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and that their place will be taken in the future by others which reflect more the *content* of modern science and theology and less its *form*. Perhaps, for example, the new understanding afforded by modern scientists such as Einstein on relativity or Prigogine on thermodynamics, will begin to affect our view of knowledge in science and in theology. That these are real possibilities can be seen in the work of people like Gregory Bateson (*Mind and Nature*, Wildwood 1980) or Eric Jantsch (*Self-Organising Universe*, Pergamon 1979), or in the supposition that the way God *is* capacitates the knowledge which human beings may have in science and in theology.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

Friedhelm Hardy

II *RETURN TO THE WORLD*

> 'This body is without essence, born of the parents' semen and blood, essentially impure, putrid and bad smelling. It is disturbed by the thieves of passion, hatred, delusion, fear and despair. It is subject to decay, and is filled with a hundred thousand diseases.'[1]

This is the driving force behind the long spiritual journey from *samsara* to *moksha*: the realization that man is contingent and not a lasting, self-contained entity. In the 'application of mindfulness', as the popular Buddhist meditation course is called from which the quotation is taken, the range of observation encompasses not only the body, feelings and mind, but the whole of empirical reality (in technical parlance: all conditioned *dharmas*). One could almost say that the stark negativism which pervades the characterizations of the body and so on, which are offered as objects for meditation, is designed to arouse a sufficiently strong energy (or 'disgust', as the Jains in particular like to phrase it) to propel the aspirant after liberation along his arduous path towards his final goal. Moreover, this brutal analysis of the human condition is meant to penetrate into the awareness of a maximum number of people—in the ideal *all* men are encouraged to become renouncers and set out to achieve *moksha*.

> Someone asked: "What is the essential meaning of Buddhism?" The Master said: "Countless dead bodies fill all the chasms and valleys."[2]

Thus logically, if everyone were to achieve liberation, humanity would be extinguished and only the corpses would remain.

This uncompromising ambition—which is by no means restricted to Buddhism—is clearly unrealistic and utopian. Even by the more optimistic reckonings, to achieve liberation will take many years of moral perfection and of meditation, years of depending on ordinary life by relying on alms for one's nourishment and other elementary needs.[3] Thus inevitably the theoretical structure of *samsara:moksha* acquires the shape of a pyramid as its real-life form; its base is constituted by the mass of humanity vegetating in *samsara*, its tip represents the liberated ones, and each layer of aspirants for liberation is supported by the spiritually less advanced. Without farmers ploughing their fields and merchants accumulating wealth, the renouncers would neither receive food nor other elementary support; yet to kill living beings (and mosquitoes and worms are included in this category!) which is unavoidable in farming, and to strive after material gain which is equally unavoidable in the life of a businessman, constitute some of the most severe infringements of the ascetic style of life. The purpose of drawing attention to this discrepancy is not to accuse the ascetics of hypocrisy, but merely to demonstrate that even in the most radical world-negating drive the realities of *samsara* cannot entirely be shut out. In the history of Indian renunciation this resulted in a fascinating kaleidoscope of solutions to the fundamental problem of how to pursue one's liberation while depending on society's support of this pursuit. In the case of long-established ascetic traditions the necessary

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contact with ordinary life would be very indirect, thanks to large monastic endowments accumulated over the centuries through generous donations by pious and wealthy laymen. But India never ceased to give birth to new ascetic movements, each one adding itself to an increasingly long list. There had to come a point at which the ascetics could not simply take it for granted that their physical needs would be taken care of through the willingness of the general populace to give them alms. Frequently therefore they could make a living only by themselves providing some form of tangible service to the ordinary people in exchange for alms. The spectrum of such ways in which ascetics have catered for their needs is amazing. They have become astrologers, fortune tellers, doctors; they have resorted to public entertainment through song, dance and music; they have used public blackmail and intimidation; they have specialized in prostitution; and we hear about marauding hordes of thousands of ascetics terrorizing a region and battling with rival hordes . . . It is rarely that we hear of semi-domesticated ascetic communities that cultivate their own fields. One may also ask to what extent the recruitment to such ascetic groups has been based on the ideal, which is a conscious, mature decision to pursue liberation by joining one of them; in practice it might well be that infants were taken into their fold, because their parents had abandoned them or donated them in fulfilment of some vow. What is worth noting here are not the sensationalist details but the fact that a variety of social and economic factors clearly run counter to any full-scale uncompromising pursuit of liberation by a sizeable mass of people, and that in addition these factors maintain some form of hold over the relatively few who have set out on this path. It would appear to be a reasonable assumption that this 'hold' had some kind of impact on the understanding of, and the interpretation given to, the striving for *moksha*. But it would be a crude type of reductionism if we were to regard these factors as the primary or ultimate cause of the modifications of a simple dichotomy *samsara* (negative):*moksha* (positive) which will allow us to speak of a 'return to the world'.

* * * *

The normative power of the *moksha* ideal was sufficiently strong to prevent us from hearing much about its outright rejection. This in itself means only that our documents, which allow us to look into the history of the Indian traditions, themselves belong to this normative system, in other words, any hypothetical rejection of the ideal lies outside the discourse which found written documentation. Yet the participants in this discourse required their own symbol of antagonism: they needed a concrete, identifiable opponent with whom they could argue and whom they could reject. This function is fulfilled by groups like the Lokayatas. They are presented to us as specific philosophical schools of thought, and aphorisms like the following are attributed to them.

> The universe consists of four elements only: earth, water, fire and air. It is from these that consciousness arises, in the same way as intoxication is produced by the grapes (and other ingredients of wine).

This crude form of materialism is the extreme antithesis to the *samsara:moksha* structure, which by rejecting any independent mental or spiritual faculty in man automatically thereby precludes the possibility of 'liberation' from physical existence. But 'schools' like the Lokayata are shrouded in mystery, and it might well be that a late-medieval author, commenting on this aphorism, is offering a much more plausible interpretation. To him 'Lokayata' means something like 'implied philosophy or belief of the masses':

> It is called "Lokayata" because it is popular among ordinary people. This popularity arises from three facts: (i) it teaches matters which are relished by worldly people, like "One should live merrily as long as one's life lasts, since everyone will fall prey to death. Once the body has been turned into ashes, how could it return?" (ii) it is in full agreement with the Manuals on Sexual Pleasures in that it advocates wealth, power and sex as fundamentally rewarding, and (iii) all matters which lie outside the ordinary realm of reality are rejected.[4]

Whether this is a systematically presented doctrine of a specific school or an *ad hoc* paraphrase of 'what the mass of people are after', in this kind of attitude *samsara* is held on to in a physical and concrete way, and 'all that

has to be achieved' is here the pursuit of pleasures. That few if any people appear to have been adventurous enough to formulate convictions like these consciously and openly reveals the force of the *moksha* ideal as a norm, something which then was misunderstood to illustrate how 'spiritual' a country India has been.

Whilst outright rejections are rare, we do find a number of implied modes of circumventing the literal implications of the *samsara:moksha* dichotomy, without questioning the dichotomy itself. The attitude which underlies the variety of such approaches could be paraphrased as follows. There is indeed something basically wrong with *samsara*—ordinary reality *is* suffering. But by employing some special means, it can be transformed and thus be made to yield happiness and fulfilment. Such a remedy might be something very concrete: the Siddhas advocate the consumption of certain drugs, particularly mercury in various concoctions. The understanding of yoga as a method of keeping fit and healthy which was fashionable in the West ten, twenty years ago, was derived from the teachings of related groups of yogis; certain physical exercises and contortionist postures are here the means to transform *samsara*. It might be a particular occult ritual involving, for instance, the drinking of alcohol, eating meat, illicit sexual intercourse or even murder[5]. Popular Indian literature frequently tells us about the 'evil ascetic' who by ritually breaking the most fundamental taboos hopes to achieve extraordinary faculties, gathering as it were all the hidden powers from *samsara* in himself.

Another complex of ideas and practices can be related typologically to this. Drug-taking, physical exercises and occult rituals make use of some kind of latent power, a force built into *samsara*, or a hidden potential; but we also find sophisticated notions of a personal absolute (in other words, God) associated with this kind of attitude. Thus a number of theological schools and religious movements conceive of Vishnu as fully transcendental, beyond all limitations of space, time and matter, beyond human comprehension, infinite, eternal and the sole cause of the existence of man and the universe. But since anything would be unthinkable without him, he is also assumed to be *in* everything. the transcendental is immanent in the universe. In between these two poles, a variety of further modes or stages is envisaged. Not only does he manifest himself time and again in some human or other form, becomes visible to man and acts towards their liberation or effects some redress of cosmic imbalance, he also makes himself available in the temple image. The theologians of Ramanuja's school have a neat simile for these different modes of divine existence. The transcendental Vishnu is like the ocean's water—remote and undrinkable; his immanence resembles the moisture in most things; and his human and other manifestations on earth during some past age are like the water of a river that has long since flowed away from any given spot. In other words, none of these three modes can quench one's thirst. But his presence in the temple images is like the fresh drinking water in a lake: available and nourishing here and now. On the popular level, this theology provides the rationale for temple worship; the divine presence sanctifies the here and now by transforming it. Just as the orthodox devotee will eat only food which has been rendered pure through the contact with the image, the same statue, when carried in procession through the villages and fields, infuses blessing into all that comes in contact with it[6].

The same underlying attitude seems recognizable here: although the world as we experience it is contingent, deficient and unsatisfactory, it is possible to achieve a metamorphosis of it by means of the application of certain remedies. Whether this transformation is felt to be sufficient in an ultimate sense, or is still regarded as preliminary to *moksha*, would have to be judged for each individual case separately. This would moreover involve the possibility of distinguishing between what the exponents or practitioners 'really mean' and how they employ a conventional phraseology, and this is a complex and problem-ridden affair, because the notion of 'liberation' has certainly suffered a high rate of inflation in this area of discourse.

* * * *

Everything we have been looking at so far can be regarded as extraneous to the actual pursuit of *moksha*. The latter was rejected altogether by the adherents of the Lokayata, social and economic factors figured as external restraints on it, and the attitudes analysed in the last

section shy away from a straightforward rejection of *samsara* by maintaining that there exists some kind of positive potential in it. Now if this were all that the Indian traditions have to offer, we would be dealing here with no more than another example of the human predicament which is the conflict between a grandiose spiritual ideal and the lethargy of ordinariness, between 'the spirit' and 'the flesh'. But India offers more than this; it reveals that the full realization of *moksha* itself may not necessarily be equated with the full rejection of *samsara*, or in other words, that a 'return to the world' may follow even from the inner momentum of the liberating experience. As usual in India, this theme has a theistic and a non-theistic variation; we shall first look at the former.

As most readers of the *Bhagavadgita* must have noticed, Krishna's teaching to Arjuna is a most ambiguous and unsystematic, not to say a messy, affair. The number of different interpretations given to it, of different theories justified by reference to it, and of different systems derived from it, is legion. Yet in spite of all this, one point is common to most—whatever its relative importance may then be in the individual case—and that is that even after liberation has been achieved the world and an active role it demands from man are not cancelled. In my reading of the text, this theme is developed in the following way. Krishna teaches Arjuna all about the traditional means of achieving *moksha*, ethical perfection and meditational exercises—in a confusing variety of terminologies belonging to many separate school traditions. He then lets the point of final achievement, *moksha*, coincide with the full meeting or realization or revelation of himself, Krishna, as 'he really is'—the personal absolute God. This theistic turn to traditional yoga was remarkable enough at the time when the *Gita* was written, but the text goes further. Precisely because the liberated person encounters Krishna in his fullness, he must meet in him the whole cosmos which Krishna has created, keeps in being and in fact manipulates. This is envisaged not just as a passive vision, but as an active challenge: liberated, totally purified of self-will and ignorance, the person participates now in Krishna's cosmic pursuits. As a 'loyal servant' (bhakta) and obedient instrument, in harmony with and attuned to, Krishna's intentions, he carries out whatever must be done. In the *Gita* this means to fight in a most devastating battle:

> Long since have these men in truth been slain
> by Me: yours it is to be the mere occasion.[7]

Yet the *Gita* sees this battle as no more than one minute facet of Krishna's 'working' in the cosmos; but we are told little if anything about the nature, motives and purpose of this work. It remains enshrined in the ultimate mystery of a God who needs nothing and yet has the world, and the most the *Gita* can tell us is that somehow Krishna's 'working' in the world is to the benefit of all beings.

> If you consider the welfare of the world, then you should work.—In the three worlds there is nothing that I need do, nor anything unattained that I need gain, yet work is the element in which I move. If I were not to do my work, these worlds would fall to ruin, and I should be a worker of confusion, destroying these my creatures.[8]

What distinguishes this conception from the otherwise closely related theology of the divine presence in the temple image is the fact that here the emphasis is on an inner transformation in man himself, which is described in conventional terms as moving from *samsara* to *moksha* by means of all the traditional paraphernalia (ethical perfection and meditational exercises). But this transformation results not only in liberation, but also in a new mode of being active in the world. It is the theistic framework, the reference to Krishna as the locus of liberation and the totally other, transcendental absolute, which permits this rather fragile construction to maintain, on the one hand, a pronounced dichotomy of *samsara* and *moksha*, and on the other hand to envisage *samsara* nevertheless as not essentially negative since it is embedded in some positive divine design.

When turning now to the Buddhist variations on the theme, we can again begin with straightforward human considerations. The Buddha himself, after achieving enlightenment, spent the four decades of his remaining life preaching, teaching and gathering disciples. Hagiography tells us that this was the outcome of a conscious decision on his part, soon after his enlightenment. One component in this overwhelming experience suggested to him total isolation from the rest of society in some remote jungle, but another component was stronger and drove him back to society in order to let others share it with him.

In one of the major streams of the Buddhist tradition, the Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle', this legendary incident was developed into a grand spiritual ideal: the pursuit of personal liberation (styled 'the perfection of wisdom') is here intrinsically connected with the endeavour to draw others into it (appropriately called 'the perfection of compassion'). Because the realm in which man ordinarily lives is 'suffering', it would be totally irresponsible and egocentric, if one were to move towards *moksha* by forgetting about the suffering beings left behind. Here spiritual progress is seen as dependent on making every effort to assist others in achieving the same. One could easily derive this kind of reasoning from ordinary human psychology. The well-known simile of the ideal Buddhist, who has one foot in liberation and the other in the world (by being perfect both in his wisdom and compassion), belongs similarly to popular discourse.

He has gone geyond all that is worldly, yet he has not moved out of the world;
In the world he pursues his course for the world's weal, unstained by worldly taints.[9]

This is said about a Bodhisattva, a mythological type who for the Mahayana embodies the fullness of wisdom and compassion; yet it could equally well have been said about Arjuna—clearly on this level the *Bhagavadgita* and Mahayana Buddhism agree very closely[10]. But it would be a serious mistake—and there are enough examples of it in the literature—to regard this merely as a concession to popular religion and as a vulgar dilution of some other, 'original' Buddhism. What appears here as the 'perfection of wisdom' is a variation of the achievement of liberation from *samsara* through meditational exercises which here as elsewhere include the direct insight into the nature of reality. Thus it is really *qua* his wisdom that he becomes most fully aware of unenlightened, suffering beings, and that compassion is implied in the bliss, peace, or whatever other attributes are traditionally given to *moksha*. In other words, we could equally well say that the more this 'wisdom' is realized, the more 'compassion' gets stimulated, and thus the concern for suffering humanity is by no means extraneous to the pursuit of liberation, but arises spontaneously in it, by its inner momentum. A new awareness of, and responsibility for, the life on earth in society which is the *outcome* of the pursuit of liberation, is primarily what is meant here as the 'return to the world'.

No doubt Indian characterizations of ordinary life and reality as 'suffering' strike us as extreme, and are meant to be; no doubt, the drive away from *samsara*. . towards *moksha* has constituted a most powerful spiritual stimulus in India. But it should also have become apparent that this *samsara:moksha* dichotomy implies many unexpected twists and turns, something that any 'armchair' speculation could hardly anticipate. More interesting than the external factors which restrained the literal move into *moksha* is the fact that the experience of liberation itself allows for a return to the world. This really means that we are dealing here not just with a move from *a* to *b*, but with a genuine dialectical tension as well. The present article has done no more than prepared the way for a closer look at how this tension has provided a fundamental spiritual stimulus for developments which might well be regarded as the most sophisticated and striking culminations of the Indian tradition.

NOTES

1. *Dharmasangiti-sutra*, quoted in *Shikshasamuccaya* XIII (translation C. Jamieson).
2. Quoted from *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. W. de Bary, New York, 1972, p.238.
3. The exception to this is found in Jainism where at least in theory and in highly restricted circumstances suicide by starvation is regarded as a means of achieving liberation.
4. Both aphorism and commentary are translated (and slightly expanded) from the *Pramana-tirattu* on the *Itu*, vol.I, pp.31f.
5. Such rituals have recently acquired fame in Western circles thanks to the popularizers of what they call 'Tantrism'. Even when we distinguish the home-baked theories of these writers from what the Tantras have meant in India, it is essential furthermore to separate an archaic ritual practice from a variety of metaphysical systems in which they came to be embedded. Part III will briefly look at the latter, while the above remarks are restricted to the former.
6. The preconception of India as a 'spiritual' country is however so strong that even a recent work on *The Hindu Temple* (by G. Michell, London, 1977) can say: 'The Hindu temple serves as a reminder of impermanence, a notion that implies a turning away from the present illusory world in an effort to surmount and to transcend it.' (pp.67f.)
7. XI, 33; translation R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Oxford, 1969.
8. Ibid. III, 20...24.

9. *Ratnagotravibhaga* I, 71, quoted in Conze, *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, i.a. New York, 1964, p. 130.
10. The affinity of the *Gita* with early Buddhism is well-known but the striking similarity between the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism and the *bhakta* in the *Gita* has not, to my knowledge, been emphasized.

POLARITY AND PLURIFORMITY IN THE CHURCH

Paul D.L. Avis

It is not often that ecclesiology comes to the forefront of theological debate—though there is no department of Christian theology that does not bear in some way on the concept of the church and no theological question that does not have ecclesiological implications. In the thought of the sixteenth-century Reformers, for example, the question, 'How can I find a gracious God?' entailed the question, 'Where can I find the true church?' Soteriology led directly to ecclesiology: the two were bound together in the Reformers' understanding of the Christian gospel[1].

In the opinion of some, the doctrine of the church is going to become dominant once again. For too long, ecclesiology has been the poor relation in Anglo-Saxon theology, regarded merely as a dispensable luxury, an inessential academic exercise. But now the Christian churches are faced with a fundamental challenge—a challenge not, for once, to their credal and confessional positions and to the credibility of the Christian faith, but to their actual existence as separate churches, to their ecclesiological integrity.

The various churches have always had to grapple with the question of what separated them from their sister churches and on what legitimate grounds they could take their stand *vis a vis* other ecclesial bodies. Superficially, they may appear to take up positions on such issues as adult baptism, adherence to the doctrinal standards laid down by Martin Luther, the Westminster Divines or John Wesley, or recognition of the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Beneath the surface, however, these ostensible criteria recede in importance and factors deriving from historical accident and the development of different styles of worship and diverse languages of Christian experience loom larger. To bring these underlying issues into the open and to subject them to critical analysis is the proper task of ecumenical theology. Each church must be helped to take a dispassionate and critical look at those things that constitute its ecclesial identity. Each church must ask itself whether those things that are embedded so deeply in its tradition are mere accidents of history and culture, or whether, on the other hand, they are actually grounded on the one and only foundation of the Church of Christ—the nature of God, the person of Christ and the character of the Christian gospel (cf. I Cor. 3:11).

This question of ecclesial identity in what we may call the external forum, that is to say, in relation to other churches, has been given added point and complexity by the further question concerning ecclesial identity in what we may call the internal forum, that is to say, with regard to a church's own inherent unity, its individual integrity. In the external forum, the problem of ecclesial identity is the problem of the plurality of churches; in the internal forum, the problem of ecclesial identity is the problem of pluralism within a church. The issue is that of unity in diversity. The diversity is obvious: but where is the unity to be located? The diversity of doctrinal views represented within the major denominations raises acutely the problem of ecclesiological integrity.

Now just as every church needs to take a critical look at its ecclesial identity in the external forum, so too every church must take heed to its integrity in the internal forum. Both ecumenical considerations, as to where a particular church stands on a particular matter, and reflection on theological method, with its alertness to the hidden methodological axioms, good and bad, that underlie all theology, demand that the notion of unity in diversity be subjected to critical analysis. No church is without this problem and each must undertake the enquiry