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## On the Proper Interpretation of Indian Religion and Philosophy

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ON THE PROPER INTERPRETATION OF \*  
INDIAN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

by

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It has been my pleasure to have known Professor Potter for sixteen years, during which time we have shared experiences at conferences, at the bridge table, and on the golf course. I honor his vast learning, his broad range of interests in life, and his subtle mind. Nevertheless, over the years, I have detected a growing uneasiness on his part regarding the proper interpretation of Indian philosophy and religion. Therefore it gives me the greatest pleasure at this time to grasp his hand firmly and assist him from the roughs and sandtraps of his own making.

What shall we make of a philosopher who appeals to "honesty"? Is he like a drunkard appealing to sobriety or a politician calling for credibility? Professor Potter appeals to honesty five times on one page. Dr. Samuel Johnson pointed out that when a man had no other argument, he fell back on "patriotism". Is this the case, by analogy, with Professor Potter falling back on "honesty"? It was Archbishop Whately who said: "Honesty is the best policy; but he who is governed by that maxim is not an honest man."<sup>1</sup> This is a perceptive insight because the "honesty" of a man will depend upon his philosophy. His philosophy will depend ultimately on his solution to the problem of the relation of consciousness to being. It seems to me that Professor Potter has not solved this problem, but we can see that he is wavering in the direction of idealism, irrationalism, and a strong faith in the deliverances of formalism. It was Hegel who said that the truth is the whole, but Potter's "whole" may be the one-dimensional "whole of philosophical idealism which rests on the belief that consciousness precedes matter. Returning to "honesty" briefly, what evidence is there in Potter's work of the last fifteen years that he has been "honest" about the claims which he disapproves? His use of the word "honest" is a touching but unconvincing attempt to cover up his bias.

In reply to Potter through necessity rather than inclination, I have had every form of idealism foisted upon me. I have sucked, chewed, and licked idealism. I have been fed idealism and theology in elementary school, Sunday School, college, graduate school, post-graduate school, workshops, and professional conferences. I have been up to my ears in mysticism and idealism from the time my grandmother taught me about God until the last conference I attended on Asian religion at the London School of Asian and African Studies. The idealistic claims of Advaitists, Christians, Moslems, Jews, Sikhs, Bahais, Christian Scientists, Theosophists have created a constant ringing in my ears for fifty years. People have exhorted me with prayers at Saivite temples, from minarets, in cathedrals and tabernacles. At one Christian Youth Camp not far from Potter's home for two summers I looked at a sign each day. It was five feet high and twenty feet long. Printed on it were the words: "What Would Jesus Have

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Done?" Today Potter would have it read "What Would Blanshard Have Done?" Later in life I asked myself what would the Buddha have done, or Nāgārjuna, or Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan? The answer is always the same: he would have done nothing. That is the essence of what the idealist did, has done, and will do. He will do nothing. He will separate himself from any material action that will change the social order. That is why we find the action of no-action in Taoism and Zen Buddhism, two religions that have been more "honest" about their outlook than others.

As I gradually pulled myself out of the slough of idealism I had the help of two materialist teachers, the first of whom was fired from the University of Washington, Potter's present university, because he refused to inform on other professors suspected of conspiracy. For a time he earned his living turning bed legs on a lathe; now he lives in elevated penury getting little solace from reading the elevated works of Brand Blanshard and Charles Hartshorne. The other materialist teacher I had is Roy Wood Sellars, now approaching his ninety-first birthday, but still active in disputing the "honest" claims of the idealists. Among the remaining philosophers with whom I studied in India, Ceylon, Japan, and the United States were either idealists or neutralists, and a small scattering of naturalists. It is said that a naturalist is a shame-faced materialist. By the same token a neutralist (positivist, linguistic analyst) is a shame-faced idealist. The out-and-out idealists generally include the phenomenologists, religious folk, existentialists, neo-orthodoxers, and Vedāntists.

Turning briefly to Brand Blanshard, a fine gentleman of the New Haven School, who is to be the standard-bearer of "honesty," I recall listening to him admonish the philosophers of the Soviet Union at the International Congress of Philosophy in Mexico City in 1963. His "honesty" made it impossible for him to comprehend what the Soviet philosophers were saying. What they were saying was that it was high time that philosophy be turned into a science instead of what it has been for the past 2,500 years. But Blanshard knew that philosophy could not be a science because it dealt with human beings. This implied that social science was impossible because people were somehow, singly or in groups, beyond or above natural or social law. Man has a free intellectual choice, outside the realm of cause and effect, to pick any philosophy he wishes. Americans, he said, in their freedom could pick among the following philosophies: pragmatism, positivism, various idealisms (labelled as such), existentialism, phenomenology, naturalism, neo-orthodoxy, and linguistic analysis (although Blanshard was not sure if that last was truly a philosophy). Thus the free and "honest" American had the same blessings in choosing a philosophy that he had in choosing a meal or an automobile. He was a free consumer who could walk down the steam tables in the Philosophical Cafeteria and order roast positivism, mashed existentialism, analytic minestrone, phenomenological stuffed eggs and finish up with neo-orthodox jello. At the end of the meal he could work out the stringy particles of positivism with a linguistic toothpick. If one had dentures—that is, were wearing a false set of philosophical teeth—the only problem would be in keeping the teeth in the mouth which could be achieved by the free-market product known as Philosity-dent.

If Potter and I weren't such old friends, I might be tempted to make an *ad hominem* attack on his ambiguous position, but I shall refrain from doing that as being merely a contemptible idealistic trick. Anyone who has read Potter's works knows that they reflect the state of his mind. The state of his mind, in turn, has this distinct characteristic, that it is confused concerning the interpretation of Indian religion and philosophy. Yet the situation is promising because of the refreshing openness of his mind which at least allows for the possibility of historical interpretation. Otherwise, why would he defend the thesis that Indian religion and religious philosophy can be understood by idealistic methods?

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That brings up the question: What is historical materialism? It is a confluence of British materialistic empiricism (Hobbes and Locke; not the idealistic empiricism of Hume and Berkeley), French mechanical (physical science) materialism, French Enlightenment historicism, Hegelian historical idealism, and British and French evolutionary social thought emphasizing the ethnological and anthropological work of Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881). Morgan, the New York anthropologist, is most famous for his *Ancient Society* (1877) with its concern for kinship terminologies and savage and barbaric technology.<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels credits Karl Marx with having synthesized positive social thought up to his time. The beginning of his work in this direction is to be found in *The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850* (1951) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). Engels says:

. . . Marx was the first to discover the great law which governs the march of history. According to this law, all historical struggles, although they seem to take place on the political, religious, philosophical or any other ideal plane, are in reality nothing else than the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes.<sup>3</sup>

One may note that there is no reference to economics in this statement, but that is soon to follow as Engels continues:

The existence of these classes and their collisions, are themselves determined by the degree of development in the economic situation, by the prevailing mode of production, and by the methods of exchange that result.<sup>4</sup>

It is at this point that we should consider the role of economics in the understanding of history as seen by Engels. One quotation will bring this into focus:

The reflection of economic relations as legal principles is necessarily a topsy-turvy one; it goes on without the person who is acting being conscious of it; the jurist imagines he is operating with *a priori* proposi-

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lions, whereas they are really only economic reflexes; so everything is pushed down. And it seems to me obvious that this inversion, which, so long as it remains unrecognized, forms what we call *ideological conception*, reacts in its turn upon the economic basis and may, within certain limits, modify it.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning religion, with which we are particularly concerned in this paper, Engels has this to say:

[Religion with its] . . . spirits, magic forces, etc. . . . it would surely be pedantic to try and find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense. The history of science is the history of the gradual clearing away of this nonsense or of its replacement by fresh but always less absurd nonsense.<sup>6</sup>

The categories of social development were set down by Morgan as savagery, barbarism, and civilization and accepted as valid by Marx and Engels. These are explained not only in Morgan's *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*<sup>7</sup> but in Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.<sup>8</sup> Elaborations on these were made later by Bernhard J. Stern,<sup>9</sup> George Thomson,<sup>10</sup> and D. P. Chattopadhyaya<sup>11</sup> as well as a rapidly growing number of other thinkers throughout the world.

Marx's earliest statement of historical materialism is as follows:

Men make their own history, but not just as they please. They do not choose the circumstances for themselves, but have to work upon the circumstances as they find them, have to fashion the material handed down by the past. The legacy of the dead generations weighs like an albatross upon the brains of the living. At the very time when they seem to be engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, when they seem to be creating something perfectly new—in such epochs of revolutionary crises, they are eager to press the spirits of the past into their service, borrowing the names of the dead, reviving old war-cries, dressing up in traditional costumes, they make a braver pageant in the newly-staged scene of universal history. Thus did Luther masquerade as Paul of Tarsus . . .<sup>12</sup>

Up to this time it was common not only for idealists, but also for French materialists, to regard social development as the result of the change of social ideas. While taking a materialist view of nature, even materialists were unable to extend it to social life. Consequently, social science and the humanities have had a more difficult time developing into sciences than even biological investigations. Marx, however, attempted to rectify the situation by initiating historical materialism, most of the great achievements of which were to appear only after his death. No work so far has surpassed his four volume study of *Capital* whose appearance led one admirer to exclaim: "Marx is the Galileo of social science."

What were the difficulties encountered by historians and philosophers trying to explain social developments, including ideas, notions, theories ideal systems and so forth? Above all there was the difficulty that social life is a result of human activity with men behaving as conscious beings endowed with mind and volition pursuing definite aims. It was evident that phenomena in nature did not depend on the human mind (although recent awareness of ecology has modified that), whereas social life was created by men themselves. This created the illusion, carried into our own day, that social relationships are built by men according to their consciousness and determined by their conscious aims and aspirations. The weakness of this approach is three-fold. First, only the ideological motives in historical activity are seriously examined. Second, only the views of the tiny elite—the intellectual segment of the ruling class are examined. As Stern pointed out, this was quite natural, since the means of writing and recording were a monopoly of the elite since the beginning of writing. No one wished to know the opinions of Lower Slobovia.<sup>13</sup> Third, the idealistic intellectuals viewed philosophy and history as a contemplative, non-activity, placing a premium on serenity rather than earth-boundness, static views above change, and backward-looking instead of forward-looking.

It is the outlook of D. D. Kōsambi, Walter Ruben, D. P. Chattopadhyaya, and myself, that each philosophical *darsāna* (perspective) in India must be seen as a historical moment or process having a specific beginning in time and place within the womb of social activity and relationships as growing out of a specific productive system. Indian philosophy is not a *potpourri* of ingenious *extra muros* answers to contemplative and religious questions such as: Does Brāhman exist? If he does, in what manner? Can we achieve a state of enlightenment? and so forth. The first step in studying Indian religion is to understand the socio-historical process in which each philosophy arose. For example, Lokāyata was not simply a hedonistic response of energetic playboys to a so-called world-denying philosophy, but a material, economic response to the monopolistic practices of the powerful of the brāhmin class. That its literature could have been almost totally destroyed gives evidence of the material power of the brāhmins just as the disappearance of the work of Lucretius for hundreds of years must be traced to the educational monopoly of Christian bishops and monks. Like the growth of empiricism in Britain, the sensationalism and sensualism of Lokāyata was an outgrowth of changes in the productive system and its relations, of the infra-structure and superstructure including philosophy, religion, law, and politics. Specifically it was due to the increase of trade in luxuries made possible by improved methods of agriculture in Northern India. The philosophy of the R̥gveda is a reflection of a productive system of its time. It was a philosophy of cattlemen just as early Judaism was the philosophy of shepherders. Today, linguistic philosophy is the outgrowth of the vast complications of legality under monopoly capitalism. Buddhism, however influenced by social advance, represents the more peaceful requirements of agricultural and craft production so long as the slave empires were in flower. The origin of Buddhism rests in respect for the cooperative tribal life instead of in the imperialism of King Ajātasātru who like General Curtis LeMay wishes to destroy

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his enemies. Ajātaśatru said: "I will root out the Vaijjians, I will destroy the Vaijjians, I will bring these Vaijjians to utter ruin." In order to have ideological sanction for this evil intent, he sent his prime minister to the Buddha to ask his blessing. The Buddha, who was no Cardinal Spellman, would not cooperate in this despicable venture. What was the Buddha's answer to the greed for riches and power? He was too realistic to believe in any God, prayers, or sacrifices which would not, he knew from experience, remedy the miseries resulting from onerous taxes, slavery, extortion, mortgage, interest, and usury. He also knew that the Upanṣadic claims that metaphysical wisdom could bring salvation was also false. So he was after a practical solution. But the productive system of his time could not assure plenty and equality for everyone. So another solution had to be thought of—an ideal one, an idealistic one, namely the psychological transformation of the personality.<sup>14</sup> If you can't get what you want, we will make you like what you get. In this the Buddha was a forerunner of Freudianism. Recently some psychologists with macro- rather than micro-involvement have decided that the individual cannot be changed without decisive changes in society as well. The credibility gap in Washington filters down through American society and is based upon the necessity of lying which in turn is based upon public and private embezzlement, pilfering, robbery, and brigandage created first, by class society, and second by the unique opportunities provided under monopoly capitalism. No maharaja of India has ever had the mendacious arrogance and insolence of the American ruling-class today and its load-eating vassals. They have not merely threatened cities with extermination, but whole continents, who refused to pander to their infinite greed.

The Buddha, having got rid of God and the permanent soul, laid down as Lokāyata did, a challenge to the doctrine that the soul is the ultimate reality. One would have hoped that later Indian philosophy would have built on this sensible doctrine which also included that everything is in flux. But instead, social circumstances being what they were, philosophical trends culminating in Vedānta, left India with a thoroughly unrealistic philosophy that has served as the ideology of Indian feudalism from 800 to the present. It is now being slowly strangled by the philosophies of naturalism, materialism, science, industrialism, and capitalism. When he even hints that Vedānta is a claimant of some kind of synoptic truth, Potter becomes its ideological spokesman. He can do this because he looks at history in micro-systemic terms as a series of discrete events, not as an accumulation of formations, epochs and constant struggles. My own impression of Potter's view is that he looks at philosophy as a set of interesting and curious ideas that pop in and out of the woodwork. As one appears, he says: "My, that is a fascinating little fellow. Let's pursue him for a while." But he does not view it contextually, formationally, historically, macro-systemically. That is why he has to defend the eternality of ideas and why he finds Blanshard a model of "honesty." The thought that some ideas are simply *passé* is more than he can bear. This syndrome is by no means uncommon. I have colleagues who believe that Plato was the wisest man who ever lived, despite the incredible nonsense to be found in his dialogues. There are others who think that Wittgenstein is the savior of modern philosophy although



the greatest energy of his life was expended in trying to construct a world out of non-material elements. Even if it is true that to our successors much of what we believe will be nonsense, that does not give us license to continue to take seriously the nonsense of our predecessors. What they said was for their age, not ours. What we say should be for our age, not theirs. There can be no *philosophia perennis*, as Potter seems to think. The Buddha gave us the clue as to why there cannot be—namely, because everything is changing. But we don't believe that proposition because the Buddha said it. We believe it because social practice has proved it. It is true by virtue of social practice.

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I wish now to discuss two examples of the analysis and description of Indian religion using the method of *histodiamat* and its presuppositions. The first concerns the interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā* which I chose because all of you have heard of it. The second relates to the problem of explaining a major feature of tantric religion, which I chose because it is about the relation of agriculture to sex.

The *Bhagavadgītā* is treated idealistically by nearly everyone who reads it—particularly by the kind of Indian philosopher that Potter seems to approve.<sup>15</sup> This famous work is dated the third century. Its composition is set in a productive system that has passed beyond the Indus cultivation and has moved down towards the Ganges Valley. The new system dominates the jungle because of the use of the iron plow, creating also a new social organization, part of which was the caste system. This period of Gangetic development was more or less complete by 700. It was a period followed by a thrust into the lower peninsula (the Deccan), an outstanding feature of which was the spread of the use of bronze and iron. It was at this time that the *brāhmins* wrote the *purāṇas* to make the aboriginal rites respectable while in the meantime savage chiefs became kings and nobles.<sup>16</sup> Kosambi compresses the content of the *gītā* into the following account:

The Pandu hero Arjuna felt revulsion at the impending slaughter of kinsmen and lay down his bow just as the two armies had begun their . . . battle. His charioteer . . . the dark hero of the Yadus . . . successfully exhorts him to do his duty. The fratricidal advice is given in over 700 tightly woven stanzas whose quickest battle might easily have been lost. Krishna, now proclaiming himself the all-god, expounds every contemporary system of philosophy in turn as his own [reminding us of Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" and Nixon's "I am a Keynesian."], without naming any of the numerous doctrines outlined in crystal-clear verse. Since all the views come from one god, there is no polemic, though Vedic *yajñā* [sacrifice] and ritual in general are slighted with a passing sneer. The pure life, non-violence, absence of greed and self-seeking are extolled. When puzzled Arjuna naturally asks "Why then do you ask me to kill?" the god [Krishna] glides away to the next point of his exposition,

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leaving the direct question unanswered.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the divine character, Krishna, reveals that he is the creator and destroyer of all things, indeed has already devoured all members of the armies about to fight. As Kosambi concludes his account:

Arjuna would commit no sin in killing a kinsman . . . [so] long as one has absolute faith in the absolute god, the ultimate gain of union with that god in life not of this world is assured to him. If Arjuna won the purely formal and symbolic battle, he would have the further joys of universal sovereignty in this world as a bonus.<sup>18</sup>

If there is an ostensible moral to the *gītā* it appears to be that as long as you have faith in ME [Krishna combining the functions of Brahman and Siva] all sins are forgiven. Therefore if duty calls, kill your brother without passion. This is only one instance of the calculated treachery expounded in the *Arthashastra*,<sup>19</sup> a classical treatise on Indian politics that makes Machiavelli's *Prince* (1513) read like a Boy Scout manual.

Whereas the *Rigveda* theosophy appeared during the middle stage of barbarism, that is during the period of the formation of herds and pastoral life as seen on the grassy plains of the Euphrates and Tigris, among the Aryans of the Oxus and Jaxartes, of the Don and Dnieper, the setting for the earliest versions of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the upper stage of barbarism during which period the smelting of iron ore and the invention of alphabetic writing occurred. This period produced the Greeks of the Heroic Age, the Italian tribes before the foundation of Rome, the Germans of Tacitus, and the Normans of the days of the Vikings.<sup>20</sup> The use of the iron plowshare made vast tillage possible and in its wake a rapid increase of the population of India. Insofar as metal money was used, a notable merchant class had appeared, there was private ownership of land, and the use of slave labor as this period moved into the stage of civilization.<sup>21</sup>

Why was the *gītā* interpolated into the *Mahabharata*? Because the lower classes were the audience of the recitations of the heroic days of ancient war. The epic served as a vehicle of propaganda for any doctrines that the powerful brahmins wished to insert. Interpolation was even better than rewriting the *purāṇas*,<sup>22</sup> or faking new ones. Why was Krishna chosen to expound the new gospel? Because the Krishna cult was rising in popularity and associated with the syncretic Nārāyaṇa, the god who sleeps in his chamber in the midst of waters, a god who can be traced to the Sumerian flood-creation myth and later appears among the Jews as Noah. Krishna was required at this time because Indra (until then chief of the gods) had lost lustre as a result of intervening Buddhism which had denied the validity of *yajña*.<sup>23</sup> Buddhism brought a new conception of morality and social justice linked with the advanced agricultural late bronze and early iron age. The importance of ritual and sacrifice becomes clearer if we recognize that the same relationships occurred in China and Greece. When Confucius is concerned over the rites of Chou he is concerned

about rebellion against the sovereign power. According to Kuan Feng and Lin Lü-shih:

Sacrifice in those times was considered an important event. In those times there were two important events in politics, one being worship, and the other being war, i.e., to offer sacrifices and to fight battles . . . Therefore, it became necessary for the rulers to adopt a set of monopolistic grades and order in the sacrifices so that there would be no promiscuous sacrificing . . . overstepping the rites to offer sacrifices was a defacto [sic] usurpation of divine power, and doing so heralded usurpation of political power. "Third Discussion on Confucius," *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. II, No. 4 (Summer 1971), p. 249.

Indra, king of the gods, was king only during the pastoral form of the bronze-age barbaric society. The ascendancy of Krishna began around 800 B. C. in the Punjab. That Krishna used the discus in war indicated that he was pre-Buddhistic and post-Vedic. He became increasingly useful for syncretic movements, where consolidation of class rule was imperative and where his messianic aspect would aid in the usual ideological repression. The Deccan Yādavas, for example, traced their geneology to Krishna, just as Spiro Agnew traces his to Socrates, in order to raise the chiefs of a local clan above the surrounding people.<sup>24</sup>

Krishna is a synthesis of the following life-like and god-like features: (1) a mischievous and beloved shepherd lad, and (2) a virile god-husband of many women (local goddesses, each in her own right spending the night with the "husband") thus easing the transition from local to regional religion. Parallel with this syncretism is the marriage of Śiva and his consort Pārvatī which was supplemented by the hermaphroditic combination of the two just to prevent separation. The Nāga<sup>25</sup> cult was absorbed by placing a cobra around Siva's neck. Earlier Śiva was placed on Nandi the Bull, who became his chamberlain and guardian of all quadrupeds. This act appeased the remnants of herdsman cults. This is a major source of cow-worship in India which persists to this day.

By the eleventh century monasteries and temples were broken into and the iconoclasm of King Harśa of Kashmir shocked the pious of India. The reason for this is that the religious images locked up in various temples and storehouses had taken too much metal out of circulation. Harśa needed funds to fight his local barons. As the result of his plunder he was able to win and feudalism became stronger than ever. During the reign of another Harśa, of Kanauj, (ca. 600-640) it was acceptable to worship Śiva, his consort Gaurī, the sun god Sūrya at the same time Buddhism was in favor. Concurrently, this same king's enemy Narendragupta-Śaśānka of Bengal raided Maghada and cut down the Bodhi tree at Gayā and wrecked Buddhist foundations wherever he could. His essential aim was also to forage for metals—among the Buddhist temples and treasuries this time, instead of among the Hindu.

With this productive-economic development in mind, we now return to the *gītā* to remark that its function from the fourth to sixth centuries and during the Gupta period (ca. 320-712) of expanding village settlement was centralization

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of functions required by vast new areas coming under cultivation. By the end of the reign of Harṣa of Kanauj, tax collection became a miserable profession because commodity production per head had dropped and cash trade was low. Luxury trade had declined markedly and with it occurred a relative decline in accumulation of gold, silver, and jewels. The Hari-ḥari cult with its image of half Śiva and half Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) could not remain fashionable after the eleventh century. The reason for this was that under the declining economy followers of the cult found themselves widely divided in their interests. On the ideological level this syncretism turned into the *smārta-vaiṣṇava*<sup>26</sup> struggle between the traditionalistic versus the Vaiṣṇava. As it accelerated it may also have included the followers of Rāmānuja, the Madhvas and (later) the Vallabhas and Caitanyas. But under Akbar, when Mughal prosperity was at its height, the great king himself dreamed of a synthetic *Din-e-ilāhī*.<sup>27</sup> His successor Aurangzeb tried to augment his falling revenue brought about by conquest and conspicuous consumption, increased religious persecution and levied a tax (*jizya*) on unbelievers. In the eighth century Sāṃkhya engaged in intense polemic. The age of synthesis and the merging of ancient and local gods was past. The crisis in production was too acute. According to Kosambi:

Fusion and tolerance become impossible when the crisis deepens, when there is not enough of the surplus product to go around, and the synthetic method does not lead to increased production.<sup>28</sup>

Marriages of gods and goddesses or their fusion worked earlier because the conjoint society produced much more after differences between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of property were reconciled. The alternative was not feasible, that is, solution by extermination or enslavement for these would simply have strained production.

During the hard times of the feudal period the *gītā* served a new and useful ideological function. It was able to do this by its innovation called *bhakti*, or personal devotion. At the end of the period of great empires in India, just as at the end of empire in Rome, the new state had to be feudal, largely because it was not yet a new state. One reason for this is that without a strong central authority the weaker members of society needed to be protected (more than usual!) by the stronger and hence pledged allegiance to them in return for guardianship.<sup>29</sup> With feudalism came the claims of loyalty, binding retainer to chief, tenant to lord, baron to king or emperor. The same relationship is found among the *samurai* of Japan after the reign of Nijō in 1160. Josiah Royce, who was ignorant of political economy, thought that the Japanese idea of loyalty might be useful in the United States, unaware that money became the basis of loyalty under capitalism. In current writing on feudal China, loyalty is spoken of as loyalty to the landlord versus loyalty to the peasant. Taiwan's government represents loyalty to the landlord and People's China's rule represents loyalty to the peasant and worker. Indian loyalty was not abstract, but served land ownership, military service, tax-collection, and the conversion of local produce into commodities largely for luxury. This system developed after the sixth

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century and was based on the key notion of *sāmanta*, which meant “neighboring ruler” until 532, but by 592 meant “feudal baron,” a new development based upon a new division of property. The new feudal baron was personally responsible to the king, and was part of the tax-gathering mechanism. Earlier the *manusmṛiti* had no *sāmantas*, administering everything himself directly or through agents who had no independent status. Feudalism from below consisted of a class of people at the village level who had special rights over the land (cultivation, occupation, or hereditary ownership). To hold such a society together the best religion was one emphasizing *bhakti*, or personal faith. Marco Polo relates that in the thirteenth century the siegneurs actually threw themselves on the king’s funeral pyre an act more shocking than *sutee* to male chauvinists. No earlier tribal chief before feudalism could expect such loyalty.

By the twelfth century the peasantry was paying not only for the vast palaces of India, but also for the ornate temples, indicating the great wealth for which India was at that time famous. Brāhminism had come to the top and its ritual codified by Hemādri, chancellor of the exchequer, in the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Exploitation became increasingly resisted until by the sixteenth century the protest formed the basis of the Marāṭha and Sikh military prowess. These two military establishments were based on a simpler, less caste-ridden, and less unequal social life. Yet in the *gītā* the only solution to class oppression is suicide. The Muslim invader, however, soon solved part of the matter by devastating the richly-endowed temples and no Krishna was able to stop them. Nor were the heavier exactions laid on the peasants more tolerable because they were performed by Muslims and in turn by the French and British. When gunpowder had blown Arjuna’s bow and feudalism off the map, some Indian intellectuals and Western sentimental idealists turned to the *gītā* to counter the growing materialism and skepticism brought in the train of capitalism and industrialism.

The Bhagavadgita then, as analyzed according to histomatic rules, is seen to be an ideological work whose function changed as the productive system and its relationships were modified through time. To make of it an eternal statement of transcendental wisdom is radically wrong and misleading. The same may be said for every religious movement or notion: it should be understood in its historical materialist context—which is to say within the womb of time and space, time being measured by matter and ideas<sup>31</sup> moving in space.

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Having discussed Kosambi’s histomatic treatment of the *gītā*, we now turn to Chattopadhyaya’s analysis of tantric religion. According to this Calcutta worthy the two basic trends in Indian culture are the Vedic and the non-Vedic. The predominant feature of the non-Vedic is tantrism.<sup>32</sup> Tantrism puts supreme emphasis on the *prakṛiti* (materiality) of the female principle which has its origin in agricultural practice. Much of Chattopadhyaya’s account of tantra in his *Lokāyata* consists in a description and explanation of early agricultural practices in India. His approach is influenced by the works of Engels, Briffault,

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George Thomson, and Kosambi all of whom adopt the historicist outlook. The idealistic approach of even such a great savant as George Sarton is replaced by the realistic treatment of ideology. Sarton's statement on tantrism is that it is a "sort of magical pantheism of which the higher thoughts were never appreciated by the Chinese, while the lower aspects appealed to their love of mystery."<sup>33</sup> Sarton's reference to "higher thoughts" and "lower aspects" implies not only a Platonism in his treatment of science, but also a priggishness in the best American genteel tradition.<sup>34</sup> One of the best-known accounts of tantra is that of Sir John Woodroffe who demonstrates how a mind trained in jurisprudence can "prove" that tantra is not really female in origin, is not lascivious in intent, nor is it identifiable with material force. He says of this primeval female power: "Sakti who is in Herself pure blissful Consciousness (Cidrūpiṇī) is also the Mother of Nature and is Nature itself born of the creative play of Her thought."<sup>35</sup> Instead of having consciousness grow out of nature, Woodroffe like the more enthusiastic idealists, has nature grow out of consciousness. Chattopadhyaya cannot abide such an interpretation, pointing out that the so-called energy of *śakti* is the power of the earth to grow things. Tantra is surrounded by magic, the belief that by creating the illusion that we control reality, that we actually control reality. Tantra as a religion had its origin in the belief that by magical practices the bounty of the earth could be controlled.<sup>36</sup> The later admixture of mentalistic elements such as "pure blissful consciousness" was simply the gloss of idealistic philosophy. Robert Briffault in his four volume work *The Mothers*<sup>37</sup> and Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilization in China*<sup>38</sup> indicate that women alone were concerned with agriculture magic the basis of mother cults persisting down to our own day. Oscar Wilde made a searching statement when he said that religion revolves madly about sex. We can now add that sex once revolved madly around food-supply. The religious practices, at first carried out by women to effect the crops, were under patriarchy transferred to men. But even then the male as male could not discharge these magical functions without assuming the features of the female. According to *Arcarabhedā Tantra* the tantrika should worship the five principles, the sky-flower, and woman. According to this work the female force is to be propitiated by a man's becoming a woman.<sup>39</sup> To this end *yogasadhana*, a psychophysical practice was developed to enable one to realize his womanhood.<sup>40</sup> The jewel of the lotus about which modern Buddhists chant is *padma* as *bhaga* or *yoni* (womb, vagina), and the seven lotuses are the seven seats of femininity. The triangle is the tantric representation of this organ as in other cultures. Reference to "the eternal triangle" has a double meaning. The frenzy induced by tantric practice is to awaken the female in the male or to destroy the male in the female. This is done so that when one transforms himself into a woman he increases the productive activity of nature. Female fertility is linked with the fertility of the earth and the "assimilation of the fruit-bearing soil to the child-bearing woman is universal."<sup>41</sup> The two major aspects of this ancient belief are first, that the plant-producing activity is viewed as depending magically on the reproductive capacity of the female body, and second, the reproductive capacity of the female body is magically dependent upon the earth.

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Chattopadhyaya relates that "During the Gorakhpur famine of 1873-74 parties of women at night time, stripped themselves naked, went out of their houses, and taking the ploughs with them, dragged the same across the fields."<sup>42</sup>

The word tantra itself has its root in *tan*, which means "to spread and extend the human family." Tantra means "propagation." *Santana* or *tanaya* mean "children." From this we may conclude that tantra was not an outgrowth of Mahāyāna Buddhism as believed by some idealistic historians such as the Bengali H. P. Sastri. Sastri naturally wondered why the lofty principles of Buddhism should get entangled with such superstitious dross as to be found in tantrism. Chattopadhyaya's answer is that first, tantrism was associated with the despised castes and professions. Second, tānrikas believed in equalitarianism among men and women, including the rejection of traditional marriage morality.<sup>43</sup> And third, manual labor of the lower castes kept them anchored to the concrete material world because they worked with it and worked it up as opposed to the delusions resulting from what Freud called the "omnipotence of thought" encouraged in the idealistic Mahāyāna Buddhism.

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I have touched briefly on two case studies in which the employment of histomat has produced tangible and fascinating results. The disadvantage of this method is of course immediately obvious: it does not obfuscate human activity and turn it into an arduous, heaven-kissing liturgy whose main function is elevated mystification ending in a blind bargain or a pig in a poke.

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In conclusion, I should like to say that insofar as the ideology of India is dominated by feudalistic or capitalistic class notions of a religious and idealistic kind, Indian religion and philosophy will appear predominately idealistic. This is not unlike the sentence appearing in a letter of reference which read: "Mr. Jones is certainly qualified to perform what he is trained competently to do." If Potter maintains this, even by implication, then he is likely to be right. On the other hand, during periods of strong challenge to such class domination, counter-ideology makes a strong emergence. There will always be a subterranean element of naturalism and materialism simply as a consequence of class antagonism. Today "green shoots are appearing everywhere" because of the challenge with which capitalism and industrialism have confronted feudalism in India. That the Advaita or Nāgārjuna positions will have any future viability depends upon the extent to which feudalism can hold out against these strong waves, among which now appear socialist white caps. To expect this to happen is to believe in a reversible or cyclic interpretation of history for which there is little evidence. Formally and systemically, to believe in them requires that one become or remain an eternalist which is contrary to all evolutionary and revolutionary evidence. Even if science and rationality (ultimately the same thing) are abrogated, which if not incredible is surely suicidal, Advaita and

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Nāgārjuna will not be generally acceptable even to mystics, irrationalists, and other idealists, because what they offer is not apposite today and will be even less relevant in the future.

### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Richard Whately, (1787-1863), Archbishop of Dublin in *Apophthegma*, p. 219.
- <sup>2</sup>See Bernhard J. Stern, *Lewis Henry Morgan, Social Evolutionist* (Chicago, 1931), Robert H. Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory* (New York, 1937).
- <sup>3</sup>Preface to the Third German Edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. from the German by Eden & Cedar Paul (New York: International Publishers, 1926), p. 22.
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup>In a *Letter to J. Weydemeyer* (London, March 5, 1852) Marx says: ". . . and now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes." Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), II, 452.
- <sup>6</sup>Engels *Letter to C. Schmidt* (London, October 27, 1890), Marx and Engels, *op. cit.*, II, 492-93.
- <sup>7</sup>(Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1910). It first appeared at Rochester, New York in 1877.
- <sup>8</sup>In Marx and Engels, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 185-307.
- <sup>9</sup>See his "Historical Materialism," *Philosophy for the Future*, ed. R. W. Sellars, V. J. McGill, and M. Farber (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949).
- <sup>10</sup>*Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, 2 vols. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1961).
- <sup>11</sup>*Lokāyata, Indian Philosophy, Indian Atheism* (Calcutta: Manisha, 1969).
- <sup>12</sup>*The Eighteenth Brumaire*, p. 23.
- <sup>13</sup>For a delightful account of this croquet see Paul Nizan, *The Watchdogs: Philosophers and the Established Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). See also Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*, trans. C. H. Kerr (Chicago: Kerr, 1904).
- <sup>14</sup>See Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 125.
- <sup>15</sup>A possible exception to this is the commentary of Franklin Edgerton, late Professor of Sanskrit at Yale University in his *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).
- <sup>16</sup>D. D. Kosambi, *Ancient India: A History of Its Culture and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), p. 51.
- <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 207.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup>Attributed to Kautilya, trans. R. Shamasastri 4th ed. (Mysore: Sri Raghuvver Printing Press, 1951). J. F. Fleet in an introductory note dates it at 321-296 B. C.
- <sup>20</sup>See Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, pp. 188-9. See also Leslie White, *The Science of Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949), pp. 397-415.
- <sup>21</sup>See George Thomson, *op. cit.*, II, 175-179.
- <sup>22</sup>The *purāṇa*, an ancient legend, has five distinguishing topics: creation of the universe, destruction and renovation of the universe, geneologies of gods and patriarchs, the reigns of the manus, and the history of the solar and lunar races of kings, John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, . . . 6th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929) p. 245.
- <sup>23</sup>Sacrifice, sometimes of humans and sometimes of gods.
- <sup>24</sup>Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, p. 27.
- <sup>25</sup>A snake, especially the cobra-capella. Also a mythical semi-divine being, having a human face with the tail of a serpent, and the expanded neck of the cobra. The females were said to be handsome, and some of them intermarried with men, as Ulupi with Arjuna. Arjuna had more on his mind than fratricide. See Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
- <sup>26</sup>Devotee of Śiva and Pārvaṭī.
- <sup>27</sup>Persian for "religion of God", religion of one God.
- <sup>28</sup>Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, p. 31.
- <sup>29</sup>. . . when a German war chief planned a campaign, he gathered about him a group of picked warriors which was called his *comitatus*. These men swore absolute fidelity . . . in



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return for arms, food, clothing . . . plunder." Sidney Painter, *Mediaeval Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>The intimate connection between religion and economics is here unusually naked as was the case in the appointment of John Foster Dulles, leading layman of the Presbyterian Church of America, to the post of Secretary of State under the Presidency of Dwight Eisenhower.

<sup>31</sup>Ideas as embedded in brains and central nervous systems.

<sup>32</sup>"Tantra" means "rule" or "ritual." As a religious view its chief characteristic is the prominence given to female energy. The live requisites of tantra worship are wine, flesh, fish, parched grain and mystical gesticulation, and sexual intercourse. The British were fascinated by this religion above all because it enjoined promiscuous intercourse which had been refused them since the end of consanguine marriage during the Roman occupation.

<sup>33</sup>Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* (Baltimore, 1962), I, 509.

<sup>34</sup>When Andre' Malraux pointed out that the United States is the only country in which the novels are not written by intellectuals, part of the reason may well be found in this peculiar American fastidiousness.

<sup>35</sup>Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śākta* (Madras: Ganesh, 1965), p. 136.

<sup>36</sup>Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, pp. 269f.

<sup>37</sup>2nd. ed. London, 1952. One-volume ed. abridged (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959), pp. 361-378.

<sup>38</sup>(Cambridge, 1965), II, 134.

<sup>39</sup>Quoted by Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, p. 278.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>41</sup>*Lokāyata* quoting Briffault, *The Mothers*, iii, 59.

<sup>42</sup>*Lokāyata* quoting *JRAS*, xiii, 921.

<sup>43</sup>Which Engels characterizes as being, under civilization in general and capitalism in particular "double-sided, double-tongued, self-contradictory and antagonistic" in *Origin of the Family*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.