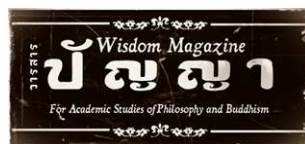


Hinduism

A Short Introduction

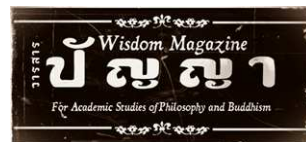


Somparn Promta
Department of Philosophy
Chulalongkorn University



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Cover Picture

Hindu People Bathing in the Ganges
(Old Picture, Original Source Unknown)

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Somparn Promta

Preface



This small book was written for the purpose to be used in my class at Chulalongkorn University, “*Basic Thoughts of Asia*.” Contents of the course were designed to cover main religious thoughts widely adopted in Asian countries which are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, and Confucianism. My part in the course covers only Hinduism.

There can be several ways to deal with religious thoughts. In this book, Hinduism is treated as *a culture of thought*. By this word, I mean the worldview of Hinduism which plays the roles behind what Hindu people in India and the world do and behave as we have seen. As religious thoughts are deepest elements in the human life, we cannot understand our fellow human beings who adopt the different religious faiths without an understanding of their religious faiths. Some scholars of the world say that the new war of the world might be religious-based, rather than the one which

was mainly caused by political conflicts as seen before. I deem this suggestion in a positive way. The war between human beings is natural phenomenon; and sometimes the war was made by good people who adopted different codes of goodness. In some religion, religious faiths and political expression should be done side by side. This can be seen as a good thing in the sense that the politicians who do not have any religious faiths should be learned that sometimes it is not easy to wage war on people who have deeply religious faiths. It is not easy because in terms of religion, human life and death are nothing but what to be sacrificed to God or to what we believe to be things that please God. Among the things that please God, justice is included.

The war starts from the human mind. So, the war is not a problem in itself. It is the human mind that we should take it seriously. In the history of Hinduism, we have found that people like Mahatma Gandhi or Sri Aurobindo do not think that religion and the struggle to have a just society should be separated. Aurobindo was deeply religious person, and the world knows him as a profound thinker of modern Hinduism. In the view of these great Hindu masters, religion is nothing but the spirit of humankind to search for good things like freedom, justice, peace, and friendship between

men. I think the next world war might be hard to happen as far as we have people who have deeply religious faiths in their souls. The history of religion has proved that finally religion wins everything because religion is the small thing and the big thing at the same time. Grass is small thing. But it persists in this world for so long time. In a sense, religion is like grass. Religion dies hard like the grass.

Human life is short. We are not immortal. All of us must die some day. It seems that no knowledge in the history of mankind can provide us with hope, except for religion. You can be a great scientist of the world. But science never promises you a beautiful hope as found from religion. Religious hopes could be illusion in terms of reality, but in terms of ethical practice they give us so many valuable things. You can be a great scientist, but a lonely man. If you come to be religious person or join a religious community, you can still be a great scientist, but now you will not be a lonely man.

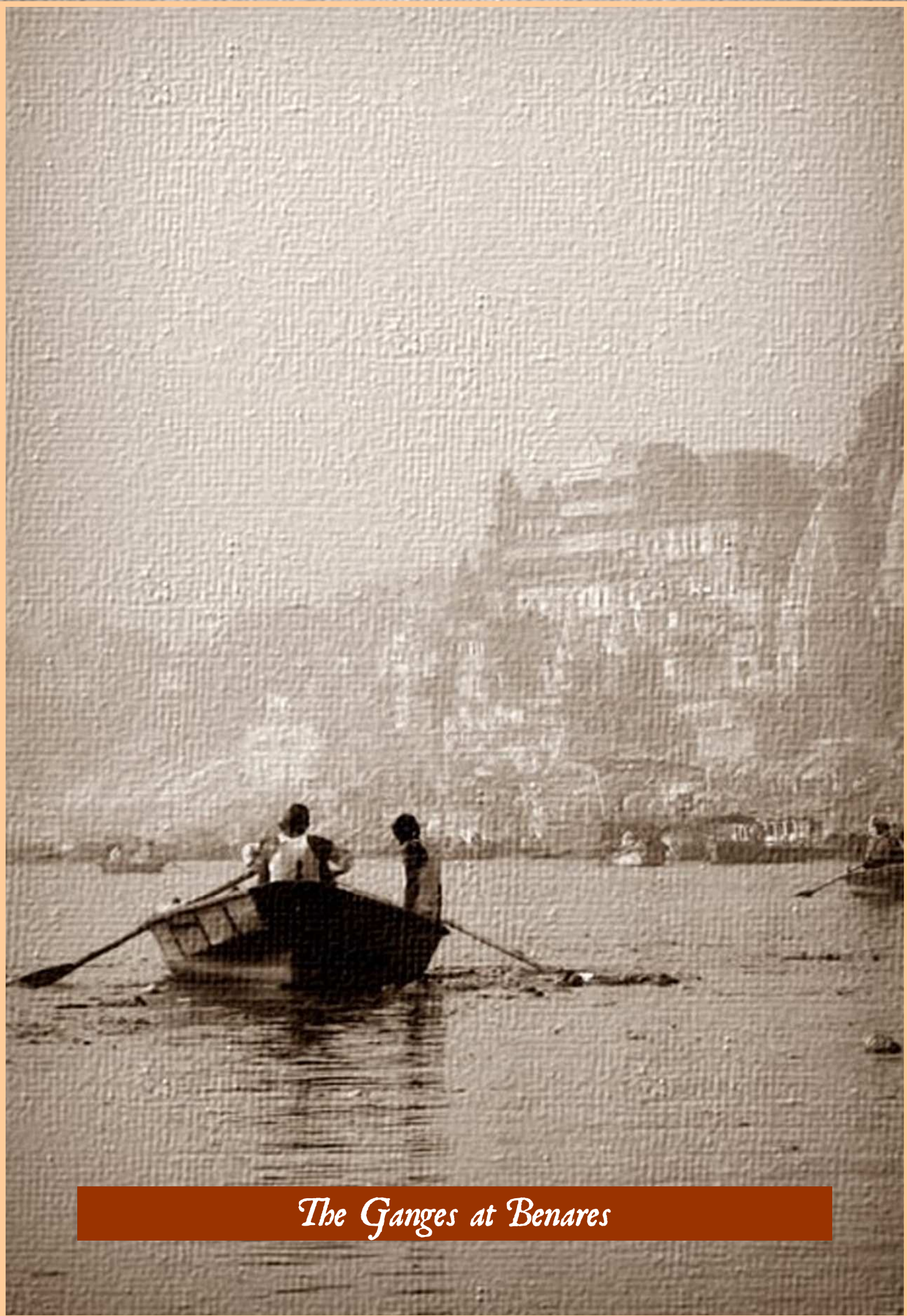
Hinduism, besides being a religion in a normal sense, is well known as a great source of philosophy, science, mathematics and logic in Indian history. We have some evidence to believe that Hindu people were the inventor of the number called Zero. In Indian tradition, Zero means voidness; and voidness is a religious

concept, conveying so many subtle notions. In this sense, if we do not have Hinduism or other Indian religions such as Buddhism, the world possibly would not have the number Zero. The Roman number system does not have the number Zero; and this makes it have a limited capacity compared with the Hindu-Arabic system. We know that the Greek and Roman mathematical thinkers, like Euclid, were extremely wise. But they did not invent the Zero. In my view, the difference between Indian and Greek/Roman mathematical thinkers lies in that the latter do not have religious faiths while the former have.

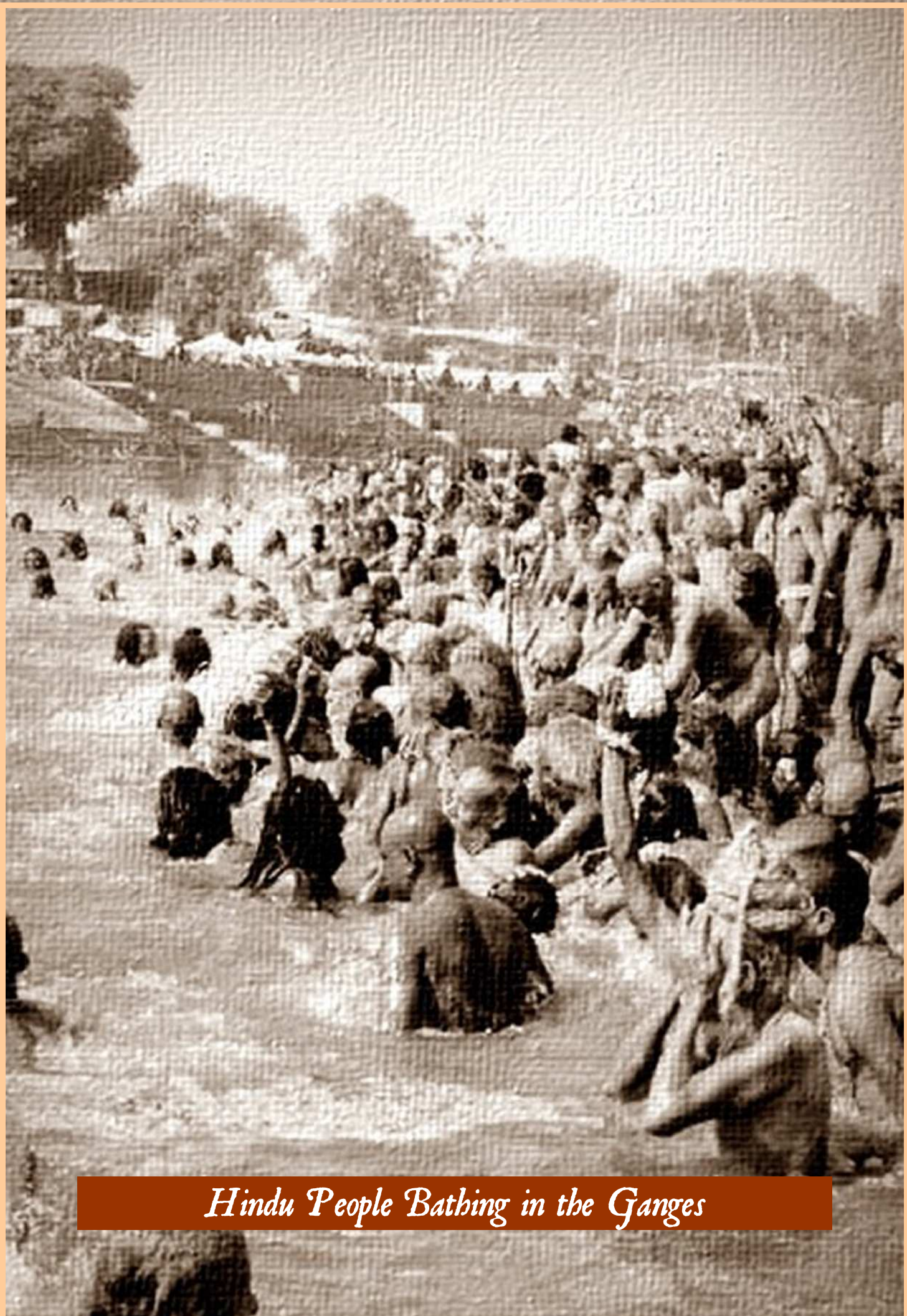
Moreover, religion should be deemed as a new inspiration for the world *endlessly*. The study of religion should be undertaken to stimulate a sense of wonder. The proper study of religion, I believe, could be a base of the making of good movies, songs, novels, and even political innovations. I hope this book would serve as an inspiration as said.

Somporn Promta

Department of Philosophy,
Chulalongkorn University
March, 2011



The Ganges at Benares



Hindu People Bathing in the Ganges

Chapter One

Popular Hinduism



In modern religious study, we usually divide a religion into two main categories: *popular* religion and *scholarly* religion. In this chapter, we will follow such a fashion. Popular religion means the religion as understood and practiced by lay people in general. In this sense, popular Hinduism is a religion understood and practiced widely among the Hindu people who are not thinkers or scholars. It seems that the original form of any religion of the world, except for Buddhism and Jainism, was given in the form of popular religion. The scholar or thinker of religion came later—after lay people had invented or discovered that religion already.

The difference between popular religion and scholarly one can be seen easily. In popular religion, people do not question about what they have believed. But in scholarly religion, they usually do such a thing. Or we

can say that reason plays a significant role and faith is less allowed in scholarly religion. More importantly, as found in Christianity and Hinduism, the scholars of religion largely utilize a thing called *philosophizing* to make religious beliefs of people reasonable. In this sense, we could deem the attempts done by the scholars of religion as something indirectly related to popular religion. That is: they try to defend popular religion. Sometimes, in the view of those who stay outside a religion, things done by lay people of that religion are seen irrational. Irrationality must be changed to be rationality. In this sense sometimes to defend the real spirit of religion, the scholars of religion have to point out that something performed by lay people is not right. We can see an example of the attempt done by the scholars of religion as said in Thailand through the work of scholar monks like Buddhadasa and Payutto Bhikkhus. In the belief of Thai Buddhist lay persons, karma is something that makes their life suffered unhappy events and they need to avoid it. When they come to a monk or a nun who is not a scholar of Buddhist teaching, they are advised to do something to change the karma, such as donating money to the monastery. According to the real teaching of Buddhism as given by the Buddha in the *Tipitaka*, this is

not right—no one in the world including the Buddha himself can change the karma. The roles of Buddhadasa and Payutto partly lie in their attempts to point out that this kind of belief adopted widely among Thai lay Buddhists are not right.

However, as Hinduism was first originated as a popular religion, the conflict between lay people and scholars in Hinduism is not strong as found in Buddhism. In the case of Buddhism, we see that the Buddha was the person to give rise to Buddhism. As the Buddha was intelligent person, his religion was intelligent as well. In the beginning stage, Buddhism was practiced by those who were intelligent people. Later, it came to the hands of lay people who did not know the real spirit of Buddhism as meant by their master. From this, we see that the history of Buddhism starts from the Buddha as intelligent person who had established Buddhism as intelligent religion; and later Buddhism became a popular belief adopted by lay people who did not know what exactly the Buddha taught. The scholars of Buddhism think it is their moral duty to bring Buddhism back to its real position. Sometimes they have to speak directly and reject the things performed by lay people strongly. But the history of Hinduism starts with lay people whose lives were forced by

some certain conditions to establish a kind of religious belief. These people were those who ‘created’ Hinduism. It could be said that at the beginning stage Hinduism was not an ‘intelligent’ religion in the sense we assign to Buddhism above. Later Hinduism came to scholars and they found that something in Hinduism needed improvements to be more profound in terms of philosophy. The roles of the Hindu scholars are not like the roles of the Buddhist scholars. It seems that in Hinduism, no scholar tries to point out that some of what performed by lay people are wrong.

The happening of Hinduism into this world, in a sense, could be compared with the happening of language. First of all, the language arose from some necessity. That is: the necessity to communicate the ideas between men. The creation of language is not a responsibility of one single man because language is the playing of a game, as mentioned by Wittgenstein. The development of human language is naturally directed by the environments surrounding people who play the language game. In some situation, people know from instinct that the best way to communicate their ideas and emotions is to invent some more details of the language rules. This results in the varieties of language rules depending on the varieties of the groups of peo-

ple who live in different surrounding circumstances. Language is not a private property of any person including those who claim to know how to use the good language. If we accept that language is the playing of a game, a concept of standard or good language is not possible.

In the same way, if we accept that religion like Hinduism can be compared with the playing of a game—within this context, it is a game of belief—the central authority to judge which is the standard belief is not possible as well. One of the best ways to look at Hinduism is to consider it as ‘life’ itself. This means that Hinduism and the life of people who ‘create’ it should not be deemed as separate things. In the view of Darwin, religion stems from human evolution; and evolution of human beings can be explained as the machinery for survival. It seems that the view of Darwin as said is best applicable to Hinduism.

Some critics of Hinduism, in Thailand most of them are Buddhists, state that the primitive form of religion as found in Hinduism was originated from *fear* and *ignorance*. In the state of nature, primitive men *did not know*: how and why natural phenomena such as the storm and the lightning are presented. This is the lack of knowledge. Naturally, when men or animals do not

know something which is frightening, they will fear it. In this sense fear and ignorance are closely related to each other. According to Darwin, fear is viewed as part of the machinery for survival. This can be explained through a very simple fact in our life: sometimes we fear the dark even though we know that there is nothing in it. Between fear and ignorance, it is very hard to judge which is the most basic. It seems that for the Buddhists who criticize Hinduism, such as Buddhadasa, ignorance is more basic. For this kind of person, Buddhism understands best: what is the root of fear. Buddhism and science, for Buddhadasa, share some similarities. For example, both of them try to seek knowledge for the reason that knowledge will destroy the problems in human life. In terms of religion, Buddhism, as understood by Buddhadasa, all the problems in human life can be summed up into: ignorance. Ignorance causes fear and fear includes a need to have a stable life, which can be used to explain the life of modern people in the present world as well.

To state that Hinduism in its primitive form arose from ignorance and fear could be unfair, as it could be possible that actually what happened at that time in the minds of those who ‘created’ Hinduism cannot be oversimplified into words like ‘fear’ and ‘ignorance.’ It

seems that the best and fair way to consider the origin of Hinduism is to deem it as what follows a thing called in Darwin's theory as the natural machinery for survival. It may be possible that fear and lack of knowledge concerning natural phenomena were presented in the minds of the Hindu people. But there must be another thing—for example, a sense of wonder concerning the universe.

I believe that Indian people are wise, otherwise they would not have created such wonderful things like religion, arts, science, and so on. D.T. Suzuki once said: Indian people have the habit to think. When they see things, they think. “Think” means: do not stop at the surface of things, but try to penetrate into their essence. Another nation having this habit is the Greek. The following are the results of the thinking of Indian people as said.

A Belief in Gods

The early form of Hinduism states that there are a lot of gods in the universe. These gods are believed to inhabit natural resources such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the ocean, the rivers, the earth, the rains, and so on. Some of us who live in the modern world could wonder why these people believe that there are gods when they cannot see them. To answer this question,

we need to understand what I have said above: Indian people are so wise. One time, Socrates said: suppose you see a tree. The existence of the tree does not depend on a fact that it is seen by you. On the contrary, a fact that you can see the tree depends on the existence of the tree. That is: there must be the tree first; and then you come to it and see it. The objective of the saying of Socrates is to point out that before we understand things we must generate the order of them: what comes first and what comes later.

Suppose you question the Hindu people: why did you believe that there are a lot of gods in the universe when you never saw them? I believe the following answer might be given by them. First of all, you should generate the order of things. Suppose you are seeing the tree. The first thing required is the existence of the tree. Suppose again that you are not seeing the tree. The same applies. That is your seeing and not seeing should be counted as the second thing while the existence and non-existence of the tree is the first thing. Simply speaking, in the case that you never saw gods all your life, this does not mean that gods do not exist. What you can claim from that is just: you never saw them. In terms of logic, it could be possible that Gods really exist, but you never saw them because they are

invisible. You may argue that your question just follows the following logical rule:

- (1) If the tree exists, you will see it.
- (2) The tree exists.
- (3) Therefore, you see it.

From above, we can apply:

- (1) If gods exist, you will see them.
- (2) It is not true that you see them.
- (3) Therefore, they do not exist.

Certainly, your argument is sound and valid in the light of Western logic. But according to the Indian who have another logical system themselves, your problem lies in the line: *If gods exist, you will see them.* This line is not true as there can be gods who are invisible. For the Hindu people, the above lines can be rewritten in the same Western logical style as follows.

(1) If you see gods, (*you can assume that*) gods exist (*and exist before you see them, like when you see a tree you can assume that the tree exists and exists before you see it.*)

- (2) It is not true that you see gods.
- (3) Therefore, it is not true that gods exist.

It is clearly seen that the above lines are false.

It should be noted that religion, including the religion which is claimed by its adherents not being based on faith but on reason like Buddhism, always has

some teachings which refer to a number of things that cannot be observed by human eyes. In the *Bible*, Paul said that no one including him ever saw God. But this is not a problem at all because we can touch God through another thing: *faith*. According to Hindu people, gods as said are not visible; but this is not a problem as there is another way to touch gods: *their works*.

The works of gods, in the view of Hindu people, have a close relation to one thing: *life*. That is: life found in the world has been supported by the works of gods. Consider the following example. A farmer plants a mango tree. When he places the seed into the earth, we can say that the earth is needed to give life to the mango tree. Then he gives it water which comes from the rain. So, we can say as well that the rain is needed to give life to the mango tree. Besides the earth and the rain, another thing is need as well—such as the air. From these things, the mango tree has been given its life. The question is: can we use other things to replace the earth, the water, and the air to make the mango tree alive. No, we can never do that. For this reason, these things must have some *divine powers* in the view of Hinduism.

The belief in gods dwelling in natural resources can

be seen in other places besides India. For example, the American Indians are reported to share this view as well. One time, the American president sent a letter to Chief Seattle, a leader of Indians, saying that his government needed to buy the land of the Indians. In the letter sent back from the chief, it was stated that selling and buying the land was so strange thing in the view of Indians. In the view of Indians, the land is the mother of man; so selling her is something unbearable. They said further that the sky, the clouds, the rivers, the fields, the flowers, the rocks, and so on... are their brothers and sisters.

I think the best way to understand the belief in natural gods of Hindu people is to understand it like a thing said by Chief Seattle above. In this sense, it is not fear or ignorance that causes the Hindu people believe in those supernatural entities. On the contrary, it is their deep understanding how much their lives depend on these things. Normally, the belief in natural gods among Hindu people is the origin of their beautiful rituals and cultures. For example, the river in the view of Hinduism is not just a physical entity. In this sense, the great rivers like the Ganges are deemed as the great mother. The life of Hindu people, from the very distant past to present, could be said to have the

Ganges as significant part. Consider the following picture below.



The picture was taken currently. For those who used to visit India regularly, this kind of picture is very common. It can be seen everywhere especially in the areas where the Ganges runs through them. For those who stand outside and watch, this kind of activity could be questioned many things. At the time of the Buddha, as recorded in the Buddhist texts, the Buddha himself tried to argue against the bathing in the Ganges as something cannot be explained through

reason. The Buddha questioned the Hindu people, “What are you doing?” They said, “Bathing in the holy river, sir.” The Buddha questioned further, “For what?” They replied, “To wash away our sins so that we will join the heaven with gods after death, sir.” The Buddha said, “If being in the Ganges would lead the person to heaven, I afraid the fish, the turtles, the crabs, and so on in the Ganges might be in the heaven as well because they live in the Ganges; and for me they have done great goodness more than you because they bathe in the Ganges all the time.”

Note that the way used by the Buddha in considering what done by the Hindu people is unique and we know that this follows the general spirit of Buddhism which is rationalist. The Buddha did not see a causal relation between bathing in the Ganges and the taking away of sins. That is, sins are not physical objects, so they can never be washed away by water. If a person needs to wash away his sins, he should practice something which is mental development because sins are placed in the person’s mind. The washing away of sins must be understood in terms of mental development. But the Hindu people understand it as if it were physical phenomenon, the Buddha criticizes.

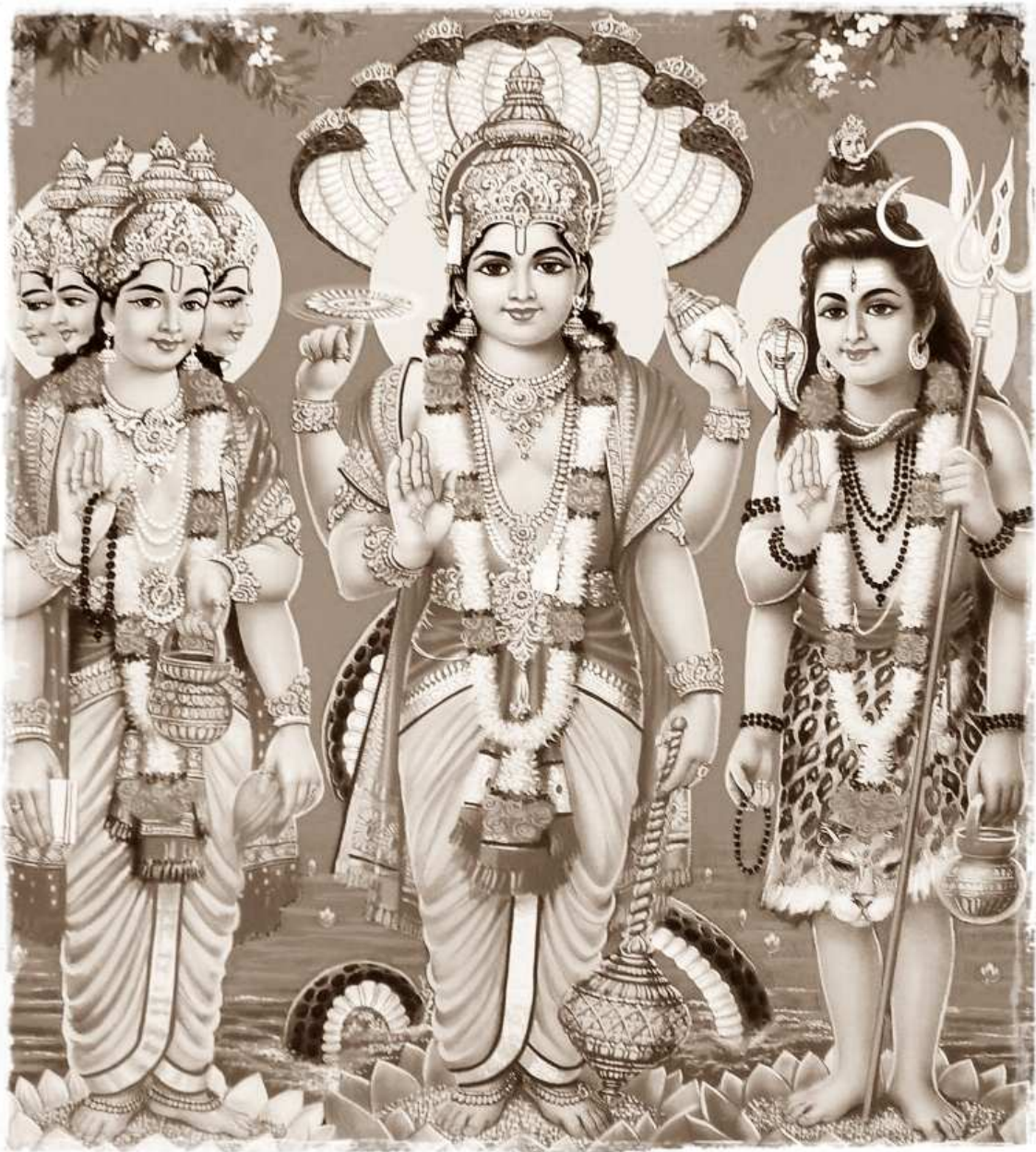
I think I understand the Buddha because I am a

Buddhist. However, to be fair to Hinduism, we should consider the matter from the view of the insider—I consider the critique of the Buddha against bathing in the Ganges above as something done from an outsider person. It seems that any attempt to look at other's action that is derived from faith is inclined to be based on reason, or rational thinking, more or less. In terms of reason, the saying of the Buddha follows a very simple truth: if there is a causal relation between bathing in the Ganges and the birth in the heaven, this truth must include animals living in the Ganges as well, besides human beings. The way used by the Buddha in denying the Hindu belief as said is well known in logic as 'proof by showing that it is absurd to claim like that.' However, in the view of the insider, sometimes we cannot look at such actions through the eye of reason because those actions are performed not from reason but from other things such as faith. The difference between animals in the Ganges and the Hindu who bathe in the Ganges is that the former do not have any religious faith while the latter have. So, the argument proposed by the Buddha has reduced all into only one single dimension: being in the water. But we know that for the Hindu themselves, it is not just being in the water; it is an action performed to express their deep

faith in religion. When we see a man chanting, maybe he is Buddhist, that is not just verbal exercise, as the later term denotes only physical meaning, and does not cover spiritual meaning. There are spiritual dimensions in bathing in the Ganges, so to criticize it as an action conveying physical meaning only is not fair.

Gods in Hinduism are of two types. The first one is those who have the big roles as the creator, the protector, and the destroyer of the universe; and the second one is those who perform smaller roles such as giving the rains to men, animals, and plants. The god who creates the universe is called Brahma. The god who protects the universe is called Vishnu. And the god who destroys everything is called Shiva. In the picture below, the first god is Brahma. Note the he has four faces. The next one is Vishnu. And the last one, who has a snake on his neck, is Shiva. This kind of picture is very popular in India. The idea that the thing that we have seen must have someone or something as the creator can be said a matter of commonsense. You have a cup of tea in your hand. You know that it must be made by some human being(s). It is not possible to have a cup of tea which is not created by someone or something in the world. This is a matter of commonsense. In the same way, the Hindu believe that this

universe, or narrowly speaking—this world, must have someone or something as its creator. Normally, the person or the thing playing the role as the creator of anything must be intelligent. In this sense, Brahma deserves such a position: the creator of the universe, as he is the most intelligent being.



The four faces of Brahma, in my view, could be interpreted as highly intelligent. Normally, the person who creates the car, for instance, is more intelligent than the person who takes care of it. In this sense, the person who creates the universe can be understood as more intelligent than those who protect and destroy it. Why does the universe need protection? This can be answered by commonsense as well. If you have a car, you need to maintain it. Certainly, you are not the creator of the car; but you need to take care of it because it is not possible to make things that can function well eternally. Even though Brahma tries extremely to create the universe that functions well by itself, the complicated conditions to happen in the future could interfere with the functioning of the universe. In this sense, we see why the universe needs Vishnu as the protector, like we need the engineer to take care of our car.

The world needs protection from Vishnu in two main areas: physical and moral. And these two dimensions are closely related in the view of the Hindu. Actually, all Indian religions believe that this universe does not have physical meaning only. The pollution created by man to this world, thus, is not deemed as merely physical event. It fully conveys moral meaning,

as well. Or we can say that according to Hinduism and other Indian religions such as Buddhism, immorality in Humankind is the main cause of the possible collapse of the whole world. Before we would destroy the world in terms of physicality, for example causing pollution to the world; we would have some kind of mind or attitude that can be said being corrupted. Without it, the harm to the world would not have been created.

From above, Hinduism is of opinion that when Brahma has created the world and humankind already, he lets human beings deal with the world freely. To use modern philosophical term, he lets man possess free will to choose, including 'to choose *badly*.' It is not difficult to create man to be born good by their nature. But if Brahma does so, human beings would not be different from robots. Certainly, if we have human beings who cannot do evils because they are 'programmed' to have only 'good nature;' this world might be safe. But Brahma does not value such safety as it requires that human beings must be mechanical robots without free will. He needs human beings to be free creatures. And he knows that to have such a thing, the world could be at risk as human beings must have the potential to be immoral as it is part of having free will. Finally, Brahma decides to create this world as some-

thing that can be corrupted by human mind; and lets everything run on its way.

As mind is the key concept to play the role behind the rise and fall of human civilization and the world, the key role of Vishnu as the protector of the world is mainly related to human mind. Shortly speaking, Vishnu is believed to teach moral lessons to human beings through various forms such as the form of religious masters. Note that according to some Hindu people, the masters of other religions besides Hinduism, such as the Buddha of Buddhism, could be counted as Vishnu incarnate as far as we accept that the truths in Hinduism are universal in the sense that they can be expressed through any language, culture, place, time, and so on—depending on surrounding conditions.

In the history of Hinduism, they believe that one time in the distant past Vishnu was reincarnated as Krishna to give the moral lessons to Arjuna, one of the great warriors in the holy war between the good and the bad persons according to the Hindu belief—Arjuna belongs to the good side. The above story is recorded in the *Bhagavadgita*, which is the one among the great religious texts of Hinduism. In the story, Arjuna was confused whether or not he should fight against the

enemy because ‘that side’ was his beloved friends and relatives. The whole content of the *Bhagavadgita* is intended to show that goodness in Hinduism is nothing but the following of moral duties given to a person by the god. And in this case, the god is Vishnu. Vishnu is reincarnated to lead Arjuna to the right way—the way set up by Vishnu himself. In Indian tradition, we usually find that the great epics like the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* are basically based on the Hindu belief in the reincarnation of Vishnu as moral heroes.

Even though Vishnu has attempted extremely to lead the whole world to the right way, finally it could be possible that the world reaches some point that goes beyond his abilities to bring them back. If the world is in such a state, Vishnu will stop his duties and give the next task to Shiva. The whole duty of Shiva is to destroy the world. There are not details concerning the process of destroying the universe performed by Shiva. In terms of philosophy, we know that anything in the world cannot stay forever. Everything begins, stays, and then decays. In this sense, we understand that the idea concerning the duties of three gods in Hinduism follows such a truth.

It seems that our commonsense tells that in creating something we need a thing called *art* and *science*, while

we do not need such a thing in destroying things. There are some people in the world knowing how to create books, but all know how to destroy them. However, the idea that the destruction of the whole universe is given in the hands of Shiva seems to suggest that the above commonsense cannot be applied to the destruction of the universe because it is the great destruction which needs some kinds of art and science.

Look at the sun. One day it must be unusable according to the second law of thermodynamics. The death of the sun will lead to the death of the planets orbiting around it, including our earth. It seems that the scientist, who believes in the second law of thermodynamics, does not believe that the sun will be usable again. Bertrand Russell himself strongly claims that! But according to Hinduism, the death of the sun, if it is included as one of the tasks of Shiva in the great destruction of the universe, is different from what believed in science. Shiva does not merely stop the sun, but stops in such a way that it would be back again when Brahma needs it.

Shortly speaking, the belief in the different roles of three gods in Hinduism suggests that the whole universe is given in the circle of arising, staying, and decaying; and then arising again. There is no such a thing

called the *absolute death of the universe*, which is believed among some modern scientists. In this sense, the universe according to Hinduism seems to be endless process of things, or endlessly changing of seasons. In a micro scale, a human life can be compared with the universe. It is like seasons. Death is not the end; but the new beginning. If there would be a thing called the absolute death in a person's life; that would be found only when the individual soul of the person has reached the highest perfection and became part of the universal soul of gods.

A Belief in Caste System

The belief in the caste system counts as one of major characteristics of Hinduism; and this belief has both *positive* and *negative* sides. We will start with its positive side as it is really needed by those who gave rise to it in the distant past. In the Hindu texts, it is stated that when Brahma has created human beings, he thinks that it would be good to create them different. The community of man is viewed by Brahma not differently from one single organism such as the body system of a human being. Any person has different parts of body that work differently. We have mouth to eat, feet to walk, hands to hold things, etc. Exactly, the difference between parts of body should not be viewed

as inequality, but harmony. It is harmony in the sense that to have happiness the whole organism needs every part; and needs it to perform suitable tasks designed specially for it.

According to the caste system, human beings are divided into four classes: the Brahmin, the warrior, the commoner, and the slave. The role of the first class is to act as religious teacher; the second class, to rule the country; the third class, to run economic activities; and the fourth, to serve the above three classes. As class is determined by religion as holy position, it cannot be changed. That is: a person has to belong to the certain class by blood. The children of the parents who are slave must be slave as their ancestors.

Even though the original setting up of the caste system has nothing to do with inequality, later the caste system was corrupted by those who belong to upper classes: the Brahmin and the warrior. As the result of such corruption, the slave was made and treated not different from animals. In the Hindu law, the slave cannot have education and he was excluded from all religious activities. It is said in the Hindu texts that the slave differs from three upper classes in that while the three upper classes have the right to join the religious community, the slave has no such a right.

The corruption of the caste system as said later was rejected strongly by Hindu thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi. For Gandhi, it is not possible for the god who creates human beings to put the slave within such a misery. It seems that as the result of long development of social culture, it is not possible for anybody in India to totally reject the caste system, including charismatic persons like Gandhi. The highest thing that can be done is to point out that the original objectives of the caste system are not intended to put the slave in a misery as seen. Today, Indian law does not support the caste system. However, in terms of culture, it remains strong not differently from the past. In terms of culture, Gandhi can accept the existence of the classes under the condition that classes were made by the god as the division of labors and has nothing to do with inequality. The slave must be treated as the son of god, like others.

In political philosophy, there is a political theory concerning the right of the king to rule the country called the *divine right theory*. According to this theory, only the king has the moral right to rule people because when God has created the world, He intends to give such a right to the king, and not to others. Moreover, as the earth was created by God, it is God only

can be said being the owner of the land. As the owner, God has an exclusive right to give the earth to the king and let the king rule the land on behalf of Him. In the West, Christianity is the source of such a claim. In India Hinduism plays the similar role as said.

For modern people, the caste system is something very hard to defend. We accept that the division of labors is needed, but we do not accept that those who are the workers should be workers forever. The sons of workers, who are intelligent and have talent, deserve higher positions than their ancestors. In a free society, this is common phenomenon. It is not right to keep people permanently in their social positions as their ancestors. The caste system does not allow such a moral right. There are a number of religions in India, for example Buddhism, that do not accept the caste system of Hinduism. The Buddha says, “When the king does good things, he is a good person. He counts the good person not because he is the king, but because he does the good things. In the same way, when a slave does good things, he is the good person as well. He is the good person not because he is slave, but because he does good things. Goodness done by kings and slaves shares the same moral qualities. So, being a king or a slave has no meaning in terms of morality. In

this sense, we should not base our society on such a system—the system which values people from their social positions.”

Even though the caste system has been criticized violently by religions like Buddhism or by modern social thoughts like democracy, it persists firmly in India in terms of culture. To understand the caste system, the best way is to conceptualize it as culture. In Thailand, we have Buddhist monks. Sometimes people from the West come to Thailand and question, “Who are these people?” When they are informed that the monks do not run business; lay people support them in terms of economy and sometimes it could be possible that monks are in better economic condition than lay people (for example—live in better housing and eating better food), they think, “Thai people are strange. They respect beggars.” Actually, Buddhist monks could be deemed as beggars as they live on what people give. However, to understand the position of Buddhist monks, knowledge concerning Thai culture is needed. Looking from Thai culture, Buddhist monks are not beggars, but religious masters. The respect of classes found in India, especially among those who are of the lower ones, could be best understood not differently from what we have said concerning Buddhist

monks in Thai society.

Four Objectives in Life

Hinduism in a sense could be deemed as social norms. That is: it deeply affects the ways of life of Hindu people. One among these is: the *four objectives of life*, called in Sanskrit as '*purushartha*' which literally means good things for man. As we know, there is one important ethical question generally posted in ethical circle: what should be counted as the good thing for life? Some philosophical system suggests sensual pleasure; while some says it should be things other than sensual pleasure such as wisdom, enlightenment, and so on. In Hinduism, this question has a clear answer: the following four things are good for human life. They are: *knowledge, sensual pleasure, morality, and freedom*. These four words are translations of *artha, kama, dharma, and moksha* respectively.

Artha, the first objective of life, has been explained as something to be gained when the person's age was about 0-20 years. The simple meaning of this objective of life is that the person at this stage of life has duties to study subjects that will benefit his/her life in terms of career in the future. It can be said that this objective of life is nothing but the preparation for economic life in the future. Good jobs require good knowledge—this

is very simple truth and Hinduism understands it.

Kama, as the second objective of life, has been designed for the person who passed the first step of life and now is living a household life. At this stage of life, the person was advised to marry and enjoy a couple life. Sex is not deemed as an evil in Hinduism. On the contrary, it has been viewed as a gift presented to man by god. That is: when Brahma creates human beings, he has put sexual instinct inside human life. When the proper time arrives, we should enjoy it and there is no any evil in enjoying this thing as far as it is performed morally. The following picture was taken from a Hindu temple in India. It is the picture of sexual enjoyment as the second objective in human life.

Note that this picture was given at the temple, meaning that Hinduism does not think that it is an evil, otherwise it can never be placed at the temple. On the contrary, being given at the tem-



ple seems to suggest that it was deemed to give some useful lessons for people who came to the temple—at least in terms of sexual education.

Actually kama has the meaning wider than sex. It includes all worldly pleasures. Having a good family and friendship is counted as part of kama. According to Hinduism, god has created men to be social animals, meaning that human beings will not be lonely as far as they live peacefully together. Marriage is a kind of friendship between human beings. It is given by Brahma as an instinct to reduce loneliness in life. Between man and woman, there are some things given by god as instruments to unite them, and sex is included. The proper use of sex is viewed by Hinduism as a good thing. Sex is deemed as a thing to be performed on the basis of love and mutual understanding between the husband and the wife. In some religious tradition, sexual relationship between husband and wife that performed purely to have sexual excitement is considered as an evil. We would not find such a view in Hinduism. According to Hindu ethics, sex and reproduction sometimes can be separated. That is: god does not create sex for the purpose of reproduction of humankind only. In short, god has created sensual organs such as the eye to be used for the purpose of both utility and enjoyment. The utility of sex is reproduction. But along with this utility, god allows us to use it sometimes purely for the purpose of enjoyment.

There is a set of Hindu religious literary works dealing with kama, called the *Kama Shastra*. Among them, one of the most well-known is a book named the *Kama Sutra*, written by a great saint of Hinduism. One of the main arguments given in the book states that it is not right to conclude that sex found in man and animal are of the same qualities; and it is not right to say that for religious person, sex is dirty thing. On the contrary, the author argues, sex in human life can be used as a means to some good end: the perfect life. It seems that for Hinduism the four objectives of life could be compared with the stairs leading higher to the perfection of life, meaning that a person cannot jump over some step as the lower one plays the role as the basis for getting the higher one. In this sense, sex plays the role as the end in itself and the means to higher objectives of life which are morality and freedom.

The third objective of life, morality, is called in Sanskrit (the original language used to record the classical Hindu texts) as dharma. This word has a variety of meanings. In this context, it means: the gradual development of the soul. Note that the former two objectives of life (artha and kama) are mainly involved with material dimension of human life. Even though the Hindu ethics does not reject material world and mate-

rial pleasure to happen in man's life, these things, finally, are deemed as something to be abandoned if the person needs to get higher stages of life. Unlike artha and kama, dharma has nothing related to material world and material dimension in human life. It is spiritual one. Spirituality here means something that leads a person's life to freedom of the mind. Hinduism has an opinion that by nature man has been created to attach himself to the world. The world here means everything that surrounds human life such as family, country, and so on. Attachment causes a feeling of 'mine.' We naturally have a feeling of 'my life, my family, my country, my culture, and so on.' The first two objectives of life (artha and kama) are included in the objects of attachment as said, as well. In this sense, finally they are things to be abandoned when a person arrives at some stage of life as they are the bondage of life.

Hinduism divides human life into four steps as related to ages and the objectives of life which are suitable for each age as follows.

(1) First step: after birth-20 years; this should be used to gain knowledge (artha). This step is called in Sanskrit as *Brahmacariya* which means the age of student.

(2) Second step: 21-60 years; this should be used to

gain sensual pleasure (kama). This step is called *Grihastha* which means the age of householder.

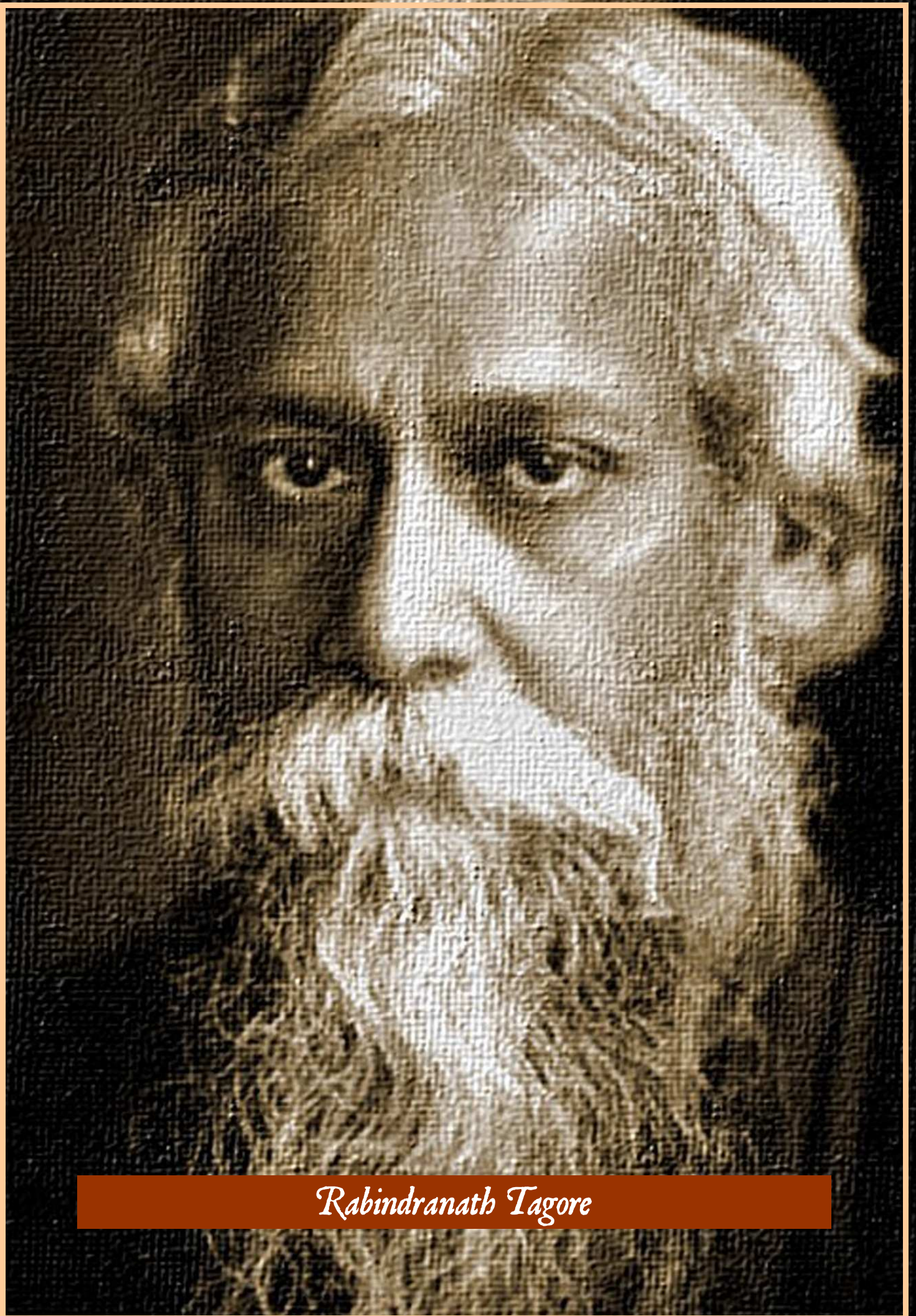
(3) Third step: 61-65 years; this should be used to gain morality (dharma). This step is called *Vanaprastha* which means the age of forest-dweller.

(4) Fourth step: 66 years-death; this should be used to gain freedom of the mind (moksha). This step is called *Sanyasi* which means the age of the wanderer.

From above, we see that the age of the third step onwards is later age of the person; so it is right for the person of this age to abandon all sensual pleasures in life to dedicate the whole life to spiritual happiness. Morality is the study of religious teaching and contemplation. The elder in Hindu tradition is hoped to devote entire life for the study of religious teaching; and one day when the process of self-realization as been completed the next task to do is to wander through the lands to share the light of dharma with other who needs and die in peace.

In practice, we cannot hope all Hindu people doing the above things completely, especially in this century. However, ideally the Hindu people have the tradition to look at their life through these four objectives of life which suggest that material wealth is not the end of life. It is just a means to have temporary sensual happi-

ness in this material world. There are other worlds beyond this material world. The person should learn to prepare him/herself to be born in those worlds. As Jesus says, wealth makes men turn away from the heaven. In Hinduism, they think of wealth in the same manner. We live in this world just to prepare ourselves to stay in some better places after death.



Rabindranath Tagore

Chapter Two

Scholarly Hinduism



Scholarly Hinduism here means Hinduism as understood by the Hindu scholars—a word intended to include Hindu thinkers, poets, philosophers, and so on. It differs from popular Hinduism mainly in that the purpose in exploring Hinduism undertaken by these scholars is to show the most rational form of Hinduism. In the circle of philosophy around the world now, including Thailand, there is a philosophical subject widely taught: Indian philosophy. It could be said that Hinduism as explored in Indian philosophy and scholarly Hinduism are much identical. Both of them are based on the study of Hinduism made by the great thinkers of Hinduism such as Radhakishnan, Tagore, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and so on. As the contents given in scholarly Hinduism are so vast, it is not possible here to explore all of them; we would choose some important characteristics accepted

by all of the Hindu scholars as basic manners of Hindu philosophy as follows.

Impersonal God

We learn from popular Hinduism that there are many gods and three of them play the important roles in creating, protecting, and destroying the universe. Gods in popular Hinduism are natural creatures. They have form or body that can be seen by human beings. Basically, gods of this type are not seen by people; and this makes Hinduism criticized by other religions in Indian society such as Buddhism as a religion believing in things that really do not exist. In Buddhist texts, the Buddha questions Hindu people, “Among you or your masters, is there anyone who has seen Brahma with his or her own eyes?” When the people answer “no sir,” the Buddha states that the belief in Brahma then is irrational.

The simplest way to reject some religious beliefs (such as the life after death, hells, heaven, gods, God) is to say that such things cannot be seen, or no one in the world has ever seen them. Scholarly Hinduism was partly developed by the Hindu thinkers as the result of criticism from other religions as said. In terms of reason, we know that something can be accepted rational even though it cannot be proved by sense experience.

The Hindu thinkers think that to make a belief in gods as found in popular Hinduism look rational, there is a need to develop the concept of gods.

For the person who believes that God is the person to create the universe, sometimes the question: “Who is the person to create God?” was inevitably faced. It is rational to question about the creator of God because those who believe that God is the creator of the universe always claim that anything seen in the world cannot happen without its cause or creator. So, the universe needs something or somebody as its creator. Unfortunately, they are not aware that God can be placed inside the empire of things that need creator as well. When Hindu people say that Brahma is the creator of the universe, Buddhists usually question, “Who creates Brahma?” If the Hindu says that Brahma does not need the creator, the Buddhist will respond, “If so, the universe does not necessarily need the creator as well!”

From above, we see that there are two theories concerning the happening of the universe. The first one states that the universe needs the creator or some kind of origin, while the second one states that we do not need the concept of creator to explain the existence of things in the universe. Both theories have their own reasons. For those who believe in the first theory, the

reason to support the theory is: we have never seen anything happening without causes, or we have never seen anything that creates itself. Everything must have something or some condition causing it to occur in this world. For this reason, we have no way to explain the existence of the universe other than the theory that the universe must have its creator.

For those who believe in the second theory, it may be true that everything that we have seen in our lives always has its cause or condition; but whenever we claim that “this thing is the creator of the universe” we are forced to confront the question: “who creates such a creator?” So, the best way is: just recognize the existence of things as they are and never postulate about the creator of things if we need to avoid such a problem.

In the history of Indian thought, Buddhism accepts the second theory while Hinduism accepts the first one. The scholars of Hinduism are of the opinion that we can retain the theory that the universe has its creator and answer those who argue against the theory that “who creates the creator?” The following are their arguments.

First, we need to re-conceptualize the world ‘creator.’ In popular Hinduism, the creator of the universe

is Brahma, who is a god among gods. At least Brahma has his body—the divine body that can be seen by human eyes. In later literature such as *The Bhagavadgita*, it is claimed that there is one supreme God to create the universe and this God is the single form that includes all three main gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. That is: these three gods are the different manifestations of one single God: Brahman. In the new theory, the difference between *Brahma* and *Brahman* just lies in that the former is counted as a god among gods (and within this understanding, there is no highest God), while the latter is counted as the Supreme God or the Master of gods. However, both of them are personal in the sense that they have bodies that can be seen by human eyes.

Bodies need their creator, like material things we have seen in daily life. So, those who accept the theory that the universe does not need the creator are still able to question: how the body of Brahman was created? Suppose we explain that ultimately the Brahman has no form and the one that has the form is secondary, not primary one; the above question is no more usable.

Consider empty space before us or in the universe. It exists. But no one can question: how this empty space was formed. The space does not need the creator. This kind of idea leads to the creation of the theory

concerning the nature of Brahman. According to this theory, Brahman has two forms. The first form is called in Sanskrit as *Nirguna Brahman*, which literally means God without body. The second form is *Saguna Brahman*, which means God who has the body that can be seen by human eyes. To understand this Hindu theory of God, note that God in the *Old Testament* could be compared with Saguna Brahman; and God in the *New Testament*, as referred to by Paul “God is love,” could be compared with Niraguna Brahman.

Once Einstein was questioned, “Did you believe in God?” Einstein rejected God that appears in the *Old Testament*, everybody knows this. However, this does not mean that Einstein completely rejects all theories concerning God. For the above question, Einstein said that he believes in God as given in the philosophy of Spinoza.

Spinoza’s God is not personal God, the God that has body and can love or hate men, as found in the *Old Testament*. But this God is something that we have never seen with our eyes. Why we need to accept this God? Spinoza replies: “Because if we do not accept the existence of this God, we would not be able to explain how the beauty and harmony of things in the universe is formed.” We know that Newton clearly says in his

great book, *Principia*, that God is the person playing the roles behind the beauty and harmony of the universe. In the views of Hindu thinkers such as Gandhi and Tagore, God in Hinduism in His/Its ultimate nature is not the Holy Person, but the Great Thing playing the role behind the beauty and harmony of things in this wonderful universe.

God as the Source of Moral Strength

Mahatma Gandhi plays an important role in human history not because he is the great politician. But we know that his political power was so great, and because of this great power, the British Empire was forced to know that they were wrong in taking India as their colony. On the roundtable talk for the possibility to free India, some British politician questioned Gandhi, “Why we the British should follow your suggestion—free India?” Gandhi smiled and said, “Because it is never right to walk into the land of other and take it as your personal property. India belongs to Indian people, and not the British.”

In the history of humankind, we usually find that the way people largely used to free their country from the colonialist country is to use political violence. But Gandhi has shown that there is other way which is more powerful and non-violent. He called this way as

ahimsa way. The word ‘*ahimsa*’ is a Sanskrit word, meaning not using violence. In terms of the concept, the word ‘*ahimsa*’ is generally shared by all Indian religions including Buddhism. However, in terms of political practice, Gandhi seems to be the first person to apply it in actual political struggle; and he was greatly successful.

During the time of struggling against the British Empire, Gandhi had been imprisoned several times. About this, he said:

The Gita is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went disappointed. I find a solace in the Bhagavad-Gita that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad-Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of exter-

nal tragedies—and if they have left no visible or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavad-Gita.

From above, we clearly see that *The Bhagavadgita* is the spiritual source of moral strength in Gandhi. Normally, people are of the view that politics is a dirty thing and in political activities we can never find good things as found in religious activities. Gandhi does not think so. According to him, politics can be seen as a means to some good ends such as freedom of the country from the invasion of other country, as in the case of India at his lifetime. Gandhi usually says that religion and politics should not be separated. Actually he believes that religious teaching has the potential to make politics clean and right. The great politician is the one whose soul is deeply rooted in religious belief.

Why does the politician need religious belief? For Gandhi, it depends on how we define a word ‘politician.’ This word, if means a good means to some good end, requires something that plays the role in pointing out that there are some objectives in human life to be attained in the name of the community. That is: politics is the way to deal with people who live together in the community in such a way that all of them will attain the good goals in their lives and these things cannot be achieved without community. Like Confucius, Gandhi

thinks that a community is needed if the person wants to be cultivated as the good and free person. The struggle against the British Empire is not the end in itself. But it is the starting point to have a community as the place where people have to be cultivated by their *own culture*. This is why Indian people should fight against the British Empire.

In normal political activity, evils like anger, violence, and so on seem to be accepted as normal things. But in the view of Gandhi, if we need our political activities to be something pure and right, these things must not have been allowed. Gandhi said to the Indian people, who thought that in struggling against the British Empire, violence could not be avoided, that this idea was wrong. For him, in real political activities, there is no anyone deserving a position as our enemy. The British are not enemies of Indian people. In fighting against them, Indian people should look at them as human beings; and fighting in this context is nothing but a way to point out that the British did not have any right to rule India because India belongs to Indian people, and not the British.

Moral strength does not necessarily express itself through a political activity alone. Sometimes this thing could be found when a person faces moral dilemmas in

his or her life and finally they choose to follow the way suggested by religious belief. As Jesus says, “It is not possible for the person to be the slave of God and money at the same time,” meaning that we have to choose only one thing, the great persons of Hinduism like Mahatma Gandhi are those whose lives choose to follow the way of God. The following picture shows that what Mahatma Gandhi possessed in his life in terms of personal property. It is his little and simple house where he lived until his death. This is the house of one of the great men of the world. When he died, he did not have personal property for his children, except for this house.



What we have said above does not mean that according to Hinduism wealth is an evil in itself. It just means that sometimes to be a great person we should choose between wealth and other thing which is more valuable than wealth. In the history of some Indian religion like Buddhism, we have found that it is the millionaire who supports Buddhism. In such a case, Buddhism says that wealth is not an evil in itself. Man can use it either for good objective or the bad one. Sometimes wealth helps much in doing good thing, such as donating it for the benefit of poor people. However, the case of millionaires who support religions as said could be considered as not reaching its highest point—the point where the person faces the dilemma that forces him to choose only one thing between wealth and religion. The Buddha accepts that if the millionaire needs total freedom of life, *Nirvana*, he has to abandon his wealth, like himself who abandons all worldly properties to be a homeless wanderer. At this point, we see that wealth and good things according to religion cannot be the same, and the person has to choose only one thing.

In modern world, politics all over the world is in the hands of billionaires and this makes political activities become dirty things. Billionaires have only one thing:

money; but this thing has so great power as it has the great potential to control the human mind. We know that the weakest point in the mind of human beings is a thing called ‘greed.’ Money can buy the greed—that is, if you have enough money you can control people to do things that you need them to do under the very simple condition that “do it, then I will pay you!”

From above, we see that moral strength is something that helps people to be free from the influence of greed. If money cannot control the mind of person, everything in his life would go straight to right things. If he is a politician, be sure that he will be a good politician. If he is a policeman, be sure that he will be a good policeman. In this sense, moral strength has the vast potential to make human life and the world good and peaceful.

God as the Source of Artistic Inspiration

Indian society is well known as the land where arts have highly flourished for thousands of years. Indian music is so deep and beautiful, everyone knows this. Indian literature is very thoughtful, everyone knows this as well. But there are a few people knowing that behind the beauty of Indian arts as said, there is a religion called Hinduism playing the major role.

Compared with other Indian religions, Jainism and

Buddhism, Hinduism is unique in that there are so many artists creating highly beautiful artistic works as the persons who are inspired by Hinduism. It seems that when someone saying to you that “this is a great poet of India,” it is highly possible that such a poet is Hindu rather than Buddhist or Jain.

Why does Hinduism have the potential to bear artists more than Buddhism or Jainism? This question is very interesting. The following are my understanding and interpretation of the matter. First, as mentioned by Einstein himself, if a person has what Einstein calls ‘cosmic feeling’ (a feeling that the universe is so wonderful and hides so many mysteries that deserve investigation) he would have a chance to be a great scientist or artist more than the one who does not have this thing. The universe is a miracle in itself. How is the universe formed? This question is one among the biggest questions posted in the circle of philosophy. Some philosophers in the world try to answer this question and some do not. For those who do not try, this kind of question cannot be answered. Note that not answering this question is not a solution. It is just avoiding the question. Buddhism is well known as a religion which does not try to answer this kind of question. The Buddha gave a reason that it does not lead to the practice

to stop suffering in our lives. It might be true that this kind of question has nothing to do with the practice to eliminate suffering in human life. But something in human life counts 'important' not because it brings about utility. It seems that the cosmic feeling is the one among these 'useless' things. The scientist like Einstein needs to know how this universe was formed. Certainly, there is no any utility to be taken from this kind of knowledge. But there are a lot of human beings who feel that their lives should be devoted to the exploration of this kind of subjects.

Man is a limited thing. We are born with some limited capacities which prevent us from knowing everything. How to deal with such limitations? For religion like Buddhism, we should accept it and do not try to break it because that is not possible. But Hinduism does not accept this kind of attitude. The Hindu thinkers are those who believe that this universe deserves being a subject to be explored. It seems that the best way to understand the world of Hindu thinkers is to understand that this cosmic feeling is the origin of their work.

Totally, the universe is a beautiful thing. It is well arranged by *something* or *someone*. In this sense, the creator of the universe, be it whatever, must be the Great

Artist. The mountains, the ocean, the sky, the moon, the sun, the stars, and so on... are beautiful in themselves. Just look at natural flowers and compare with those created by human hands, we know that the latter can never be compared with the former. The feeling that the universe must be created by someone who deserves the position of the Great Artist can be said to be a great inspiration in creating artistic work of the Hindu artists. The following are poems written by Rabindranath Tagore. Note that how much the cosmic feeling playing the role behind the poet's thought.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one

sweet harmony—and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.

My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

*And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions,
knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.*

The above poems are taken from a book entitled “*Gitanjali*” which makes the poet the first Asian person to receive Nobel Prize for literature. In ‘Introduction’ of the book, written by another Nobel poet, William Butler Yeats, the author expresses his feeling about the reading of the manuscript of “*Gitanjali*” as follows.

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics— which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my live long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something

even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.

It should be noted that what is extremely needed in artistic creation is emotion, and never reason. The moon in the eyes of scientists is just a small planet that orbits around our earth. The scientific analysis of the moon provides them a number of facts about the moon, and these facts have nothing to do with its es-
thetical characteristics. It could be said that reason gives us a kind of knowledge that can be called '*realist knowledge*.' The main knowledge in Buddhism is of this kind. On the contrary, the moon that appears to the eyes of the poet like Tagore has another meaning. The moon that shines its subtle light to the world is a miracle. Why it is created to orbit around our world and with such a subtle light? From the poet's point of view, the moon seems to be a gift from 'someone' who knows best how to arrange things in the universe. In short, knowledge about the moon in the view of artist is not realistic as said above, but the *romantic* one.

The question is: can we create artistic work from realistic knowledge? To answer this question, we need some imagination. Suppose you are asked to write a poem concerning the atoms that you have observed through a microscope (suppose they are observable!).

Can you do that? Even though it is not easy to answer the question, we know from commonsense that compared with writing a poem concerning the sunset over the ocean, the latter one is of more easiness. Why? Because knowledge appearing from the seeing of the sunset is the romantic one.

In the philosophy of art, there are two main theories concerning the nature of art which are different. The first one states that art is a production of human brain, or mind if the latter term is more preferred. The statement ‘art is the production of human mind’ means ‘in the happening of any artistic work, there is only man involved and there is nothing supernatural or beyond man playing the role behind.’ In Darwin’s book, *The Descent of Man*, he says that artistic creation found in man is not a thing that makes man differ from animals, as he believes that artistic expression is based on entertaining instinct which is shared by man and animals. Note that according to Darwin, art is created from instinct. That is: man creates art because his inner instinct commands him to do so and the role of art-making can be ultimately explained in terms of something that supports the survival of man—art makes us feel happy to live in this world!

According to this theory, as art depends deeply on

the nature of those who create art, if there is an alien coming from other planet and he has another nature differing from us, his concept of art must be different from us. In this sense, a thing called ‘universal art’ or ‘universal beauty’ does not exist.

In the view of second theory, it is true that man creates art from his mind, but this does not mean that in creating art there is man only involved. Art is something so subtle. It can move our thought and emotion, like religion. If we accept that this beautiful universe is something requiring the creator because if there is no such a thing we will not be able to explain how such a beautiful thing happens, we would accept that in creating art there must be something playing the role behind the human mind, as well.

Tagore deeply believes that he alone cannot write poetry. It could be possible that man alone can play the language game concerning how to write a poem, and as the result of that he is successful in writing a poem. But, in the view of Tagore, such a poem is just a series of words well arranged as the author knows the rules of poetry-writing. If the quality to make something a poem is *artistic soul*, that series of words is not a poem because it does not have such a soul.

In Hindu philosophy, God or Brahman has three

major properties called in Sanskrit as: *sat cidananda*. The first property, *sat*, means God is *Being*: meaning that God really exists as a kind of being. The second property, *cit*, means that God is given or expresses itself as *Consciousness*. According to this property, ultimate nature of God is not material; God does not have a form to be perceived, but still has the potential to become perceivable when it is needed. The third property, *ananda*, means God is *Joyfulness* in itself and has the potential to bring about joyfulness to those who understand and appreciate God's existence.

The last property of God is believed to be related to two faculties in man: *moral* and *esthetical*. Morality in the view of Hinduism is the joyfulness in goodness, and esthetics the joyfulness in artistic beauty. Note that in Hinduism man is the descendant of God; that is: the Soul of God is divided to be the soul found in each man. There is a very popular statement mentioning the relationship between the Soul of God and the soul of man in Hinduism: "*tat tvam asi*," which is literally translated as: "You are Him." This means that everyman in the world is God, in the sense that his soul once has been part of the Soul of God.

A belief that the soul in man is part of God plays the important role in the Hindu view concerning morality

and art. In morality, goodness according to Hinduism begins when a person has realized that he is part of God. As God is the pure being, his duty to follow in God's footsteps is to attempt to keep his soul pure as God. In the same way, artistic beauty in Hinduism begins when the artist has realized that he is part of God. God is the Greatest Artist of the universe, so to be an artist is to imitate God, this is the most direct and simplest way.

Relationship between Man and God

There is a Hindu text that plays the important role behind modern thinkers in Hinduism as said previously. It is the *Upanishad*. The *Upanishad* is a collection of holy texts which contains hundreds of individual book. The theme of *Upanishad* is mainly concerned with the relationship between man and God. The following are some essential thoughts derived from the *Upanishad*.

First of all, it might be well to understand that a man in the view of the *Upanishad* is composed of three main components: the body, the mind, and the soul. The body is not problematic as we best understand what it is. The problem seems to be: what is the different between the mind and the soul? Shortly speaking, in the view of Hindu philosophy, which is *Upanishad*-

inspired, the mind belongs to the body while the soul is something unique in itself and does not belong to the body at all. To understand the difference between the mind and the soul according to Hinduism, we need to start with the Hindu view concerning the nature of body and soul. Matter and God are both separate realities. That is: there are two things existing in the universe and both of them do not have the creator. In Hindu philosophy, God does not create matter. Matter, called in Sanskrit as *prakriti*, is uncreated like God. It is said in the Hindu tale of the creation of the universe by God that God just collects matter and forms it to be the stars, the suns, and so on. It is also said that if there is no matter already existing in the universe, God cannot create anything, because in creating things materials are needed, like in making a chair we need materials such as wood.

It is interesting that matter in the view of Hinduism can evolve itself to be something intelligent. In this sense, the theory of evolution which states that ‘all living things on earth have evolved from non-living matter’ has no any conflict with Hinduism. The process of evolution from non-living matter to living organism gives rise to three things: mind, intelligence, and sense of ego, called in Sanskrit as *mano*, *buddhi*, and *ahamkara*

respectively. According to Hindu philosophy, especially the one which holds the evolutionist view like the Sankhya school, matter consists of two parts. The first part is matter that evolves to be living-entities, and the second part is the one that has not yet evolved. Plants and stones differ in that the former belongs to the first category while the latter belongs to the second category. However, ultimately there is no difference between these two kinds of matter as both of them share the potential to evolve itself to be living-entity. The stones could be living-entity some day in the distant future when the condition is ready.

Plants, animals, and men are three kinds of living-entity in the world. Plants have three evolutionary qualities that we have considered above: mind, intelligence, and sense of ego. However, plants do not have the soul. Animals and men also possess the above evolutionary qualities, and Hinduism explains that these qualities have nothing related to the soul at all. They belong to the material side, and not the spiritual side.

The mind in plants, animals, and men expresses itself as perceiving faculty. When a plant expresses some action indicating that it is sleeping in the night, that shows the plants know 'the night has come.' And this shows that the plants have the mind: the perceiving

faculty inside. In the case of animals and men, the mind seems clearer than the plants. When you read this book, something inside you is playing the role as an agent for the seeing. The eyes are not this thing. The eyes are just a tool used by this thing. Hinduism calls it the mind. This thing in a sense could be compared with the soul in the sense that they are unobservable; but the difference lies in that the mind evolves from matter.

As the mind of men and animals evolves from matter and matter according to Hinduism has the potential to evolve as living, conscious entity with the sense that: “this is me,” what follows is that each man or animal has the unique characteristic that cannot be seen in other. That is: the mind in men and animals makes individuality in them.

Individuality in men and animals plays the important role in causing suffering. In the case of human beings, each of us has the feeling that “it is me and I must try every way to possess wealth and power over the rest.” This feeling is an expression of the sense of ego and it works closely with the mind and intelligence.

In general, human beings are of more intelligence than animals as the matter which evolved to be our body has longer evolution. The higher intelligence

makes human beings the master of animals as currently seen. Hinduism is of the view that the mind and the sense of ego in men and animals are of no significant difference. The great difference lies in intelligence as said above.

From above, we see that human beings have the body which belongs to matter, and the living aspects found in the body all evolve from matter itself as the result of long evolution. The mind which is the capacity to perceive and know things including itself is counted as a property evolving from the evolution as well. Besides the mind, another two mental aspects, intelligence and sense of ego, are considered as the result of the evolution of matter as well. Today, people believe that the brain is the center of the mind, intelligence, and sense of ego. This belief has nothing which contradicts Hinduism as Hinduism is of the view that the mind, intelligence, and sense of ego belong to matter.

The matter according to Hinduism possesses some kind of energy which could be called ‘the dark energy.’ That is: even though the human body, including the brain, has evolved so intelligent, its intelligence finally will only serve its basic nature, being the dark energy. Selfishness could be cited as an example of this dark

energy. The work of modern scientist like Richard Dawkins, who writes a famous book entitled *The Selfish Gene*, might be a good example of the work that explores how human bodies work as described in Hinduism as said.

However, man does not consist of the body only; he has the soul which is part of God. The role of the soul is to use the body as temporary means to some goal. Imagine that you need to go to the city called *Moksha*. But you have no any vehicle. The city is very far from here, and that makes it is not possible to walk by yourself. During that, there is another person journeying. He has a car. He questions if you need to get in his car. You say okay, even though you feel that this man has something not good hidden in his face. After you get in the car, you have found that in his car there are a lot of bad things such as drugs. The man says to you, “You can have them, try!”

The man who has the car in this story is the body. And you are the man who needs to go to the city. The city name is *Moksha*, which means final liberation according to the Hindu belief. Why does God drop man from Him to journey in the universe? The very simple answer is: because God needs man to have exciting experience and learn some good lessons. This could be

compared with the father who sends his son journeying to gather experiences. He sends his son because he loves him.

To learn the world is nothing but to deal with good and evil, God knows this best. So, it is right to drop man into this world because in this world there are both good and evil to learn. During the journey, the man who has the car says to you that he does not have any final aim in his life. He just travels to taste the beauty of the world. One day, he says to you: “Brother, why do you not drink. This is excellent wine. Nature creates a mouth to us for this kind of job. We have mouths for what if not drinking wine?”

It could be possible that some day you agree with the man, and as the result of that you have changed your mind—not going to *Moksha*, but traveling with the man to taste the beauty of the world. If so, the soul is considered by Hinduism as losing its strength temporarily. In general, men when dropped by God into this world largely agree with the man and decide to travel with him for a long time. The journey of the soul with the body as said is called rebirth in Hinduism. The belief of rebirth is accepted by Buddhism and Jainism as well. In Jainism, the soul is not dropped into this world by God. It exists there forever, but exists as a normal

soul. The journey of the soul to the *Immortal City* in the view of Jainism is the process to turn a normal soul to be a liberated soul. In Buddhism, the soul is not dropped by God as well. But the Buddhist soul and the Jain soul are different in that the Buddhist soul is not permanent. It arises and decays momentarily, they said. However, the objective of the journey in Buddhist teaching is the same: to arrive at the *Immortal City* (called by Buddhism and Jainism alike as: *Nirvana*).

Even though the body belongs to matter which possesses the dark energy as said, this does not mean that everything done by the body cannot have a positive moral aspect. We must not forget that matter has the potential to evolve into an intelligent being by itself. The brain of man and animals is explained to work differently as their processes of evolution are different. Indian religions are different from Christianity in that the former believe that animals have some kind of intelligence while the latter seems to refuse this. The difference between these two religious traditions lies in that the latter believes that the soul is the source of intelligence and animals do not have the soul, so they do not have intelligence; while the former believe that intelligence can be of matter, animals have the brain, so they are intelligent, even though we accept that

they do not have the soul. (Hinduism believes that animals have the soul, but their intelligence belongs to the brain.)

As Darwin points out, intelligence in man and some high-developed animals shows itself through a thing called ‘compromise.’ Compromise here means: giving something to other to have another thing as an exchange. The soul that resides in the body is viewed by the body itself as a family member. Sometimes the body (the brain) learns that the advice given by the soul is of utility, for example the soul says that money cannot buy everything. The ‘learned body’ is a concept accepted generally in Indian religions. The morality meant to be adopted by the householder in Indian tradition is the one which accepts the compromise between the body and the soul, as said. Good people within this level of morality are those who do not need to go to the *Moksha* City, but rather need to journey to taste the beauty of the world and during that have the soul as good company.

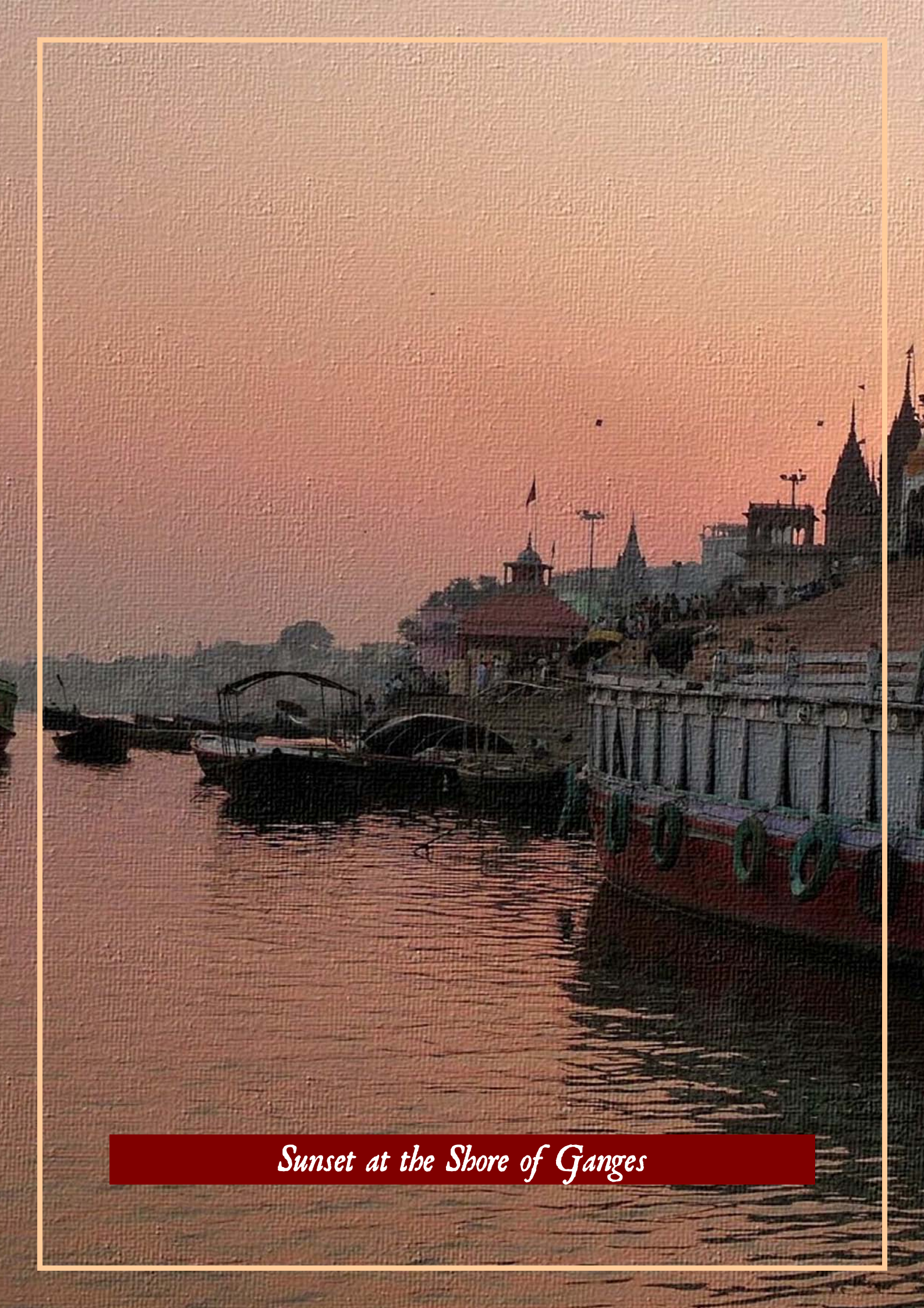
In the *Upanishad*, it is stated that when a person performing the actions good or bad, the soul has not been involved in this. The soul under this understanding is something pure and thus should be separated from the action performed by a man. Suppose a man

has committed some evil and as the result of that he was sent to the hell after death. In the hell, the man has suffered severe punishments. In such a circumstance, the soul still resides in his body. But the soul never suffers anything as it never commits anything wrong. The mind of the man is the sufferer; and the reason why the mind should suffer like that is: because the mind is the highest agent which decides to do that thing. The soul just gives advice.

From above, we can imagine that one day these two friends, the learned body and the soul, agree with each other that the long journey is now a boring thing; so they decide to drive the car directly to the *Moksha* City. When the gate of the city is opened, the soul says to the body, "You can stay with me for a while." The body has its own period of time to exist in this world while the soul does not have such limitation. For this reason, the body cannot stay forever in the City.

When his friend has passed away, the man has realized that he is not alone in the City. Actually, the governor of the city is the same person as the one who has dropped him into the world before this. He is the Great Father. So, the journey to the City is nothing but coming home. There, he sees others who are his brothers and sisters. All of them have passed the ex-

perience in journeying through the world. Happiness in human life, according to Hinduism, cannot be found if the person has no experience in traveling to see things in the world. The Hindu saint is called in Sanskrit as *sanyasi*, which literally means the wanderer. In some case, physical journey is not important. Instead, the spiritual one is of more significance. The spiritual journey is: a process of experiencing both beloved and hated things and persons and finally leaving all of them to go ahead. In this sense, traveling denotes freedom; and this is why this thing is required in the ethics of Hinduism.



Sunset at the Shore of Ganges

Chapter Three

Conclusion



Karl Marx has criticized religion as the opium. In the country where Marxism is adopted as the political ideology, religion is rejected on the grounds that it does not teach the real truths to people. For the Marxist philosopher, truths must be based on human experiences. What taught in religion such as heavens, God, the afterlife, and so on are the things that nobody in the world ever perceived by sense experience; so these things are just illusion created by religious masters or leaders to use it as the opium for the purpose of controlling people's minds. Opium has a property that when you take it, it will make you feel good; and when you do not take it, it will give you a pain.

It seems that the criticism against religion by Marx applies well to a religion of which the leaders or priests have a luxurious life. Some Marxist thinkers are of a

belief that Roman Catholic Church can be cited as an example of religion which is criticized by Marx as the opium. It is interesting that at the ancient time, there was an Indian philosophical master who had criticized religion in the same way as done by Marx. Certainly, Hinduism had been criticized by this master. Thousands of years have passed. Nobody in India now knows the name of this master, while Hinduism has been widely adopted throughout India and stood firmly in the hearts of so many people.

Unlike Roman Catholic Church, Hinduism has no any central authority. It could be said that Hinduism is a religion of no center. Actually, all Indian religions share this characteristic. So, the political-economic approach to religion as done by Marx is so powerless when applied to criticize Indian religions. Religious leaders or masters of Indian religions, such as Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda, or Sri Aurobindo, are not rich persons. They live a very simple life. They never use religious teaching to exploit people.

In the past chapters, we have divided Hinduism into two categories: folk's Hinduism and thinker's Hinduism. Actually, such division may be illusion as ultimately there may be only single Hinduism: Hinduism that has the subtle influence over the lives of Hindu

people. Even for the thinkers, Hindu philosophy must have a living spirit that can be touched by the hearts of people. No one in India thinks: there is a religion that can be played just as a game of thought. Indian philosophy is known as a living philosophy that has the real effect over the lives of people, otherwise it must not be called religion or philosophy in Indian tradition.

Religion in the West has been involved in politics, but Indian religion and politics are clearly separate. This depends much on the nature of Indian religion itself. Even though sometimes Indian religion like Hinduism was used in the struggling against some political matter (for example, it was used by Gandhi to struggle against the British), that can be seen as a temporary event. The leaders of Hinduism never need to possess political power. They know that true religion is something existing beyond and above politics. More importantly, they know that true religion is placed in the heart of the person. Religion can never be used as the tool of politics.

Throughout the history of Indian religion, we have never seen the war between two or more religions. This thing never happened in the history of India. Certainly, there were some conflicts between religions or

between the different sects of the same religion, but such conflicts never evolved to be the war. The following are my personal opinions to answer why there is no religious war in the history of Indian religion. First, as said previously, no Indian religion needs to possess political power. All masters of Indian religion consider themselves as the Guru of the kings, the prime minister, the politicians, and so on. In short, the Guru is the one who feels that all people in the community are his children. The Guru can never take side in everything. Second, there is one thing which in my opinion exists in all Indian religions and this thing makes Indian religions tolerate the different thoughts of other. I call this thing: a *philosophical spirit*. Indian religion is religion in its fullest sense, but besides this Indian religion has possessed a philosophical spirit, which means the spirit to accept that there can be different views concerning the same subject. In the West, there is no war among the philosophers as well. That is due to a very simple fact concerning philosophy: there is no dogma in philosophy. In the same way, there is no dogma in the same sense in Indian philosophy as well. Certainly, if 'dogma' means a system of belief, there is this thing in Indian religion. But, if 'dogma' means an attitude which states deeply inside the person that "there is

only truth in my religion and I have the religious duty to convert (sometimes by force if it is needed) those who hold the false religious views,” there is no such a thing in Indian religion.