperative. *Moksha* as the opposite to *samsara* cannot be conceived of as characterized by space, time and matter, and consequently we notice a certain hesitation to describe it.

After the previous warnings about the complex significance of Indian technical terms, we ought to be prepared for the fact that this pattern established for the terms *samsara-karma-moksha* also possesses a second, vastly variegated, concrete level of applications by the different schools. It is on this level that we approach also something like a partial rationale for the differentiation of various popularly used -isms. Thus it is typical of Jainism to regard *karma* as a fine-material entity which is taken in by the soul through all its activities; of Hinduism to connect it with a strange mixture of ethical factors and customary social conventions; of Buddhism, to interpret it in purely ethical terms. The Buddhists may conceive of *samsara* as a sequence of momentary events, and Hindus and Jains as the roaming of souls (really, or only phenomenally, individual) through the dominions of heaven, hell, and earth in successive births. The reasons that are given for human existence in *samsara* in the first place cut again across the borders of the different -isms, and the fact that in most traditions more than one are mentioned shows that we are dealing here with one of the unsolved mystery areas of Indian spirituality. Ethically oriented explanations regard 'desire' as the reason; where the emphasis lies on meditation, as 'ignorance', as a wrong understanding of one's self-identity and as fatal individuation; theistic systems may regard it as punishment for some prior act of self-will; but there is always also the tendency to let all such rational explanations dissolve in the notion of *leela*, the cosmic play which cannot be grasped by human notions of reason and purpose. Similar differentiations take place in the concrete application of the terms *moksha* and the means to achieve it in the different schools and traditions.

Great prominence is given to two other terms, *atman* and *brahman*, in the literature on Indian thought. These terms derive from the ancient Upanishads and thus have remained restricted to Hinduism. The first term denotes an empirically individuated 'self' or 'soul' which transcendentally merges—in some form—with *brahman*, the self and origin of the cosmos and the *locus* of

moksha. But it seems preferable to me not to use these terms in our present discussion, firstly because they are not shared (even conceptually, not just terminologically) by Jains, Buddhists and certain marginal, non-Upanishadic schools of Hinduism, and secondly because even in the majority of Hindu schools that do use the concepts, their concrete level of significance is confusingly differentiated. Thus for example Vedantadeshika identifies *brahman* with Vishnu, other Hindus may regard it as a state of pure, quality-less experience, etc.

* * * *

This curious interaction of a structural pattern and a great variety of concrete expressions, an interaction marked by the two levels of significance of inherited technical terms, can be understood more clearly when its historical and social dynamism are taken into account. It can then be perceived as a process of discussions, modifications, redefinitions and changing attitudes which was motivated by the encounter of basically different spiritualities, one of which acquired a kind of normative prestige in society. The extant sources allow us to specify at least in their general outlines the crucial events which stimulated the later complex and variegated developments. This takes us back, very roughly speaking, to 800 B.C. This is the period when the documents for the first time begin to refer to the *samsara: moksha* dichotomy (directly in the earliest Upanishads, and indirectly also in a reconstructed 'proto-Jainism'). On the other hand, the oldest documents of Indian religions as such, the hymns of the Vedas, are traced as far back as c. 1500 B.C. In addition to these approximately seven centuries of an earlier religious literature, many later sources also contain religious material which is unaffected by the *samsara: moksha* dichotomy. This suggests that the two-tier interpretation of reality was formulated only at a certain point in the Indian spiritual history, and that only in a certain milieu. While the first assumption suffers from the general shortcomings of an *argumentum ex silencio* (and is rejected by advocates of a monolinear continuity of the Indian religious tradition—a view not shared by the present writer), it is easier to support the second inference. The early sources reveal quite prominently as the expounders of this particular conception communities of people who have renounced all worldly ties (with family, possessions, etc.) and are wandering through the country begging for their livelihood. These are early Buddhist and Jain scriptures; the case of the Upanishads is somewhat more complex.[10] We can assume that it was primarily the spiritual influence of these wandering ascetics upon the rest of society which accounts for the gradual, and ultimately all-pervasive acceptance of the *samsara: moksha* doctrine, in some form, as the structural backbone of spirituality. At least for the early period, a man 'who has done what must be done' inevitably is somebody who has renounced all ties with normal life and society and become a homeless wanderer or monk. In its origins we are thus dealing with a form of spirituality which both in its content (*samsara: moksha*) and in the life-style adopted by its adherents, totally rejects the ordinary connections of man with his environment and the society in which he lives.

This rejection shows a number of corollaries, some of which may be illustrated here. These examples show that in a variety of ways, emotionally and intellectually, the fact of the unsatisfactoriness of *samsara* is driven home, and that the motivation for abandoning it draws both on ordinary life experiences and more metaphysically oriented elements. Thus we find haunting, sometimes almost grotesque, poetic dissections of the human body as 'the storehouse of phlegm, bile, pus, faeces. . .' etc. These aim at the realisation that all cravings and desires—for personal welfare, possessions, ornamentation, and above all, physical love—are misplaced and essentially lacking in an appropriate object. Experiences of ordinary life, like love, affection and happiness, are shown to be transient and therefore not really positive. Thus even the greatest moment of bliss, by being but a moment, is from a higher level of observation nothing but suffering. The whole edifice of what we regard as the 'person', including our self-awareness, is broken up into various components, and only a 'self' or 'soul' may be left as non-contingent, in some cases (Buddhist), even this last centre of personal identity is rejected. The world of our ordinary awareness is presented as lacking in any essence, meaning or reality, and is frequently compared to a dream or a conjuror's trick. On the whole this side of Indian spirituality is pessimistic and indeed world-negating.

Unfortunately, any critical investigation into

the background of the appearance and rapid expansion of this spirituality soon runs into the darkness of pre-history. We are naturally inclined to ask what sort of circumstances and experiences gave rise in a society which had shown itself in the earlier—and some subsequent—sources to be enthusiastically this-worldly and earthy, to its theoretical and practical negation. Yet our sources do not allow us to answer such questions. One might argue from a purely logical point of view that the experiential content of *moksha* presupposes the re-evaluation of *samsara*: that in the light of such meditationally induced 'altered states of consciousness' ordinary reality manifests itself with all its limitations and sufferings. But the extant documents on the whole present the reverse sequence (certainly biographically the only logical one): an initial dissatisfaction with, and then insight into, the contingent nature of *samsara*, and a quest for, and eventual achievement of, *moksha*. Moreover, meditation in the earliest sources is not the only means of achieving liberation; the ancient Jain works make no reference to meditational techniques, but to very severe forms of self-mortification.

However this may be, the fact remains that in the following centuries and millennia the conception of *samsara:moksha* increasingly dominated the structure of Indian spirituality. The details of this expansion are complex and go beyond the scope of the present observations. But one aspect of this expansion may be singled out for a brief mention. One of the effects of the growing prestige of this new conception of the world and the desire to escape from it was the erosion of highly developed nature-philosophical and quasi-scientific schools of thought.[11] A number of such disciplines concentrated on a systematic analysis of facets of reality (like the Sanskrit language, logical thought, art, and cosmology) in terms of a limited number of sets of basic factors and the laws governing their interaction. Sometimes one gets the impression that the intention behind this approach was in fact mechanistic, anti-transcendentalist. Precisely because they concentrated on the empirical world, viz. *samsara*, they were increasingly felt to be taking it too seriously and wanting in positive references to the other tier of reality, *moksha*. Although they made attempts to adapt themselves to the changing times and new demands of society, other schools of a directly 'mystical' concern soon pushed them into a background position of increasing sterility and non-experimental dogmatism. Doubtlessly the advocates of a contemporary 'youthquake' will see in this a comforting parallel with changing attitudes towards the sciences in the West. . .

This example illustrates, nevertheless, only one direction of the line of developments. The very fact that the Indian traditions produced such a rich variety of concrete interpretations of the *samsara:moksha* pattern suggests also an opposite direction, viz. an impact, often subversive and concealed, of other areas of Indian spirituality upon the above-mentioned pattern, thereby bringing about certain transformations and modifications. The enormous prestige of this structure of thought allowed other facets of spirituality to survive by adopting its terminology and the abstract connotation of the terms, and to have an effect on the pan-Indian context. Thus extensive resources remained available to feed and keep alive the *samsara:moksha* structure. On the abstract level, the dichotomy was kept intact, and the *krtya*, 'what must be done', continued to denote a move away from ordinary reality to the glorious state of *moksha*. In *this* sense Radhakrishnan simply paraphrases the situation when speaking of a 'spiritual tendency' in Indian thought and culture. In *this* sense the Western image of India as the country of world-renouncers and supramundane wisdom is adequate. Yet there is far more to Indian spirituality than this. What has been discussed here so far could only be described as the 'essence' of the Indian tradition, if the abstract 'normative' is taken for the whole living, concrete organism of spiritual history. Such a living whole presupposes the interaction of different components, which are localised in specific social and regional *milieux*, and nothing is gained by ignoring these—grantedly complicating—factors. The following section of these reflections will explore a few of these additional facets. As we shall see, even when 'all has been achieved which had to be done', when the Indian mystic and ascetic has totally left the world of ordinary events behind, and when in the splendour of *moksha: samsara* has been consumed, the inner road of Indian spirituality has not yet come to an end. What about

other people, and what about my earthly existence? Why are they there in the first place? These questions could not be suppressed.

NOTES

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, London, 1923^1, 1929^2, etc., pp. 41f.

2. To my mind come for instance the somewhat heavy-handed explorations of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Canetti's *Die Blendung* (1935), English: *Auto da fe*, (1946), also in Penguin modern classics, and the far more humorous play with Indian ideas of Alther's *Kinflicks* and Hasek's *Good Soldier Svejk*.

3. Quoted from M. Pye, *The Buddha*, London, 1979, p. 31.

4. *Rahasyatrayasaram*, ed. Narasimmacharya, Madras, 1920, pp. 457, 459.

5. Indian exponents will tend to present the significance of these culturally inherited notions restrictively in terms of their own school tradition or spiritual background. Western interpreters often lack familiarity with the varieties of concrete contexts, and manipulate the terms in a far too abstract or limited manner, sometimes within a totally different system of spirituality.

6. A label of Buddhism that was fashionable with previous generations of students. Von Glasenapp's *Der Buddhismus–eine atheistische Religion* (1954^1, 1966^2) was translated into English as *Buddhism–a non-theistic religion* (London, 1970).

7. Through *yoga* Vishnu becomes not only potentially an object of direct human experience, but this experience also serves as a complementary source of human knowledge of him. Moreover, Vedantadeshika belonged to the school of Ramanuja, which looks back upon the twelve Alvars, yoga-practising saints, with veneration. Finally, unlike some of his theological opponents who held an extreme faith-only position, he was not prepared to abandon altogether the other facets of the inherited religious tradition which included yoga.

8. There are direct links between the 'classical' yoga of Patanjali and Buddhist meditation (compare e.g. E. Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vol. I, Salzburg, 1953, pp. 163-73 (there exists an Indian English translation of this important work, Delhi-Benares 1970); between these and the *Bhagavad-gita* (see e.g. chapter VI, verses 11-17) from where Ramanuja and his school take their theistic yoga (calling it *bhakti*).

9. He derives this phrase from *Taittiriya-Upanishad* II, 4, 1; 9, 1; and the *Bhagavad-gita* IX, 3.

10. On the one hand, Hinduism, like Jainism and Buddhism, has its version of the 'renouncer', the *sannyasi*. *After* he has pursued other aims in his life, like founding a family, a man is encouraged to 'renounce' in the final stage of his life. Clearly this arrangement is meant to overcome the 'anti-social' drive in the renouncer movement. In a manner which is not quite clear, Hinduism connects the Upanishads with the *sannyasi* as the sacred scriptures relevant to him. But in the *earliest* Upanishads such a connection between *sannyasi* and the pursuit of *moksha* is not fully established. We hear there, e.g. about kings teaching about it, and about married priests happy to take home with them cattle they have won in a debating competition about such topics.

11. Details about these schools can be found in vol. II (Salzburg, 1956, English: Delhi-Benares, 1970) of Frauwallner's work.

Part II: *Return to the World* and a further article will be printed in future editions of the *Review*.