

The Principle of Fundamental Oneness

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THE CONTEXT

DOES DEVELOPMENT DIVIDE OR UNITE HUMANITY?

As I look at society today, this is what I see: many worlds and many peoples struggling to find a place for themselves, their traditions, and their ways of life while their realities change around them at an ever-increasing pace. And I see marks of nobility in these struggles: generosity when people have little or nothing themselves, expressions of kindness toward others, and untiring dedication in working for equality, unity of purpose, peace, and harmony with the natural environment. These are good people doing the best they can to manifest the good life that their traditions, myths, religions, and conscience tell them is possible. They work hard to move toward solidarity and cooperation and resist tendencies toward separation, selfishness, and conflict.

But it is impossible to ignore the strength of the forces pulling in the other direction: gender imbalances; gross inequities in the distribution of wealth; the distortion of religion into fundamentalist postures

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and actions; periodic communal violence; disregard for the principles of moral sexuality; crassly hedonistic consumerism (that is, the production and consumption of goods and items that have little relevance to the real quality of life but provide sensation for the sake of sensation); nonparticipatory development initiatives that rarely profit the beneficiary population; and confusion over culture, religion, and spirituality (for example, how one religion can relate harmoniously and noncompetitively with other religions) — all this occurring within the context of the ever-pervasive and increasingly ominous pollution and destruction of our natural resources. The problems are certainly more than I can list here, but it seems to me that all of them find their roots somewhere in the divided nature of the world.

Given the recent emergence of many of these problems, it is hard to identify holistic technological and social solutions to address them. Each “fix” has its own consequences, both good and bad, and it is difficult to see at the moment of its application the ultimate impact of each new “solution.” Solutions, without an adequate moral or spiritual grounding, often become problems themselves. For example, although science undoubtedly has made immense and positive contributions to human well-being, it has also been used to build nuclear weapons; computer technology is used to facilitate communications, but it is also used to target “enemy” sites. And behind all these scientific applications gone awry, I again see the marks of a world lacking unity and cohesiveness. It is this insight, I believe, that needs to be brought to an analysis of the prevalent paradigm of development.

In the issues before us, three important areas interplay — modern science, religion and values, and development (broadly defined in economic, social, and psychological terms). I explore their interfaces in this paper from my own perspective as a practicing Hindu woman and social scientist. In these introductory remarks, I elucidate the details of this perspective. In the second section of the paper, “Hinduism: the backdrop,” I explain my understanding of Hinduism and Vedanta and some of their cardinal principles, such as *dharmā* and “self–Self.” In the third section, “Self, society, and development,” I explore the approach that Hinduism takes, moving from an inward, personal development to an outward, social development. In the section entitled “Modern science and the Hindu religion,” I look at the striking similarities between new discoveries in science and very old wisdom from Hindu scriptures. In the penultimate section, “Devotion, knowledge, and action,” I turn to a historical description of religious movements and leaders in India who have spearheaded action for social reform and development, leading us finally into a discussion (in the section “Conclusion: an integrated paradigm”) of what resources religion, and Hinduism in particular, can offer to the field of development.

The dilemmas to which I have alluded seem to be so inherent to the modern lifestyle that to reverse them would be no small

accomplishment. It would require a great and persistent effort over an appreciable period. The present generation, I think, can do little more than lay the groundwork of an ultimately “united” world. It is exactly in this process that the Hindu religion, for me, offers such valuable resources: its syncretic and pluralistic history and its concept of an ultimate Oneness provide an alternative outlook and an important balance to the divisive effect of modern systems and materialist mind-sets.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

At the outset, I would like to reflect on how I first encountered the principles of science, religion, and development (SRD), how I use these in my personal life and work, and how I became interested in this project of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

I feel that it was my parents, especially my mother, who introduced me to the religious ethos and the Almighty — or Supreme Power — when I was a child. My mother came from an Arya Samaj family background and conveyed, in her own loving way, her understanding that the Supreme Power is One and the Creator of the whole universe. We are all children of that Almighty. She inculcated in me — and my brothers and sisters — the habit of praying to God on getting up in the morning and before going to sleep, to give thanks for God’s blessings, to ask for protection from evil, and to impart to us the good sense and positive attitude needed to love, respect, and take care of ourselves and others. Thus, I received these core religious beliefs as part of my socialization in a liberal home, school, and community atmosphere.

I continue these practices even today. I do yogic exercises and pray regularly on waking and again before retiring, to thank the Supreme Power for his blessings and to internalize the divine qualities by linking my personal soul with the Supreme Soul through meditation. I make efforts to put into practice some of the cardinal principles of the Hindu religion (*sanatana dharma*). For example, I have faith in an Ultimate Reality and in the Oneness of that power from which, and in which, all creation lives. I firmly believe that I am a soul (*atman*), as are others, and that the soul is basically and fundamentally divine. I am conscious of the potential divinity inherent in me and in everyone. On these grounds, I try not to distinguish or discriminate between people on the basis of sex, class, religion, region, or nationality, and I work to alleviate discrimination. I make every effort to live out the values of love, understanding, compassion, caring, sharing, nonviolence, and interfaith understanding.

I am a believer in the law of *karma*, a principle that inspires me and gives me the inner strength to carry out my responsibilities and duties to serve humanity to the best of my ability. I work to accumulate good *karma* for a better future in this life and in the lives I believe will come (from my belief in the immortality of the soul and in reincarnation).

My effort (*karma*) is to maximize the good I can do in the world and minimize the evil. I work and pray not only for my family's welfare but also for the well-being of others and society. I endeavour to serve and help others — those who are troubled, poor, weak, and underprivileged — to help themselves. This gives me a great deal of satisfaction when compared with pursuits that centre on economic gain at the cost of values and principles. I try to share my material and nonmaterial achievements — that is, knowledge, education, and training — with others. At the same time, the principle of *karma* gives me strength to bear whatever misfortunes befall me and the courage to face all my problems without blaming anyone else for them.

Throughout my life, my curiosity has led me to learn more, both scientifically and empirically, about religion, exploring such questions as Who is the Creator? and What is the purpose of life? I have read the scriptures of various faiths in translation. I have listened to the religious and spiritual discourses of knowledgeable individuals from diverse belief systems, including the Bahá'í Faith, the Brahma Kumaries, the Ramakrishan Mission, the Sri Aurobindo Society, and the Arya Samaj. I have even tried various kinds of meditation. This has widened my knowledge and appreciation of other religions and the revelations that they each have to offer. I have found that, in essence, the core religious beliefs and values are universal, and this makes me feel very close to people of different faiths.

When I was a student of social science (psychology, counseling, sociology, and religion), I was interested in the debate on whether science and religion contradicted each other. I read literature on science and spirituality, for example, the works of Chander (1988) and Kanal (1991), the writings of Indian scientists such as physics professor D.S. Kothari (1977, 1980, 1997), and texts by spiritualists like Swami Vivekananda (1937, 1968); (see also Swami Bhajanananda 1976–77) and Swami Ranganathananda (1978, 1983, 1987), who argued that there is no clash between science and religion: the two are interrelated and are in harmony with one another.¹ These readings whetted my curiosity to learn more about the interrelationships between these two seemingly unrelated discourses.

Throughout my higher education, I was interested in observing and systematically studying the changes taking place in the socio-psycho-cultural realms and in the political-economic situations of people from diverse societies. I was particularly interested in such changes in relation to the situation of women, especially the women of India. I was keen to study the problems women face and to understand their changing attitudes and feelings. I wanted to investigate how they were being

¹ This might be termed the “new approach,” the understanding that it is counter-productive to human well-being when people rely on religion or science to the exclusion of the other. When the two are combined, they strengthen one another and bring a holistic expression of human genius and total fulfillment (Ranganathananda 1978).

treated within and outside the family, both now and in ancient India (based on our scriptures). I asked myself what factors had contributed to bringing about these changes. This interest led me to do research on gender issues and women's development for my doctoral and post-doctoral studies. Thus, I was introduced to the concept of development and the social sciences quite a while ago, but I have had less exposure to the physical sciences.

As a social scientist, I have observed developments in science and technology (s&t) and how these affect people's lives — women's lifestyles and well-being in particular. I was also strongly interested in laying out the constitutive elements of women's development in the context of sustainable development. I observed that India, after independence, has seen spectacular progress in s&t, increasing economic growth, industrial development, and self-sufficiency in terms of food and clothing. I found that governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were taking countless measures to improve the situation of women and bring about overall development. I have been trying to analyze why, despite the vast resources poured into these initiatives, we see increasing problems of communal violence (for example, between Hindu and Muslim groups), a rising incidence of violence generally, widespread corruption, rampant illiteracy, casteism, unemployment, abject poverty, overpopulation, malnutrition, and degradation of the environment. Why do we see so much socioeconomic and gender inequality and injustice? What is the origin of the growing emphasis on the values of materialism and consumerism and the want in quality in public leadership? Why do we see so much crime and violence, especially against women, even in the "developed" countries of the world? In my studies (Kapur 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1995), I started exploring whether part of the answer could be found in the crisis of human and spiritual values caused by a decline in attention to these important questions and a lack of education on these subjects.

My efforts in this area have centred on counseling, generating awareness of human and spiritual values, and healing marriage, family, and other interpersonal relationships. As a counselor I try to help people to become cognizant of their strengths and potentialities and thereby help them solve their problems, resolve conflicts, understand themselves and others more fully, and manage their stress. I try to help them help themselves to grow in self-esteem (by helping them find their own positive directions), improve their strong points, and overcome their limitations. Accepting those in trouble as complete individuals, with all their talents and weaknesses, enables me to provide this support.

While working as a counselor, trying to encourage religious and spiritual values, I was continually troubled by certain questions: What is science? What is religion — Hindu as well as other faiths? What have science and religion contributed to development? How have science and religion interacted?

It was at this point that one fine morning, as a pleasant surprise, I learned of IDRC's project in SRD. After some discussion, IDRC invited me to participate in this research, asking me to explore the relevant issues as a believer in the Hindu religion. I was thrilled. Deep in my heart I felt that this opportunity came to me because of God's blessings and will.

I knew that this research would require intensive study and hard work. But I had been keen to do further research in these areas, so I was at once drawn toward the project. I accepted the invitation with great enthusiasm and began the work with the help of my research assistant, Tribhuwan Kapur, who has a doctorate in the sociology of religion. We have found it fascinating and satisfying to work on this research with the knowledgeable, understanding, and friendly IDRC group; the distinguished research team leader, Farzam Arbab; and the other eminent members of the team. I hope that my practical experience with the very intricate motivations and problems of human life (as seen from the eyes of a sociologist and counselor), my experience of India, and my lifelong immersion in a Hindu perspective provide a useful complement to the expertise and knowledge of the other participants in the project.

HINDUISM: THE BACKDROP

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY BECOME ONE

It may be appropriate to clarify at the outset what is meant by the terms *Hindu*, *Hindu religion*, and *Hinduism*. According to Ranganathananda (1987) and Badrinath (1993), the words *Hindu* and *Hinduism* were not coined by the people of India to refer to themselves or their religion; these words are not found in any of the ancient or medieval Indian texts. Instead, they suggest that invading Arabs in the 8th century AD or ancient Persians or Iranians used these terms to designate the people living east of the river "Sindhu" (the modern river Indus). Because Persians pronounced *s* as *h*, the word *Sindhu* of Sanskrit became *Hindu*, and the territory became known as Hindustan (Ranganathananda 1987). The Greeks pronounced it as "Indos," from which came the word *India*. Thus, the term *Hinduism* originally meant the religion of the people of Hindustan.

In fact, Hinduism would be hard to define as any one set of beliefs. It has always been a syncretic religion, incorporating several indigenous belief systems in addition to the religions that came to India through war and migration. The Indian thinkers themselves called their religion by the significant term *sanatana dharma*, which can be translated as "Eternal Religion." *Dharma* is the Sanskrit word for "religion," and it is a philosophical concept focused on unity. "The aim of *dharmā*," as Badrinath (1993, p. 27) explained, is "to create and sustain individual and social

conditions where each individual, in his or her own being and in relationship with others, is able to explore the potential of his or her life and bring it to fruition in such ways that he or she can." He explained the centrality of the concept as follows:

The one concern from which everything in Indian thought flowed and on which every movement of life ultimately depended, was the idea of *dharmā*, order, which was not any positive order but the order that was inherent in all life. Derived from the Sanskrit root word *dhṛ*, which is "to support," "to sustain," *dharmā* means that whereby whatever lives is sustained, upheld, supported.

Badrinath (1993, p. 22)

Badrinath further explained the five elements of the order, or *dharmā*, in which our being is firmly grounded: nonviolence; an attitude of equality; peace and tranquility; a lack of aggression and cruelty; and an absence of envy.

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While each individual has a relation to himself, he has relationships with others. In the *dharmic* view the two are not separate. It is only when our relationship with ourselves is right, that our relationship with the other can be right: and it is not until we achieve a right relation with the other, that our relation with ourselves can be right.

Badrinath (1993, p. 23)

Swami Vivekananda, a monk in the Ramakrishna order and the most famous disciple of the Bengali mystic, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, placed great emphasis on the merging of the scientific attitude with the spiritual dimension. He defined religion as "the manifestation of the divinity already in man" (Ranganathananda 1987, p. 218). By the word *divinity* he meant *Brahman* (Almighty), a concept in which divinity is inseparable from the individual self, or *ātman* (soul). As he further stated,

Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they might be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. ... All religions are so many stages. Each one of them represents a stage through which the human soul passes to realize God.

Bhajananda (1976–77, p. 9)

I think Vivekananda used the word *religion* in the special sense of spirituality. For him it meant "the realization of God" and "not just a means of personal salvation but a great creative force in shaping history" (Bhajananda 1976–77, p. 4). I see echoes of Swami Vivekananda's teaching in the work of Western social scientists like Pitirim Sorokin, a sociologist, who also emphasized that spiritual training is essential to the integration and growth of individuals, society, and culture, which in turn form an indivisible trinity (Sorokin 1958).

Swami Muktinathananda, a scientist, resided in Canada for many years, but ultimately he renounced the world and became a monk with the Ramakrishna Mission. In answer to a question about the nature of the Hindu religion, he responded that it asks the following fundamental questions:

(i) Who am I? (ii) What is this world? (iii) Who is God? (iv) What is my relation to this world and God? The Hindu concept for a human being is that a person is trichotomous: there is a body, a mind, and the self or *atman*. The aim of every being is to know who exactly he or she is: is it the body, or the mind, or the self. In fact, the Hindu religion begins with this question of knowing myself and my relation to God and my World.

Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998²)

The notion of the self in Hinduism, classical and modern, differs from that in social science. Whereas social science tends to equate the self with the ego, or the total personality that is presented to society in interaction, in Hinduism the self is equated with the soul (or *atman*) within each living being. Yet, Self also stands for the Supreme Reality (or *Brahman*). The self is seen as a small particle of the Self, and the realization of the oneness of the self with the Self (or the soul with the Supreme Reality) is the goal of human life. Thus, the movement of Creation is a play between self and Self.³

Through reincarnation, the self is engaged in virtually endless transmigrations (*samsara*) in order to come to a realization of the oneness of the self with the Self. The doctrine of *samsara* or transmigration holds that *atman* is immortal but deluded with all kinds of desires. According to its *karma* (deeds, totality of action and interaction), the *atman* incarnates in diverse bodies until it is completely purified and finally merges with *Brahman* and attains *moksha* (or spiritual liberation). As the Bhagavad Gita puts it, “Just as a man casts off worn out cloths and puts on others which are new, so the embodied [self] casts off worn out bodies and enters others which are new” (Sastry 1977, p. 49). The *karma* accumulated by a particular *atman* in previous lifetimes determines the situation into which a person is reborn.

Another complementary guide to action found in Hinduism is embedded in the *varnaashram* scheme, a socioreligious framework that

² Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

³ The Bhagavad Gita, the most popular Hindu scripture, states the following: “They say that the senses are superior; superior to the senses is mind; superior to mind is reason; one who is even superior to reason is He [the Self] . . . Then knowing Him who is superior to reason, subduing the self by the Self, slay thou, O mighty armed, the enemy in the form of desire, hard to conquer” (Sastry 1977, p. 117).

divides human life into four distinct stages, each with concomitant privileges and duties:

- ☞ *Bharmacharya* — studenthood and celibacy;
- ☞ *Grihastya* — responsible householdership;
- ☞ *Vanaprastha*— renunciation of all societal attachments; and
- ☞ *Sanyasa* — contemplation of Ultimate Reality (that is, taking on spiritual pursuits on a full-time basis) and retirement from all social links.

This pattern of life, however, is ideal; it is typical that the last stage, which requires separation from the family at a time when a person or couple is most likely to require help, is very hard to achieve. In modern India, the framework of society allows us to aspire only to the first two stages.

Nevertheless, many aged people do turn to a form of renunciation and contemplation by daily reading of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and other spiritual texts. They spend money to hold or attend religious gatherings where there are recitations of various prayers and discussions on the teachings of various gurus (or spiritual masters), preachers, and teachers. Hindus continue, by and large, to be ritualistic and to spend conspicuous sums on ceremonies. We can say then that although Hinduism has evolved over the millennia, this evolution has been more in the form than in the content.

VEDANTA: THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

Hindu religion is not based on a single personal founder or group of founders; rather, it is based on revelations of the authentic inner experiences of sages and seers deeply involved in the search for Truth. The Veda, Puranas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita form the basic spiritual literature of Hinduism. The Veda is the accumulated treasury of spiritual knowledge discovered by various seers and sages — perfected beings — at various points in history. “The term Veda, according to Sankaracharya, primarily means knowledge, beginningless and endless, capable of leading to liberation, and verifiable by one and all” (Ranganathananda 1987, p. 40). That is why the Veda is the outcome of an inquiry into Truth, very similar in nature and process to modern scientific inquiry.⁴

⁴ Joshi, a great scholar of the Veda, points out that by studying the Veda one finds that it presents “a dynamic interpretation of the world and assigns to activities in the world a profound meaning and significance. It enjoins upon man to act rather than to renounce his actions. It places before man a method of action which has been discovered after a long and intense search by the vedic seers,” who were themselves true scientists and experimenters (Joshi 1991, p. 19).

The Puranas are epics, the ideas and the teachings of the Veda told in story and parable form. The Upanishads collect the concluding and philosophical portions of the vast and varied Vedic literature and contain the quintessence of the Veda. The Gita summarizes the essential teachings of the Upanishads dealing with metaphysical reality, the nature of self, and the need for knowledge of self and presents them in a popular manner. The Gita addresses not only Upanishadic philosophy but also its ethical implications; thus, it both explains the highest reality and provides guidance for everyday life. This is why it has become the scripture of the masses in India.

But the essence of Hinduism is Vedanta, the philosophical and metaphysical part of the Hindu scriptures. Swami Vivekananda could see clearly that Hinduism had a core of sound spiritual principles based on the Upanishads and the Gita and that these principles, when applied in practical life, could solve many of the nation's problems (Bhajananda 1976–77). I would agree with Vivekananda and suggest that India's contemporary state of decline is not the result of religion but of a failure to apply the principles of Vedanta to solve the social and national problems (Bhajananda 1976–77). In a lecture entitled "Vedanta Today," Karan Singh, an eminent diplomat, politician, and scholar of Vedanta and interfaith dialogue, explained the central features of *sanatana dharma* as formulated in the five cardinal principles of Vedanta (Singh 1988):

1. *Unity of existence* — Vedantic theory suggests that an all-pervading existence, or single force, permeates the whole universe. Everything that exists — whatever it is and wherever it exists — is illuminated by the same Light that promotes the happiness and welfare of all beings.
2. *Divinity inherent in all existence (includes the potential divinity of human souls)* — In Vedanta, human beings are children of immortality, with the capacity for spiritual realization. In explaining the concept of religion, Vivekananda stated this well-known article of Vedantic faith:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one or more or all of these — and be free. This is the whole religion. Doctrine or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

Ranganathananda (1987, p. 45)

Vedanta is the realization of the divinity within oneself and in each one of us. The crowning idea of Vedanta is the unity of the divine within us and the divine beyond us. Vedanta describes *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, as *Sat-cit-Ananda* (existence,

knowledge, and bliss). If bliss is a constituent of the Ultimate Reality of the universe, it is also a constituent of the individual (Ranganathananda 1987, p. 23).

To manifest one's inherent potential for divinity, one follows the three paths to self-realization offered in Vedanta through which the individual soul finds a link with the Supreme Soul: *bhakti yoga*, or the path of devotion to the Supreme Reality or Soul; *jnana yoga*, the path of knowledge; and *karma yoga*, the path of action and work. As Gangrade (1995) pointed out, no one of these paths can alone suffice or permanently stand isolated from the other two. A person must follow *jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* together to completely develop his or her character and personality.

3. *The entire human race like one extended family* (vasudhaiva kutumbhkam) — The bond of spirituality binds people belonging to various parts of the human race, despite all their differences. Ideally, all the members of an extended family care and share, demonstrate mutual love and respect, and take responsibility for and cooperate in maintaining and furthering the welfare of the family; these ideals can be extended to provide models of behaviour for each individual toward the rest of the human race.
4. *Essential unity of all religions* — The perception of the spiritual unity of all existence in Hinduism and the emphasis on spiritual realization as the goal of religion foster interreligious harmony (Ranganathananda 1987). In Hinduism, various paths lead to the Divine: one can worship a female or male deity, trees, plants, herbs, the sun, the moon, stars, fire, the incorporeal God, the Supreme Soul–Reality, or an idol. This pluralism is apparent in Swami Vivekananda's idea of the harmony of the religions of the world and in that of a universal religion providing for the coexistence of all religions, each accepting the best elements in the others. I feel that people today very much need the pluralism of Vedanta and the interfaith understanding it espouses.
5. *The welfare, progress, development, and happiness of all* — Vedanta promotes not only the fulfillment and liberation of the self but also the welfare and development of all beings. This is indicated by a popular Vedic prayer that all may be happy and healthy and participate in and be the recipient of welfare, progress, and prosperity and that none may be unhealthy, unhappy, or ignorant. This prayer is recited in Sanskrit during various religious ceremonies; similar prayers are found in the Bahá'í Faith and in other religions.⁵

⁵ Swami Jitatmananda (1992) has brought out the five concepts, or cardinal principles, of the Upanishads (Vedanta) very effectively in the book *Modern Physics and Vedanta*, which offers an alternative to the current, primarily materialistic, paradigm.

Vedanta is both a philosophy and a religion, but it has no set dogma or method:

While asserting the truth as one, and its mystic vision as the only means, [Vedanta] accords recognition to multiple approaches to this vision Each generation has felt free to interpret the basic truth in the language and cultural mores of his own generation ... though strictly adhering and following the original texts. ... Thus Vedanta is the science of Reality rather than a dogma, religious or philosophical.

Giri (1985, pp. 34–35)

Today, people are engaged in a tremendous search for new approaches and broader understandings to guide their actions. And for me, it is this search that makes Vedanta so relevant. Vivekananda pointed out that the Vedantic principles are applicable not only in India but throughout the world (Bhajananda 1976–77) and that Vedanta has an important part to play in the life of modern humans. It provides them with, among other values, a philosophy of social service so lacking in modern society (Bhajananda 1976–77). Vivekananda believed, as I do, that religion properly understood can be applied to help solve both the mundane and the existential problems of humanity.

SELF, SOCIETY, AND DEVELOPMENT

Science is discovering the Truth. Religion is the manifestation of Truth. Spirituality is Truth itself. Morality is holding on to Truth. Ethics is application of Truth in social life.

Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998⁶)

The concept of development according to *sanatana dharma* is the “unfolding of Truth.” It embraces the development of the self (body, mind, and spirit), others, and the entire universe (that is, the well-being of all living beings, including the environment⁷). Real development

⁶ Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

⁷ Hinduism lays stress on the psychophysical environment as a cocoon for the growth of goodness and harmony. The Veda devotes a great deal of attention to agriculture, livestock, rains, and harvests (Balasubramanian 1999). An entire branch of medicine — *Ayurveda* — has its base in various herbal remedies: *Vrkshayurveda*, classical Indian plant science, is highly advanced (Balasubramanian 1999). Hindus greatly venerate several plants, including *tulsi* (basil) and neem, and use them medicinally. The ashrams of the Vedic *rishis* (seers), which taught young disciples the Veda and the way of *dharmā*, were forest retreats. The vivid descriptions of forest and fauna in the Ramayana and Mahabharata indicate quite clearly that there was then no environmental crisis of the sort witnessed in the 20th century. These accounts and indicators suggest that living according to the principles of *dharmā* includes, and results in, an understanding and appreciation for the natural world and a “right” relationship with the natural environment, as well as with others in society.

from a Hindu perspective is the development of one and all in terms of both the inner and the outer environment. As Swami Muktinathananda said,

According to Hinduism, real development in any area consists in removal of all imperfections and bringing about perfection. Thus, the essential elements of real development are helping in the removal of everything that is unreal, false or imperfect, providing education to remove ignorance, and helping one and all to understand the necessity and implications of development.

Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998⁸)

SELF AND DEVELOPMENT

That man attains peace, who, abandoning all desires, moves about without attachment, without selfishness, without vanity.

Sastry (1977, p. 80)

He who hates no single being, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, to whom pain and pleasure are equal, who is enduring, ever-content and balanced in mind, self controlled, and possessed of firm conviction, whose thought and reason are directed to Me, he who is (thus) devoted to Me is dear to Me.

Sastry (1977, p. 311)

He by whom the world is not afflicted and who is not afflicted by the world, who is free from joy, envy, fear and sorrow, he is dear to Me.

Sastry (1977, p. 312)

Those who ever contemplate the Imperishable, the Indefinable, the Eternal, having restrained all the senses, always equanimous, intent on the welfare of all beings, — they reach Myself.

Sastry (1977, p. 304)⁹

Whereas we know that the concept of the self is related to an immortal spark of inner consciousness, the word *I* or *me* (*aham*) refers to the accretions that cloud the pure perception of the immortal soul within every being. The purpose then of *sanatana dharma* is to evolve a way of dealing with society that removes the accretions of doubt, vanity, anger, and misery and brings the *atman* within every member of society ever closer to the realization of total fusion (*moksha*) with the *Brahman*. This fusion

⁸ Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

⁹ Sastry (1977) contains an English translation of Sri Sankaracharya's original Sanskrit commentary on the Bhagavad Gita.

is the goal of pursuing good *karma* in everyday life, and in India it provides a *raison d'être* for human existence.

The scriptural injunctions of the *purusarthas* (the doctrine of the four goals of life) convey the four ways to fulfill one's inner being:

- ☞ *Dharma* — moral code of conduct, rightful action;
- ☞ *Artha* — economic pursuits for self-sufficiency;
- ☞ *Kama* — satisfaction of desires (physical or other); and
- ☞ *Moksha* — total liberation, release from delusion.

Of these, the most significant is *moksha*. Our discussion of this path of the *purusarthas*, however, must be couched in the basic premise of Hinduism that the soul within a human is immortal: "Him weapons cut not, Him fire burns not, and Him water wets not; Him wind dries not. He cannot be cut, burnt, nor wetted, nor dried up. He is everlasting, all pervading, stable, firm, eternal" (Sastry 1977, pp. 49–50). Thus, the quest for *moksha* is a quest for a sort of immortality.

Dharma is neither a doctrine nor a dogma. In practical terms, *dharmā* is the overarching principle guiding a dutiful and responsible life. It relies on reason no less than on intuition (the inner feeling and apprehension of any situation). As one of the fundamental ideals of human life it aims at life's fullest manifestation and upholds and sustains the individual and universal life principles, including spiritual and social values. *Dharma* is the urge to grow.

Rama in the Ramayana is often cited as a mythological example of a man-god who followed the path of *dharmā*, even though it led him to abdicate his right to the throne of his father, Dasartha, and go into exile for 14 years in the forest as a result of the selfish wish of one of Dasartha's wives, Kaikeyi. This story demonstrates that the path of *dharmā* is not always pleasurable but also involves duty, even that which is unpleasant. Following the path of *dharmā* leads to the accumulation of good *karma*, which itself leads to a better rebirth in a family that pursues the path of the *sanātana dharmā*. This is the beginning of the process toward the goal of *moksha* or liberation from *samsara*. The Bhagavad Gita (ch. III 19) emphasizes this: "Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform the action which should be done; for, performing action without attachment, man reaches the Supreme" (Sastry 1977, p. 104).

The fulfillment of *kama*, which is the principle of lawful desire (including sexual desire within marriage) is also part of the *purusarthas*. For Hindus, the fulfillment of desire within the limits of their understanding is also part of the *sanātana dharmā*. Thus, it is clear that people in society should be moral and not obsessed by the sensual to the extent that it damages their psychological and physical health, or the fabric of society, through extramarital sexuality.

The *purusarthas* also enjoin the principle of *artha*, or economic independence. This is considered to be one of the pillars of a moral life, as economic dependence creates a flaw in all aspects of life, including that of morality. Thus, in making *kama* and *artha* some of the cardinal points of human fulfillment, along with spiritual and social goals, the *purusarthas* encourage a sane and balanced approach to living in society; in the case of *artha*, one balances the support of oneself and one's family (materialistic achievements and comfort) with the pursuit of other equally important aims in human life. In Hindu and Indian society, however, the drive for economic independence as a means to a life of plenty is evident everywhere — in all aspects of the media and in conversation with college students, as well as with corporate executives. Rural people who derive much of their income from agriculture or crafts are far closer to the life of the *purusarthas* and might therefore be considered more exemplary of the Hindu moral system.

The *purusarthas* provided a path of life that applied to both men and women. In Hindu society, societal, physical, and mental hygiene depended on living up to the *purusarthas'* high standards, and these basic notions enjoyed wide currency in India. Yet, although the ideals remain the same, modern Indians are unlikely to adhere fully to the *purusartha* system as a guide to personal growth or social interaction.

SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT

One might ask whether the diversity of India and Hinduism has led to division and conflicts and whether such controversies have been in themselves detrimental to overall development, including economic progress. Has the emphasis on spiritual development, evident right from the era of the Veda, come at the cost of economic development, perhaps even itself fostering self-centredness and apathy?

How widely are the Hindu beliefs and schemes of life accepted by the general population in India? This question is extremely important for gauging the effect of religion on economic development. The reality of Hinduism on the ground, both in urban centres and in villages, is that there is a vast proliferation of sects — the two main cults being the Viashnavite and the Saivite — which have their own local variations and imagery, chants, *bhajans* (hymns), and *mantras* (spiritually uplifting words, phrases, and concepts, usually derived from traditional scripture and musically intoned to purify the mind, elevate one's understanding of the self, and realize the divine Oneness). Yet, the sects all have in common their belief in God, known as Bhagwan, Ishwara, or Parmatma, and they all claim allegiance to *sanatana dharma*.

Religious messages are widely disseminated. Although a sizable proportion of Hindus may be illiterate in the sense of modern education, they certainly are well informed regarding the precepts of the Bhagavad Gita and the moral and ethical questions raised by the

epics — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata — enacted in whole and in part each year throughout India. In modern India, radio, television, and cinema reinforce this educational process; programs frequently include discourses on religion or religious stories. These modes of communication serve to popularize and reinforce the values of *sanatana dharma*: the honour and dignity of women, tolerance, forgiveness, patience, humility, and obedience to the will of one's parents.

Hindu social life is life within the community. One's immediate family and the wider network of kin and friends, as well as the whole community, participate in all life-cycle rituals (weddings, funerals, etc.), festivals, and special ceremonies. These ceremonial and ritualistic occasions regenerate the religious life and bring harmony to those who take part in them. During these ceremonies, priests recite various holy books and scriptures and give discourses on many scriptures, including the epics and the Gita. Local customs make a unique contribution to these events in each region but never go against the tenor of the Veda.¹⁰

From India's inception, its history has been one of invasions and conquests, commencing with the Aryans and culminating with the British colonization. Many diverse ideologies have gone into making Hinduism what it is today. An outstanding consequence of Hinduism's eclectic origins is that it has sufficient tolerance and patience to forge new syntheses without totally losing its direction and basic spiritual content. In the medieval era, for example, when the Moguls dominated India, Hinduism survived by incorporating some of the better aspects of other faiths. This is true also of India's response to the Christian rulers and missionaries under British colonization.

Hinduism's acceptance and assimilation of such varieties and polarities of faiths emerged from an underlying truth, eloquently expressed by the Vedic seers in the phrase "Truth is one, Sages call it by various names" (*Ekam Sat vipra bahudha vadanti*). This is one of the greatest pronouncements in the Rig Veda and provides the foundational philosophy of the Hindu faith. Swami Vivekananda considered this statement the Magna Carta of religion (Ranganathananda 1987).

Enlightened Hindus have a deep faith in syncretism, that is, in the practice of incorporating the best principles and elements of all religions. Thus, Hinduism displays an understanding of an underlying and overarching unity, a hard-earned tolerance for all aspects of truth, and a willingness to incorporate the truths of other faiths. As such,

¹⁰ Even in contemporary India, 47.5% of the population is still more or less illiterate. The main sources of people's knowledge of Hinduism are in the oral tradition, passed down from parents to children; sermons delivered by itinerant preachers; discourses given by priests on a daily basis at the temple or at the numerous religious festivals, rituals, and ceremonies; the daily prayers to male or female deities in temples or at the home altar (which most Hindu households have, no matter how affluent or poor); and interchanges during pilgrimages to holy shrines at the four cardinal points of India. On these pilgrimages, people exchange and absorb religious ideas from other pilgrims, especially the legends and myths connected with the shrines.

philosophically, it is not prone to intra- or interreligious conflict. This is not to deny that conflicts have ensued but to suggest that they are not in accord with the fundamental tenets of Hinduism. Given the heterogeneity of Indian society, one might ask whether these conflicts would have been much worse without this philosophical and spiritual underpinning.

Related to Hinduism's syncretic tendencies is the Indian understanding of the term *secularism*. India's society is pluralistic, with a variety of cultures, ethnicities, races, languages, and religions. Although Hinduism is the majority religion in India and a large proportion of the Indian population is Hindu, the milieu of Hinduism contains several other religions, like Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, the Bahá'í Faith, and Jainism. One of the major issues that occupied Gandhi and Nehru was determining what position on this multiplicity of religions would best suit an independent India. This position would have to define "clearly the relation between religion and politics and between religion and the nation-state" (Joshi 1995, p. 3). Secularism was the approach chosen, but a secularism with a politically convenient and distinctly Indian interpretation. "Secularism is defined as 'equal respect for all faiths' and a call for cultivation of religious tolerance and harmony" (Kanal 1988, p. 1). Mahatma Gandhi summed up the secular approach of India as follows:

Hindustan belongs to all those who are born and bred here and who have no other country to look to. Therefore it belongs to Parsis, Beni Israelis, to Indian Christians, Muslims and other non Hindus as much as to Hindus Religion is a personal matter, which should have no place in politics.

Gandhi (1992 [1947], pp. 277–278)

Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India (and Gandhi's chosen disciple), had a similar appreciation of the question of secularism and felt that it was not merely a question of tolerating other religions — it was a question of social and political justice, of creating an equitable society (Joshi 1995). Thus, the preamble to the new Constitution of India declared the country "a sovereign secular, democratic republic." The state was not to interfere with people's freedom to practice or believe in any faith.

If this idea had been truly accepted, it would have laid the foundations for an integrated development, because it would have created the conditions for subcontinental harmony. But of all the various types of socialization and conditioning, the religiocentric bias yields least to any kind of pressure to change. It is very difficult to let go of the central tenet of each religion that makes believers claim, "our religion is the best!" I would say that this is mainly a result of paranoia and the absence of knowledge and understanding of one's own religion and, more so, of other religions. If India is to realize its goal of interfaith harmony, then

Hindus must use the syncretism of Hinduism to take the lead in this process.

India's experiment in "secularism" is now about 50 years old and bears many scars; it has not managed to avoid carnage and violence, including the great strife during the partition of India into India and Pakistan. On numerous occasions, communal violence has occurred between Hindus and Muslims. These events indicate that the ethos of secularism has not percolated into the psyche of the common person in India. The experiment, however, goes on, and perhaps with deep knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and respect for one's own religion, as well as for the religions of others, India's secularism will fully succeed. Outside India, interfaith understanding and interfaith movements are also growing in every corner of the world; these beliefs, I feel, will form the basis of global unity and integrated development.

In examining the question of Hinduism's role in economic development, I take as an example an argument put forward in the early part of the 20th century by the sociologist Max Weber. For Weber (1958), the caste system and the Hindu religious beliefs of *karma*, *samsara*, and *kismet* (Urdu for fate) meant that Hindu society was otherworldly in orientation and not geared to respond to new economic challenges. Weber, however, did not seriously consider other factors — colonialism and repeated invasions — that led to the conditions he observed in India. Moreover, Hinduism is a lived and in many respects still oral tradition: it is very difficult to understand from texts. Thus, although Weber's viewpoint is scholarly, it is not holistic. A number of social scientists have, in fact, rejected his perspective. On the basis of research among entrepreneurs, Singer et al. (1966) found that the "stagnant economy" of India could not be related to otherworldly religious values; they observed that the family orientation of these entrepreneurs, as opposed to Western-style individualism, was an asset in capitalist development (see also Brzezinski 1997). Singer et al. also found that Indians used adaptive strategies — such as compartmentalization, ritual neutralization of the work sphere, and vicarious ritualization — to successfully combine the economic and religious spheres (Singer 1972). Moreover, the economist Arvind Sharma (1980) suggested that the basis for a strong work ethic can be gleaned from Hindu scriptural tradition (Brzezinski 1997).

The reason why India has seen little economic development might be found in the nonparticipatory policies and practices that have always governed its primarily agricultural economy. Farmers, especially those with small holdings, have been exploited by the landowners, bureaucrats, and rulers; for the landless, the situation is still worse. As a result, in most parts of India the benefits of agricultural production have accrued only to those who exploited both the people and the resources and refused to share these benefits with those who worked for them or with the general population. The most recent spate of economic

development in India began with the unification of the various pre-existing nation-states into a single sovereign Republic of India on 15 August 1947; at that time, India's leaders confronted a host of historical problems but failed, for various reasons, to fully enlist the progressive and reformist ethos of that period, including its participatory, indigenous methodologies. I will return to this issue when I discuss Gandhi's *sarvodaya* (or welfare of all) model of village-based economic development and Nehru's preference for the heavy-industrialization model.

ISSUES FOR HINDUISM AND DEVELOPMENT

Westerners raise some pertinent questions when they encounter Hindu-based social action and development strategies: Does belief in reincarnation, *karma*, and *samsara* have a deleterious effect on people's awareness of, or their action on, social problems, such as poverty and the denial of women's rights? Further, to what extent is "fatalism" a major influence in people's daily life, and is it based on Hindu religious belief? Does the caste system create and reinforce inequity?

The concepts of reincarnation, *karma*, and *samsara* are closely inter-related and convey the belief in the "cycle of birth and rebirth," the immortality of the soul, and the idea that "as you sow, so shall you reap." It would be incorrect to assess the Hindu attitude as fatalistic, for this would imply the existence of a large Hindu community without any intellection or direction. Fatalism is the attitude of people who believe and act as if their efforts, whether great or small, will make no difference to the ultimate outcome of plans or actions. This attitude would result in utter indifference to efforts to bring about development. Yet, *karma* (in Hindi) and *bhagayavad* (in Sanskrit) do not carry the negative connotations of fatalistic passivity and laziness; rather, they carry the positive connotation of reconciliation after the event. This is the approach, in practice, of a vast section of Hindu society; these people use it to accept gracefully and with great courage, calmness, and strength the outcome of adverse economic and social situations. *Karma* suggests that such circumstances must stem from people's own deeds, yet *karma* also imparts confidence that people have the strength and capacity to shape their own future in this life and in subsequent ones. I feel that this understanding of *karma* has, on balance, a positive rather than negative effect on poverty alleviation, women's rights, and developmental activities in general because it allows people to sustain their hope during inevitable setbacks and to believe that their endeavours will yield fruit.

Besides, the existing socioeconomic system adequately inculcates norms of competition, individuality, and ceaseless striving to better the situation in one's family, business, or career. This has removed all but a token recognition of the passive side of fate and fatalism. Even though Hindus refer to "fate" whenever they encounter a life event they cannot

control or even understand, they exert strenuous efforts to follow their desires and achieve their goals. This dual approach is consistent with passages in the Gita that clearly refute Weber's argument. The Gita preaches constant action in all that one does **and** deep meditation as part of action. One is instructed not only to strive in all spheres of life but also to do this in a cool and detached manner, keeping all the consequences of action in view. Hinduism is therefore not a religion that teaches passivity; rather, it is both outward and inward looking, with a logical connection between these dimensions.

The caste system also causes great comment and consternation. Each caste is related to a *varna*, of which there are four: *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, and *shudra*. Each of these has a role to play in society:

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- ☞ *Brahmins* are in charge of ritual and religious matters;
- ☞ *Kshatriyas* are warriors and allied to the defence of society;
- ☞ *Vaisyas* are the merchants and given to commercial pursuits; and
- ☞ *Shudras* serve all people belonging to the other *varnas*.

Another group of people, who live outside the caste system, were once known as the “untouchables” and then as *dalits*¹¹; contact with an untouchable was considered polluting by caste Hindus.

Many Hindus believe that the *varna* into which one is born is due to fate or *karma*, because *varna* is immutable. Although the practical effect of this system has often been inequality — with rural, illiterate, and often destitute people bearing the brunt of exploitation by higher castes — it can be argued that this was not the intention of the *varna* system as set out in ancient Hinduism. The functional, rather than hierarchical, nature of the *varna* system is manifest in Balinese Hinduism:

In the history of Hinduism, the doctrine of *varnas* appears *before* the doctrine of *karma*. This raises the suspicion that the doctrine of *karma* may have provided a post facto rationalization for a birth-oriented division of society that was already in place when the doctrine of *karma* became widespread. ... It is possible though that Balinese Hinduism represents the original concept of *varnas* “In Bali *varna* is simply occupation. A businessman is a *vaisya*, a teacher a *brahmin*, an employee a *sudra* and so on. No inferior or superior stature is attached, and if one switches profession — say from teacher to shopkeeper — one changes caste from *brahmin* to *vaisya*.”

Sharma (1993, p. 25, emphasis in the original)

¹¹ In 1937 Dr Ambedkar coined this term for untouchables, but it later came to refer to people of all oppressed classes.

The exploitation of lower castes and untouchables was condemned by the Bhakti mystics and by numerous modern Hindu activists, such as Gandhi. In more concrete terms, certain provisions in the Indian Constitution also combat the discrimination caused by this system, and the Indian people are changing their attitudes and behaviour toward these classes. The history of the caste system in India leads me to think that all human systems carry the potential for abuse when material and status considerations are foremost in our minds and we ignore spiritual and human values.

MODERN SCIENCE AND THE HINDU RELIGION

Scientific knowledge is built upon facts. The medical side is fairly well developed, though the causes and cures of certain ailments are yet to be discovered. But what science does know, it is more or less sure about, because the various factors concerned have been tested: theories have been tried and proven. In religion it is different. People are given certain facts or truths and told to believe them. After a little while when their belief is not fulfilled, doubt creeps in; and then they go from religion to religion in trying to find proof. You hear about God in churches and temples; you can read about Him in books; but you can experience God only through Self-realisation attained by practicing definite scientific techniques. In India, religion is based upon such scientific methods. By experimentation, India has proved the truths in religion. In the future, religion everywhere will be a matter of experimentation; it will not be based solely on belief.

Yogananda (1944, p. 35)

Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

Einstein (1950)

Turning to the nexus between science and religion, I should state that I believe that as objects of study, external phenomena and the inner dimensions of human existence are equally significant. Thus, inasmuch as science is a search for truth, religion is also a search for Truth. The physical sciences are an inquiry into matter and the nature of the external world. Religion, in contrast, is an inquiry into consciousness, spirituality, and the nature of the inner world. In the final analysis, however, one may find no separation between the external and internal dimensions, but a continuum between these states. Science inquires through experiment, and religion inquires through inner experience. In this sense, religion is scientific.

One of the most noticeable trends in science and religion in India is that spiritual savants are recognizing the great significance of science; they have begun to acknowledge that contemporary humans are living

in an age dominated by science. They do not see religion as opposed to science but as having much to learn from the methods and temper of science. Thus, Ranganathananda recorded the following statement of Yogananda:

Pure science needs to cover a wider ground than the external physical world constituting only the external physical environment of human life. Science has to study the inner world of man as well, besides the outer world of nature. But in the modern context, unfortunately the sciences of physical nature have far outstripped the sciences of man If the physical sciences have lifted man from many fears and uncertainties of his primitive past, it has landed him also in new fears and uncertainties arising from ignorance of his own inner nature. The modern man has to realise that such a study of the “*within*” of nature, as revealed in nature’s evolutionary product, that is man, is also a science like the other study by the physical sciences, of the “*without*” of nature.

Ranganathananda (1983, p. 3, emphasis in the original)

I find this statement important because people often assume that modern science alone has verifiable methods, experimentation, and testing. But, as Yogananda suggested in the epigram that began this section, spiritual aspirants can internally verify and replicate specific stages in spiritual progress as set out in Hinduism and Buddhism. We can then say we have a “science” of religion, which, apart from the sociological side of it — as represented in ceremony and ritual observances — is quite capable of providing a topography of the “within” of humans.

In answer to the question of whether the Hindu religion is scientific, Swami Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998¹²) gave the following response: “If we define the scientific in this way that to be practical is to be scientific, then Hinduism is perfectly scientific.”

In his lecture on religion and science, Vivekananda said, “Religion deals with the truth of the metaphysical world just as chemistry and other natural sciences deal with the truth of the physical world” (Ranganathananda 1987, p. 175). Vivekananda also taught that “religion is the science which learns the transcendental in nature through the transcendental in man” (Jitatmananda 1992, p. 68). In Swami Vivekananda’s view, the physicist and the mystic reach the truth of unity by following different approaches. As he noted, “physics today is relating itself increasingly to philosophy and drawing closer to Vedanta philosophy” (Jitatmananda 1992, p. 70). “What the Vedic sages discovered through mystic intuition, modern scientists are confirming with the help of sophisticated instruments” (Jitatmananda 1992, p. 86). American physicist, Fritjof Capra, also supported this view:

Thus the mystic and the physicist arrive at the same conclusions; one starting from the inner realm, the other from the outer world.

¹² Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

The harmony of their views confirms the ancient Indian wisdom that *brahman*, the ultimate reality without, is identical to *Atman*, the reality within.

(Capra 1983, p. 338)

Another trend in Hindu religion is the discovery of various parallels in religion and science where the two seem increasingly to be speaking the same language, that is, language that points toward the unity of all existing phenomena:

Modern particle physics shows the folly of trying to search for a single object, a sub-atomic particle or electron as a separate independent reality. Such a thing does not exist. The very experience of the independent existence of one thing is unreal. Vedanta terms it *mithya*. The right vision is to perceive the whole in the so-called isolated entity. This is what the Vedantist means by the statement “*brahman* alone is real.”

Jitatmananda (1992, p. 27)

As mentioned before, the Ultimate Reality for the ancient Indian seers was *Brahman* (or the Self), from which all *atmans* (or selves) emanate. The realization of the preexisting oneness with *Brahman* was the goal of all life, but to describe *Brahman*, or the Supreme Reality, was considered beyond the capacities of human language or even human conception. For example, Yajnavalkya, a Vedic seer, attempted the following description of Supreme Reality for his wife, Maitreyi, many centuries ago:

For where there is duality as it were, there one sees the other, one smells the other, one tastes the other, one speaks to the other, one hears the other, one thinks of the other, one touches the other, one knows the other. But where everything has become just one's own self, by what and whom should one know? By what should one know Him by whom all this is known? He is indestructible for He cannot be destroyed. He is unattached for He does not attach himself. He is unfettered, He does not suffer, He is not injured. Indeed by what would one know the knower?

Radhakrishnan (1974, p. 286)

A well-known mystic from medieval India, Kabir, also preached the merging of selfhood with the *nirguna* (beyond any attributes), which is clearly a linguistic reformulation of the “not this, not this” (*neti, neti*) of the Upanishads' description of *Brahman*.¹³

¹³ See Pande (1989, p. 122): “Kabir's object of devotion is qualityless (*nirguna*). This reality cannot be identified by any creator. Kabir, in fact, identifies the creator with the created world. In this notion of transcendent immanent unity he is reminiscent of Upanishadic or Kasmira Saiva monism as also of Madhyamika absolutism.”

Thus, two features frequently characterize the Hindu perception of the nature of reality:

- ☞ Ultimate Reality exists, but it cannot be adequately described, or at least it cannot be described with a great deal of precision; and
- ☞ The Ultimate Reality can be experienced in the consciousness of the self by the latter's merging with the consciousness of the ultimate Self.

Further, certain other subfeatures emerge from this characterization:

- ☞ The experience of an Ultimate Reality is not the monopoly of any single religious tradition. Buddhism, for instance, speaks of the "void" into which everything returns and from which everything emerges.
- ☞ It is not possible to quantify the "voidic experience," and in fact this linguistic awkwardness indicates the difficulty.

Modern physics suffers from similar difficulties when it attempts to describe or predict the behaviour of quantum particles, which physicists have described as forms of energy "dancing" without any cause or purpose, a field of energy existing for and in itself.

Hindu scientists, religionists, social scientists, and medical practitioners have noted other base-level similarities between the findings of modern science and the experiential discoveries of Hindu mystics; they have also tried to conceive of new paradigms in which the scientific and religious understandings converge. For example, Mukhopadhyay (a pathologist) developed the *Akbanda* ("unbreakable" or "whole") paradigm that treats the entire universe as a living organism. He pointed out that the "evolution or involution of species is intimately related to evolution or involution of its environment" (Mukhopadhyay 1995). He felt that the question of morality is intimately related to the evolution of consciousness, and this is clear from the wisdom of the sage and savant Sri Aurobindo, whom Mukhopadhyay acknowledged as a seminal influence on his work. In the following quotation, Mukhopadhyay expressed, in modern language, the ancient insight of the Vedas that *Brahman* created the "multiverse," to use Mukhopadhyay's language, as a form of play, where the self would lose consciousness of Self, and the entire purpose of Creation would be the drama of mind, body, and spirit, in which the self would once again merge with the Self:

The "self" within the brain understands its imprisonment within five overlapping concentric spheres. Who am I? What am I supposed to do? Where from I have come? Where shall I be doomed, if proper precautions are not taken before hand? It is "self", seeking the "Self", through "self", for "Self". If "self" is successful in this

mission, then inside is out and outside is in. There is inversion of the neuraxis.

Mukhopadhyay (1995, p. 171)

Mukhopadhyay's seminal work was thus a transformation of the ancient religious insights of India into the modern scientific language of pathology and biology.

Certain scientific discoveries — such as the theory of evolution, the law of conservation of matter, and the theory of relativity — bear striking similarities to Vedantic concepts of the universe. Sri Ramakrishna used the concept of the nonduality of consciousness (*Advaita*) to build his theory of the harmony of religions (Bhajananda 1976–77), and Vivekananda saw nonduality as the basis for the underlying similarities of art, science, and religion.¹⁴ Likewise, Einstein, in his special theory of relativity, used the constancy of the velocity of light to formulate the principle of invariance (Bhajananda 1976–77, p. 23). The close agreement between Vedantic principles and those of the modern scientific discoveries, despite the difference in their expression, is noteworthy (Bhajananda 1976–77). As Jitatmananda pointed out,

The entire world of modern physics is moving toward a knowledge of final unity in the universe. The Vedanta, the philosophical and the metaphysical portions of the Vedas, affirmed this unity as the very basis of all existence and the ultimate goal of all knowledge.

Jitatmananda (1992, pp. 6–7)

Another commonality of science and religion is the idea that the mind, or subjective consciousness, plays a great role in creating the world and lays down the laws of perception. When mystics go “inward,” their consciousness alters and they can perceive worlds not possible if consciousness were not capable of altering dimensions and adapting itself to new perceptions. Social-science researchers have recognized this link between subject and object, in terms of the continuum of consciousness, and suggest that each person “creates” a particular perception of the world, both mental and sociophysical. Similarly, as Jitatmananda remarked,

Unless we know the Knower we cannot also know that the known is only the projection of the Knower. This Knower is our Pure Consciousness, which is the only seer, the one all-pervading Existence, the one all-inclusive knowledge. This Pure Consciousness projects the entire universe just as a spider projects its web. The external and a separate universe is, therefore, only a superimposition, due to our desires and will, on the Pure Consciousness which knows everything as One.

Jitatmananda (1991, p. 50)

¹⁴ According to Vivekananda, “Art, science and religion are but three different ways of expressing the single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita” (that is, nonduality of consciousness) (Bhajananda 1976–77, p. 26).

The importance of the observer has, by now, also been recognized in the physical sciences.

Backed by these eminent thinkers and with these comments on the similarities between scientific and religious inquiry, I subscribe to, and try to manifest in my work, the following statement by Ranganathananda:

There is no conflict between science and religion, between the physical sciences and the science of spirituality. Both have the identical aim of discovering truth and helping man to grow physically, mentally and spiritually, and achieve fulfillment. But each by itself is insufficient and helpless.

DEVOTION, KNOWLEDGE, AND ACTION

THE ORIGINS OF THE HINDU SOCIAL ETHIC

Between the 12th and 16th centuries AD, Hinduism experienced an extraordinary efflorescence. This medieval spiritual renaissance indicates that Hinduism not only survived but prospered under the foreign rule of the Moguls. Some of the better known mystics of this age were Jnanadeva (d. 1296), Namadeva (d. 1346), Kabir (15th century), Nanak (1469–1539), Mira (16th century), Tulsidas (1532–1623), and Eknath (1533–99). Together, they are referred to as the Bhakti gurus. They were spiritual masters—preceptors, who imparted knowledge to their disciples, dispelling ignorance from their minds.

The concept of a living spiritual master has been of extreme importance in Hinduism, and even today many cults and sects with living gurus flourish in India and in other parts of the world where Hinduism has spread. The guru mediates between the disciple and *Brahman*, bringing the disciple closer to *Brahman* through counsel, discourse, exercise, and example. In due course, perhaps after several lifetimes, the disciple is freed from the bonds of delusion and the ongoing cycle of transmigration; then the disciple can merge with *Brahman*.

There were a number of commonalities among the Bhakti mystics and saints, several of whom, like Kabir, came from the lowest caste. The medieval Indian spiritual preceptors, like the Vedic seers, enjoined hard work in the form of service to the spiritual preceptor, community, and society. Devotion to *Brahman* by means of devotion to the guru was another common aspect of their teachings. Most advocated that caste “untouchability” was an age-old evil and that the exploitation of the lower castes and outcastes was a reprehensible practice that must be reversed. They therefore made no distinctions of caste or gender in their ashrams and attempted to influence society by their example. They initiated men and women of all castes into their faith and promised them that they, too, could aspire to and fulfill the desire of spiritual liberation.

Mira stands out as a mystical luminary who was regarded as a saint, even as a woman living in medieval times.

Kabir, for example,

refused to acknowledge caste distinctions or to recognise the authority of the six schools of philosophy. He did not set any store by the four divisions of life (*asbramas*) prescribed for *Bhramanas*. He held that religion (*dharma*) without devotion (*bbakti*) was no religion at all (*adbarna*), and that asceticism, fasting, and alms giving had no value if not accompanied by adoration (*bbajana* — the singing of devotional songs).

Pande (1989, p. 102)

Kabir taught the worship of a Reality that cannot be described. He felt deeply that the guru was the only route to salvation.

There was a great deal of cross-pollination among the religions of the region during this time: Islam¹⁵ and Sufism (mystical Islam) had a strong influence on the Bhakti gurus. In the case of Nanak, the synthesis between Hinduism and Sufism was seminal in the creation of Sikhism.¹⁶ A description of the medieval renaissance would be incomplete without a reference to the insights of Nanak. He was a spiritual teacher who came from a Hindu family, founded Sikhism, and set in motion a lineage of 10 spiritual masters. Nanak believed that the Creator is a single principle from which all things evolve. Although he believed that the Creator is beyond any specific description, he felt that God is capable of forming a pervasive personal relationship with humans. Nanak described God as a “pure light” that pervades everything; in this sense, everything exists in God and the world is his play (*lila*) (Pande 1989). Humans, according to Nanak, emanate from the light of God and are born as a result of the desires of the mind. Humans, by following the will (*bukum*) of God, can evolve in stages and realize spiritual salvation. In this process, nothing is achievable in the spiritual realm without the presence and guidance of the guru. In terms of action, humans must be balanced and objective and live in the world with love and dedication. Nanak said, “Truth is higher than everything, but the living of Truth is higher than everything else.” Clear Upanishadic strains appear in Nanak’s insights, and he, too, worked against idolatry, ritualism, the caste system, and exploitative relationships.

The medieval Indian saints had a very pronounced impact on the evolution of Hindu ideas. Almost every reformer or mystic after Kabir and Nanak denounced casteism and tried to purge Hinduism of the pernicious practices that had crept into it, including discrimination against

¹⁵ See Pande (1989, p. 121): “A pervasive influence of Islam on the medieval Bhakti movement has been asserted and even Sankaracharya is said to have been influenced by Islamic monotheism.”

¹⁶ In Sikhism, the “Holy Book” (Guru Granth Sahib) is treated as a living guru and given every consideration that a living master would be given. For its recitations and interpretation there are Sikh priests called “granthies.”

women. Some of the 18th- and 19th-century reformers were outright in their condemnation of such discrimination; they praised the role of women as mothers — as representative of the Divine Principle. Others, like Dayanand, campaigned to abolish ghastly ritualistic customs, such as *sati* (the self-immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands) and the then-prevalent custom of child marriage, in which even prepubescent children were married. He was also firmly opposed to social restrictions against the remarriage of widows, which went so far as to prevent a widow from remarrying even if she was only a child when her husband died. This first recrudescence of devotion, knowledge, and action, in medieval times, paved the way for the second Hindu renaissance, the effects of which are still evident. The various sects and cults of the 20th century owe allegiance to, and freely quote, the teachings of Kabir, Nanak, Namdeva, Jnanadeva, Mira, and others.

THE SECOND HINDU RENAISSANCE

By the 18th and 19th centuries, despite the teachings of the mystics of the Bhakti Renaissance, many social problems remained unresolved. In fact, these conditions and practices — *sati*, obstruction of widow remarriages, caste exploitation, untouchability, and poverty — remained intact under both Mogul and colonial rule. Nevertheless, certain exemplary movements in the fields of SRD emerged and significantly improved the economic and social conditions of marginalized people. I will now turn to a brief examination of these movements, with a view to outlining their ethical guiding principles and how their principles inform their developmental activities.

Arya Samaj movements

Founded near the turn of the century (1875) by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, under the slogan “back to the Vedas,” the Arya Samaj was characterized by the development of an elaborate monotheistic system of beliefs. Swami Dayanand had an acute sense of social awareness and was active in the field of women’s rights, women’s education, and gender equality. The Arya Samaj started movements for India’s freedom, the education of girls and women, the care of orphan children and the poor, and the revival of religious studies and debate. Through these movements, Dayanand attempted to eradicate superstition, obsessive ritualism, and blind faith; caste, class, and sex discrimination; and the social evils of dowry and untouchability. He started a movement to revive the dignity of hard work and individual virtues. He propagated regular prayers and “Havens” (recitations of Vedic verses while herbs, incense, or cereals are burned to purify the inner and outer environment). He encouraged the concept of the oneness of the incorporeal God and gave impetus to economic development through education, vocational

training, creation of jobs and small-scale industry, and publications. The Arya Samaj has generated an enormous amount of literature on social, religious, scientific, and literary topics (Gupta 1998).

Dayanand acted to change society through the classical system of education (*gurukul*) in which knowledge about *dharmā*, as well as human and spiritual values, was imparted and the ideal of equality practiced. In Satyarth Prakash, a book that provides the fundamental principles of Arya Samaj, Dayanand proposed education for young boys and girls in a three-language formula — Sanskrit, Hindi, and a foreign language. He propounded continence for students and opposed child marriage. The Arya Samaj has founded many Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV) schools, especially in the Punjab; the DAV schools provide modern education with a traditional and Vedic tinge. The Arya Samaj runs a large number of Vyayam Shalas—Akharas (gymnasiums and sports centres) for physical health. It was involved to some extent in the anticolonial movement, supporting the production and consumption of indigenous goods (*swadeshi*) and the use of Hindi as a national language, and it remains active in contemporary India, especially in the northern belt (Jordens 1978).¹⁷

Ramakrishna Mission

The Ramakrishna Mission was founded at the end of the 19th century and named after the Bengali mystic, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahans. Its founder, Swami Vivekananda, was one of Ramakrishna's chief disciples. The Mission teaches the principles of Vedanta and also provides concrete service to communities with its schools, colleges, hospitals, and orphanages.

Sri Ramakrishna emphasized, among other principles, “the equal validity of all religions, the potential divinity of man, and service to man as a way of worshipping God.”¹⁸ Ramakrishna was basically a devotee of Kali, the Divine Mother. As a mystic, Ramakrishna emphasized the spiritual side of life and the limitation of human wants. One of his most urgent dictums was that humans should avoid the trap of sensuality and obsession with material things. He also emphasized people's need for the spiritual and cultural traditions of the past to help them move meaningfully into the future.

Today, the Mission addresses the question of spirituality and science and is now preaching that science has begun to validate the Vedantic viewpoint of the oneness of the universe — nothing can exist outside of the Spirit. The Mission's ideal is freedom of the self and service to humankind. Its aim is to practice and preach the *sanātana dharmā* as embodied in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, who undertook their spiritual quest through social action

¹⁷ For more information, consult the Arya Samaj website (www.whereisgod.com), which, at the time of writing, was still under construction.

¹⁸ See the Ramakrishna Mission website (www.sriramakrishna.org).

and the gospel of love. The motto of the Mission is “renunciation, service, and harmony of religions”; its method is work and worship — religious preaching and training of monastic aspirants. The preachers are all monks in the Mission and have specific regulations governing their clothing and food. The two components of the Ramakrishna Mission are the *math* (or monastic order) for contemplative activities, such as meditation and preaching the Vedanta, and the Mission per se, which has ashrams and institutions all over the country. The activities of these bodies include the following (Gambhirananda 1957):

- ☸ Religious teaching and discourses;
- ☸ Operation of schools at all educational levels, including general technical education, language training, and character building from an ethical–spiritual perspective;
- ☸ Creation of libraries;
- ☸ Social work among marginalized peoples;
- ☸ Medical service (creation of hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and sanitoriums and distribution of medicines to those unable to afford them);
- ☸ Projects for poverty alleviation and income generation;
- ☸ Relief projects; and
- ☸ Agricultural and scientific research.

These organizations work closely with local communities on problems the communities have themselves deemed relevant. They infuse their actions with the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Aurobindo Society

The life, message, and teachings of Sri Aurobindo inspired the creation of the Sri Aurobindo Society:

Sri Aurobindo’s teaching starts with the ancient perception of the seers of the Vedanta that there is a supreme reality that is absolute, eternal, and indeterminable. This is *Brabman*, the one Truth, Sole and Entire All this is a manifestation of *Brabman*, by *Brabman*, and in *Brabman*.

Pandit (1959, pp. 3–4)

The integral truth of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings is corroborated by the hymns of Veda, the Upanishads, and the Gita. The basic aim of the Sri Aurobindo Society is to work toward “individual perfection, social transformation, and human unity based on a spiritual foundation.”¹⁹

¹⁹ See the Sri Aurobindo Society’s website (www.sriurobindosociety.org.in).

The Society has established a number of research centres to investigate ways to integrate spirituality into various aspects of human life, such as the social sciences, health, management, commerce and business, and applied scientific research.²⁰ One of the developmental activities of the Society and the Sri Aurobindo ashram is to promote “integral education” to balance and integrate the four aspects of the individual: the physical, the vital (dynamic energy, passions, will), the mental (thinking and reasoning), and the psychic and spiritual (the seat of the highest truths of existence). The Sri Aurobindo Society promulgates this education through various means (children’s books, educational games and toys, teacher-training programs, and distance and digital education) and institutions (an institute of vocational training and mass communication; study and youth camps; and health centres, with yoga and “nature-cure” wings). Through its Women’s Council, the Sri Aurobindo Society also focuses on women’s development premised on the full development of the spirituality of the individual woman and an inherent equality based in the divine source of all humanity. Through lectures, seminars, and publications, the Sri Aurobindo Society promotes prenatal and parental education, equal opportunity for women to work and be of service to humanity, and economic independence for women.

World Spiritual University

Seeing illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, and blind faith and realizing the grave erosion of India’s moral values and national character, Prajapita Brahma (later known as Brahma Baba) started the World Spiritual University (Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya) to cultivate the seeds of knowledge, wisdom, and virtuous behaviour.

The World Spiritual University is an international organization with 450 000 members or students. It has more than 3 000 educational centres teaching Rajyoga meditation and moral and spiritual values in more than 60 countries. It is administered primarily by women. It is dedicated to education for all-round development, and it focuses on spiritual growth through contemplation, development of higher values, and service to community. Education in moral and spiritual values is emphasized to bring about transformation in attitudes and behaviour, build human character, and develop an integrated personality. Enrollment in the university is free and open to individuals who wish to

²⁰ The Sri Aurobindo Institute for Applied Scientific Research focuses on innovations in alternative energy sources and appropriate technology to solve worker-identified problems while consciously emphasizing deeper psychological and spiritual values. In its literature, the institute suggests that, “while it is important to reach and work at the frontiers of science, it is equally important to develop a technology which will be appropriate for rural and semi-urban India and other developing countries. The need is for a technology which will have the least side effects and touch immediately a large number of people directly in their lives. It will help them do their work more efficiently, faster, with less health hazards and at a lower cost” (SAS n.d.).

engage in an active change process through personal growth and meditation.²¹

Prajapita Brahma's vision for the world was grounded in truth, justice, and equality, an equality based on a foundation of harmony and balance between the sexes. At the time of the university's inception, Prajapita Brahma, a respected 60-year-old diamond merchant, surrendered all his property and assets to a trust administered by eight young women. Women and young girls have been chosen as administrators and spiritual teachers. The university is based on principles of equality of the sexes and teaches that "any form of discrimination and prejudice is destructive to a world which depends on the strategic balance of a full and equal partnership between women and men" (BKWSO 1995b).

The university has general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, has consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund, and is associated with the United Nations Peace University. The World Spiritual University works primarily in the areas of environmental improvement (for example, a project to demonstrate solar-wind-battery hybrid systems technology in India²²), health awareness and medicine, world unity and peace, and the eradication of poverty. It has participated in a number of United Nations conferences, published position papers taking value-based approaches to various development problems,²³ and received seven United Nations Peace Messenger Awards.

Swadhyaya

Another spiritual movement engaged in development activities is the *Swadhyaya* movement (a Sanskrit word meaning "self-study"), which works primarily in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Using the Bhagavad Gita and the traditional Indian worldview as its philosophical basis, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, its founder, asked people to recognize the self as a manifestation of divine being and thus to acknowledge the divinity of all individuals. The followers of this movement — the "swadhyayees" — consider service to God their main purpose and

²¹ See the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University website (www.bkwsu.com).

²² The project is summarized on a web page of the International Centre for the Application of Solar Energy (www.case.gov.au/complete3.htm) (CASE n.d.).

²³ For example, the World Spiritual University explored a spiritual response to poverty in its statement for the 1996 International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, which emphasized that the interconnected root causes of poverty go beyond material considerations and advised careful consideration of poverty in relationships, spiritual bankruptcy, spiritual causes of poverty, the greed factor, and conditioning and poverty consciousness. It recommended that solutions to poverty emphasize self-worth, simplicity, creativity, and self-reliance. It saw its role in poverty eradication as planting the seeds for long-term changes in attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyles through positive-thinking programs, developing and sharing values, inculcating abilities and responsibilities, promoting self-reliance-empowerment of the self and community, and encouraging intellectual development and inner knowledge (www.bkwsu.com/bkun/wit/wit6.html) (BKWSO 1995a).

translate this purpose into initiatives to improve the socioeconomic conditions in swadhyayee villages. Swadhyayees, for example, tend communal farms and regard the wealth thus generated as belonging to God, to be distributed to those in need or to villagers to support their efforts to become more productive. Any individual, however, only works a few days a year on any one plot and does this as a form of devotion. The principle has also been expanded to fruit-tree planting and fishing. *Swadhyaya* is credited with teaching equal treatment of individuals, regardless of sex, caste, class, or faith. It has no formal hierarchy or paid workers. It does not attempt to convert people away from their professed religion; instead, Athavale recommended that the wisdom of *swadhyaya* be shared through example and by heart-to-heart or mind-to-mind discussion (Ekins 1992; Ramashray Roy 1993).

Gandhi and the *Sarvodaya* Order

The developmental nexus is most pronounced in Mahatma Gandhi's ideas espousing "welfare of all" (*sarvodaya*). This concept–movement represents a stream of thought developing from the beginning of the 20th century until Gandhi's assassination in 1948. It propounds a model of sustainable development as an alternative to the capital-intensive, industrial paradigm of the West and to the nonparticipatory communist model, which also set store in expeditious economic growth. Gandhi preached the participation of people in decision-making and the decentralization of power to the many villages of India. Gandhi, in his struggle for a *Sarvodaya* Order, linked his economic agenda with a non-violent (*ahimsa*) struggle for Indian political independence (*swaraj*). He made *swadeshi* (indigenous production and consumption) part of his overall developmental philosophy.

Gandhi was a self-confessed Hindu, who regularly read the Bhagavad Gita; as such, he represents a continuity in the Hindu tradition. He injected the spirit of religion into politics and everything he did. In Gandhi, the voice of ancient Hinduism found an interpreter who envisioned the development of India from the bottom up, rather than from the top down as in conventional development paradigms (Khoshoo 1997b). In fact, his entire approach to development differed from prevailing methodologies that pay no attention to the depletion of the resource base, ecological imbalances, or the needs of future generations. Gandhi said, "The earth provides enough for every man's needs, but not for every man's greed" (Khoshoo 1997a, p. 6).

Perhaps it was his adherence to the precepts of Hinduism that led Gandhi to comprehend and articulate the inextricable link between social transformation and self-transformation:

This method of self-transformation [Gandhi] called "satyagraha" and it was characterized by an earnest desire and effort to make truth, non-violence and justice pervade every aspect of one's personality as well as inter-personal transactions. He founded

ashrams, communities where these principles could be deliberately practised.

Palshikar (1998, p. 15)

Gandhi was also aware of social marginalization and its effects; he fought, for example, against untouchability and for the liberation of women, saying

I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there is no high class or low class of people, and an India in which all communities will live in harmony. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. This is the India of my dreams.

Chowdhry (1994, p. 19)

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For Gandhi, the *charkab* (spinning wheel) was symbolic of a proper perspective on economic development — it should provide a minimum income and employment to the people at large (Mashruwala 1971). In that early era of Indian development, theories were not obsessed with stimulating materialistic wants. The population of India was just one-third of what it is now, allowing for sustainable levels of economic consumption. Gandhi could envision a good and simple life for the people of his country.

The *Sarvodaya* Order proposes that economics be based on renewable resources and that power be decentralized to independent, but interlinked, villages, where employment would be generated through agriculture and simple crafts. Kamla Chowdhry, in her *Mahatma Gandhi: Lessons for Sustainable Development* (1994, p. 19), observed that “Gandhi’s priorities for development were village development and village industries. Development to Gandhi was abolition of poverty, misery and fear.” Gandhi visualized a village society in India in which all the basic amenities would be available and people would be economically self-sufficient but mutually dependent. He saw cities as “clearinghouses” for village products. Gandhi also believed in making use of all human waste to produce gas or manure to replenish the Earth for agriculture.

Gandhi was highly critical of Western-style industrialization, writing

God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west. The economic imperialism of a single tiny Island Kingdom is today keeping the world in chains Industrialism is, I am afraid, going to be a curse of mankind. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit.

Khoshoo (1995, p. 33)

Yet, Gandhi was not against machinery per se, only against machinery designed for the exploitation of people.

Gandhi wanted to decentralize the state structure and create “fully participatory village ‘republics’ founded on a non-violent revolution, in which landlords would voluntarily transfer their property to the people” (Annan, cited in Starcevic 1998). Gandhi also wrote that “independence must begin at the bottom It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its affairs. The Government of the village will be conducted by the Panchayat (Village Council)” (Khoshoo 1995, p. 40).

One could say that the special features of the *sarvodaya* approach are the following:

- ☪ National governance accountable to local governance;
- ☪ Self-sustaining local economies;
- ☪ Decentralized production system;
- ☪ Industry in trusteeship of, and accountable to, the community; and
- ☪ Secularism as a confluence of all religions.

The desire of Gandhi’s heart was “to wipe every tear from every eye” by encouraging India to follow its own path of development, taking into account its own realities, its own people, and its own culture. Although Nehru agreed with Gandhi that certain objectives, like sufficient food, clothing, housing, and education, were the minimum requirements for the country and all its citizens, he wanted to attain these objectives “speedily.” “Speedily to Nehru meant modernization, industrialization, building of big dams, establishing institutional infrastructure for science and technology. In other words catching up with the West, for, according to Nehru there was no way out but to have them” (Chowdhry 1994, p. 19). After Gandhi’s death, therefore, India embarked on a development strategy very different from the one he had envisaged.

Nehru’s approach to development has been the credo for more than five decades in India. His development strategy undoubtedly brought about very impressive progress in many directions, but it also led to many failures. Chowdhry (1994, p. 23) pointed out that these strategies neglected issues such as “rural poverty, primary education and illiteracy, unemployment, increasing inequalities and women’s drudgery.” She went on to explain that widening disparities in income and consumption were causing social and political unrest, widespread corruption, and the decay of the social fabric. We cannot say with certainty that Gandhi’s approach would have played itself out more positively and successfully, but we can see certain results of the Gandhian approach, such as the effects on the 8 600 villages adopted by the well-respected Sri Lankan Sarvodaya Shramadana movement. Moreover, his thinking has influenced some of the most important social-justice and environmental movements in India. Some examples of these movements are described below.

The contemporary environmental movement in India

The contemporary environmental movement in India started with the Chipko Andolan in April 1973. From the Chipko Andolan to the Narmada Bachao Andolan, environmental activists have relied heavily on Gandhian techniques of nonviolent protest and *sarvodaya* philosophy, as well as drawing abundantly on Gandhi's polemic against heavy industrialization. Some of the movement's better known figures — for example, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Baba Amte, and Medha Patkar — have repeatedly emphasized their debt to Gandhi (Guha 1993). Other influences on the Indian environmental movement include Marxism (in Kerala), socialism, liberation theology, and the self-help traditions.

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The organizations participating in the environmental movement in India demonstrate an interesting amalgamation of modern scientific technique and traditional motivation. Take, for example, the Sankat Mochan Foundation. The head of this Varanasi-based institution is Professor Veer Bhadra Mishra, a priest of the Sankat Mochan Temple and a professor of hydraulic engineering at Benares University. He is convinced that science and religion have to mesh if India is to clean and save the river Ganges. He says, "Life is like a stream. One bank is the 'Vedas' and the other bank is the contemporary world, including its science and technology. If both banks are not firm the water will scatter. If both banks are firm the river will run its course" (Chowdhry 1998).

Other participants in this movement also seem to display a firm awareness of the interconnection of spiritual, environmental, social-justice, and economic concerns and their solutions. Ramchandra Guha is a professor, sociologist, and historian; his work has focused on historical and present-day interactions between humans and the natural environment. In a lecture on Gandhi and the environmental movement (Guha 1993), he commented on Gandhi's approaches and those of two well-known followers — Kumarappa and Mira Behn — who had applied Gandhi's ideas to environmental questions. Guha (1993, p. 9) noted that "at the level of the individual, Gandhi's code of voluntary simplicity offers a sustainable alternative to modern life styles." Guha also commented that Behn's primary concern, like that of Gandhi and Kumarappa,²⁴ "was with rehabilitating the village economy of India." And Kumarappa himself stated that "forest management should be guided not by considerations of revenue but by the needs of the people" (Guha 1993, pp. 11–13).

²⁴ See *The Economy of Permanence: A Quest for a Social Order Based on Non-violence* (Kumarappa 1984 [1948]).

The women's movement

In India, the women's movement started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike the women's liberation movement in the West, which adopted a militant stance and often took an adversarial posture toward the opposite sex, in India the women's movement was the creation of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Dayanand Sarasvati, and Maharishi Karve — almost all of them men. It started as a fight against social injustice suffered by women, the dominant-male–inferior-female mind-set, and social customs such as *sati*, the ill-treatment of widows, the custom of demanding a dowry, and female infanticide. Lord William Bentick, Anne Besant, and Margaret Cousins were some of the foreigners who actively supported the first phase of the women's movement in India. The relevant issues were also taken up by pioneer women's organizations, like the All India Women's Conference. This phase was marked by an overall, middle-class urban leadership.

In the preindependence period, the drive for women's rights was very much a part of the nationalist movement. Mahatma Gandhi brought masses of women from behind the four walls of their homes to take part in the struggle for freedom. He encouraged them to be partners in the endeavour to gain India's independence. He supported women's equality and recognized their potential to advance the country's development.

After independence, the Indian Constitution guaranteed women's equality, and India established autonomous bodies like the Social Welfare Board. It was felt that welfare-oriented programs for women would ensure gender equality. The emphasis in government policies was on women's welfare: women were to be the passive beneficiaries of this support. And for almost two decades, the women's movement was inactive. These decades were marked by apathy toward women's issues and a general attitude of acquiescence (Desai 1988).

During the 1960s, women did not become involved in the political arena for women's issues specifically, yet they participated in large numbers in the general struggle to improve the conditions of the rural poor and indigenous peoples, as well as participating in other mass movements, like the Chipko Andolin. This participation definitely provided a backdrop for later struggles focused on women's issues. The declaration of International Women's Year and of the Decade of Women, the creation of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India, and the submission of its report in 1974 provided leverage to the women's movement in India. These factors also contributed to the emergence of some autonomous organizations (for example, the Self-employed Women's Association, in 1972; the Rural Development Society, in 1976; and the Centre for Women's

Development Studies, in 1980) and the revitalization of some mainstream organizations.

With the National Committee on the Status of Women in the 1970s and the propagation of the government's sixth five-year plan (1980–85), the focus of the movement shifted from social welfare to the developmental activities of women. Many women's organizations concentrated on issues in education, economic independence, and health, emphasizing women's participation in all these developmental activities. The first three World Conferences on Women addressed the themes of equality, development, and peace, respectively. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, the emphasis was on women's rights as human rights and on the introduction of the concept of a "partnership" of men and women in development. The Fourth World Conference on Women chalked out a Plan of Action for achieving the goals of women's equality, development, and peace and for ensuring that all participating nations would be committed to this plan. The focus of the women's movement then shifted to women's empowerment and women's equal participation in all decision-making and developmental activities. Yet, despite national- and international-level efforts to achieve the goals of women's equality and development, these goals are far from being achieved.

Women's development and empowerment are imperative for nationally and globally integrated development. I feel that to make this a reality, we must collectively work for the transformation of the psyche and consciousness of men, women, and society, which would involve awakening the spiritual powers for the conversion of the heart and mind. As suggested in the book *A Global Ethic* (Kung and Kuschel 1993), all men and women need to make a commitment to a culture of equal human rights and obligations, a culture based on human, spiritual, and religious ethical principles and a common ethic of mutual understanding, peace, and Earth-friendly ways of life.

HINDU RESOURCES FOR AN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

Religion can help development by encouraging the spirit of service and sacrifice; by showing ways to attain the Truth ... and by improving the quality of life for all. The Hindu religion gives the exalted ideals of *Atman* — self — to everyone and that through the awakening and realisation of the self, one could achieve success and development in every field.

Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998²⁵)

Hinduism brings a holistic approach to development, because it does not concentrate simply on the question of economic well-being but also incorporates ideals of spiritual and sociopsychological satisfaction. In

²⁵ Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

the book *Bhagavad Gita and Contemporary Crisis*, the great Vedic scholar Kireet Joshi (1996) pointed out how our modern culture looks on a person first and foremost as an economic agent. Even attitudes are conditioned by the demands and needs of the economic imperative. Modern culture has developed the science of material life but neglected the science of self-control and self-discipline and, as a result, cannot present remedies for the crises of violence affecting individuals, societies, and nations from time to time. We are gradually becoming dehumanized because we do not have the leisure to grow inwardly (Joshi 1996).

As Joshi (1996, p. 8) further emphasized, “We need the knowledge of what is within us, beyond our economic being, beyond our physical, vital, mental and intellectual faculties. We need to know if there is a source of peace and tranquility ... free from turbulence of hurried struggle [and competition].” The Gita, in a practical manner, unites knowledge, action, and the third crowning element in the soul’s completeness, divine love and devotion;²⁶ the *jñana*, *karma*, and *bhakti yogas* provide interrelated paths to this self-realization. Wisdom such as this can solve the contemporary crisis of personal, and socioeconomic, and spiritual development (Joshi 1996).

Thus, life for a Hindu is basically meant to be a spiritual journey. When development becomes merely a means to fight off hunger and disease, without encompassing the spiritual dimension, then to that extent it fails to provide the essential fuel of enthusiasm and hope. The contemporary discourse of development is geared toward the physical, without incorporating any idea of what lies beyond the attainment of plenty. The notion of sustainability has gained credence, to my mind, because it addresses this imbalance.

This spiritual dimension is most evident in the fourth of life’s aims in Hinduism — *moksha*. Ultimately, all life action and development activities must lead to spiritual liberation, even as they create better economic conditions and release us from physical pain and disease. Development efforts must create, or at least not suppress, conditions that provide intellectual and spiritual satisfaction; “development” should not be thankless toil — in the sense of working under compulsion — for one’s own material gains. Yet, despite Hinduism’s spiritual orientation, it is not entirely otherworldly. Hinduism acknowledges the need for people to appropriately enjoy the mind, spirit, body, and senses, in its idea of *kama*; and economic accomplishment, in its idea of *artha* — both *kama* and *artha* are included in life’s goals. As Danesh

²⁶ Joshi (1991, p. 20) pointed out that “in practical terms the veda prescribes that every action of man should be sacrifice offered by him to higher and higher forces and beings, to the *devas* and ultimately to the Supreme Being itself. ... It is, in fact, in the Gita that we find a comprehensive and abundant exposition of the principle of sacrifice [not ritualistic sacrifice] and of the method of performing actions as a sacrifice to the Divine.” It is this approach that is needed for self-development and holistic socioeconomic and ecological development.

(1993) stated in his examination of the psychology of spirituality, the living person requires this integration, because the true nature of a human being is in the total unity of the two distinctive expressions of reality — the material and the spiritual. To achieve individual self-transformation or self-development — and this must precede the transformation or development of others and broader society — it is essential that the individual work simultaneously at both levels of reality (Danesh 1993).

Looking at the situation in India today, I see that uninhibited materialism has certainly increased among the affluent classes since economic globalization made its recent appearance. In addition to promoting a consumeristic paradigm of economic development, globalization has been lopsided: it caters to those who are already privileged, making them richer. Moreover, it marginalizes the poor, the weak, and the underprivileged, categories that often include a disproportionate number of women. Although globalization “reduces” the geographic distance through efficient communication technologies and trade networks, it concurrently increases socioeconomic distance and disparity. In India, it is felt that globalization adversely affects people’s human rights and lures them away from their culture.

According to Hassija (1991, 1998), unless people retain the ability to look inward, globalization will unleash bitter competition, stark materialism, commercialism, and the disintegration of the human and spiritual values of world unity, compassion, and cooperation. These effects of globalization would not only destabilize financial markets but also create disharmony in social and human relations. As such, globalization in business and trade without globalization of spiritual values will create imbalance and tension in the world order. Hassija (1998, p. 2) suggested that “a happy blend of economics and spirituality — both based on values — is necessary.”

Hindu beliefs and religion certainly caution against uninhibited consumerism and materialism. I feel that a greater emphasis on limiting human wants and on the ideology of simple living and high thinking could counterbalance today’s consumerist ideology. The approach and concept of the *Sarvodaya* Order, for example — which provides an outline of the voluntary limitation of human wants — can certainly help temper unmitigated consumerism, materialism, and hedonism. I feel that Gandhi could become an important symbol in the fight against the present-day consumer ideology and the violence it nurtures.

Gandhi’s principles also provide us with another important resource for integrated development: *ahimsa* (nonviolence), an ancient Hindu principle that mandates noninjury of others in thought, word, and deed. One of the central principles of Mahatma Gandhi in his movement against the colonial British powers was nonviolence, which he adopted as a personal credo and preached to the Indian people. A truly nonviolent person will not retaliate with violence, even in self-defence.

The concept of nonviolence is found throughout Indian religious traditions, and it is especially emphasized in Buddhism and Jainism.

Hinduism also brings to the paradigm of development the idea that all life in the cosmos is interrelated and interwoven — a firm spiritual basis for ecological balance and protection of the environment. In the *Isho Upanishad*, for example, we read the following:

The whole universe with its creatures belongs to the Lord (Nature). No creature is superior to any other, and the human being should not have absolute power over Nature. Let no species encroach upon the rights and privileges of other species. However one can enjoy the bounties of Nature by giving up greed.

Khoshoo (1995, p. 13)

Kumar (1997) remarked that at the centre of the Vedic vision is the human–nature relationship, as articulated in sacred incantations and rituals that repeatedly remind us of the need to sustain the ecological balance of nature. The “*Bhumisukta*” of the *Atharvaveda* (12.1.35 is one of the most important sources of information on the relationship of humans to their environment and their duty to preserve it. In this hymn, the seer Atharvan presents a beautiful picture of Mother Earth as the basis of our sustenance and a symbol for the entire environment:

Whatever I dig from thee, O Mother Earth
May it have quick growth again!
Purifier, We may not injure thy vitals or thy heart.

Quoted in Kumar (1997, p. 6)

The holism practiced in Hinduism has other ramifications for the environment. The current paradigm defines sustainable development as development that meets the current generation’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). The problem is that one nation’s sustainability very often comes at the cost of another’s resources. We have no “world sustainable-growth model” that takes into account even the poorest nation. With Gandhi’s *sarvodaya* approach, the notion of sustainability would involve all the nations of the world, not just the countries of the North in isolation from those of the South. In an increasingly individualistic world, this all-encompassing concept of sustainable development could be very difficult to comprehend, accept, and act on.

But the chief influence of Hindu belief in promoting integrated development, I believe, would be a deep-rooted belief in God and in the notion that we are all children of the same father, in the Oneness of the universe, in the potential divinity and immortality of the soul, and in spiritual values. The approach of the Hindus is to insist that development have a conscience. This is encoded in the idea of *dharmā*, wherein all action, including development interventions, must be weighed carefully in terms of an altruistic concern for village, region, nation, and all other countries on the globe; all actions must be weighed holistically.

According to Hindu belief, developmental efforts must incorporate the spiritual welfare of the entire beneficiary population and, indeed, anyone who would be affected by it. Development should not come at the cost of exploiting the resources in other countries at cheap rates, displacing marginalized populations, and living extravagantly at the ultimate expense of others, for Hinduism conceives of the world as a global family. The idea of a global family is essentially a religious one, found in Hinduism and other traditions. The percolation of this idea into the psyche of development practitioners might change the insidiously exploitative bent of 20th-century development.²⁷

WHERE TODAY'S HINDUISM AND DEVELOPMENT MEET: THE PROMISE REAPPRAISED

I now turn to the question of how today's Hinduism can be incorporated into the idea of sustainable development. Agreeing with Einstein's observation about how peace can be brought to the world, Chowdhry (1994, p. 33) wrote that "the problem of peace, as well as that of sustainable development and environmental concerns, will only be solved by employing Gandhi's method on a large scale." Echoes of Gandhi's voice seem to be emerging even from institutions such as the World Bank. After visiting some 25 countries, the World Bank's president, James Wolfensohn, said these visits had brought home to him that the "World Bank's central mission is to weld economic assistance with spiritual, ethical and moral development" (Chowdhry 1996, p. 10). Some recent World Bank initiatives (known as the World Faiths and Development Dialogue), in which the Bank met with leaders of nine world faiths to broaden opportunities for a base of common understanding and action in tackling global poverty, may raise suspicions among Bank critics, but they suggest that the Bank is at least trying to make good on Wolfensohn's insight.

Development experts, like Kamla Chowdhry, Ashok Khosla, and S.K. Sharma, and religious leaders, like Swami Muktinathananda,²⁸

²⁷ It must be admitted, however, that many religions and many religious leaders talk about love, compassion, and altruism; they say there should be equity, cooperation, and the absence of force and violence. Yet, for centuries and centuries this message, which is both simple and profound, does not seem to have percolated very deeply into the human psyche. Instead of *Ram Rajya* (Rule of Virtue and Truth) and the Kingdom of Heaven, we have seen endless wars backed by religious jingoism. It would be safe to say that love and compassion, though widely preached, are concepts not widely understood or practiced in their truest sense.

²⁸ Swami Muktinathananda observed that science can help development in the following ways: (1) by providing adequate knowledge to remove ignorance and superstition; (2) by adding to the happiness of human beings through the removal of disease, poverty, and want; (3) by providing technological means to enhance lifestyles; and (4) by reducing destructive items and by not adding to the already existing ones (Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998).

agree that sustainable development needs technology and science to solve its problems. Yet, they also feel that this relationship should be subject, in Chowdhry's words, to the condition that it also be accompanied by public awareness, political action, and a way to ignite the moral and ethical values of the Indian heritage and psyche. Chowdhry further suggested that we should start with a new paradigm of development, which she described as "a people-led development, an alternative development, a development which is 'pro-poor, pro-nature and pro-women', not borrowed development" (Chowdhry 1994, p. 37). She also summed up the elements involved in sustainable development:

Eradication of hunger and poverty is not merely an intellectual exercise of science, technology or economics, but also involves an inner change. To alter the system, it is necessary to alter the paradigm of development, and to take cognisance of the spiritual, of the inner voice, of the ethics and values that promote sustainable development.

Chowdhry (1996, p. 11)

Khosla, founder of the NGO called Development Alternatives, and Sharma, founder of the NGO called People First, observed that technology can change lifestyles but does not usually change the quality of human existence.²⁹ The goal, they emphasized, should be to realize a sustainable society in which people work toward attaining a high level of human and spiritual development. In their opinion, this society could be achieved by combining Gandhian ideology (based on the Indian ethos and tradition of grass-roots democracy) and contemporary Western democratic experience.

The experience of 50 years of independence in India has shown us that borrowed models of development do not work. The mindless imitation of Western models by developing nations has led to all kinds of environmental disasters (Siddhartha 1998) and social malaise. When formulating and implementing an indigenous paradigm of development based on the Gandhian model, we have to understand and take into account the social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual background and values of the people concerned. Khoshoo (1997a) stated that this model of development aims at building local self-reliance and self-respect in villagers, alleviating poverty, and striving for social justice. He wrote that the need for a "creative synthesis" of the Gandhian and Nehruvian (or Western) models is imperative because the Gandhian model leads to decentralized economic planning — an economy of permanence — whereas the Nehruvian model of industrial economy runs the danger of making the rich richer and the poor poorer (Khoshoo 1997a). We need to appropriately blend tradition and modernity, religion and science in

²⁹ More information about Development Alternatives can be found at www.ecouncil.ac.cr/devalt/damain.htm; and about People First, at www.ecouncil.ac.cr/devalt/peoplef.htm.

such a way that human-made capital does not become destructive of the natural capital needed for development (Khoshoo 1997a).

These realizations are also manifesting themselves outside India as international development agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) discard or revamp many of their old concepts of development. Chowdhry (1994) felt that their focus on participatory approaches in the last decade means that these organizations are moving more toward a Gandhian-like focus on people. She pointed to UNDP's use of phrases like "men, women and children must be the centre of attention," development strategies are "to be woven around people and not people around development," and "the durable solution to today's problems of poverty, unemployment, social disintegration and environmental deterioration cannot be achieved through just more development of the past kind" (Chowdhry 1994, p. 23).

Chowdhry's point is well-taken. The UNDP's *Human Development Report 1993* offers some indications of this change in approach. The report calls for

new models of sustainable human development [to] invest in human potential and to create an enabling environment for the full use of human capabilities. ... The purpose of development is to widen the range of people's choices. Income is one of those choices — but it is not the sum-total of human life. Human development is development *of the people for the people by the people.*

UNDP (1993, p. 3, emphasis in the original)

At the end of the overview, the report notes,

The implications of placing people at the centre of political and economic change are profound. They challenge traditional concepts of security, old models of development, ideological debates on the role of the market and outmoded forms of international cooperation. They call for nothing less than a revolution in our thinking.

UNDP (1993, p. 8)

These words give me hope that international agencies are open to new ideas, that is, to hearing what experience has been telling them, but I am left to wonder how this emphasis on "people centredness" will manifest itself without a more explicit focus on spiritual principles. Are the challenges of tapping into creativity, distributing benefits justly, and providing equal access to opportunities (UNDP 1993) not, in the final analysis, asking what motivates people to act and (perhaps more important) to act compassionately? And does that question not require us to ask what is at the centre of ourselves?

CONCLUSION: AN INTEGRATED PARADIGM

The Hindu religion stands for the good of humanity — social, cultural, moral and spiritual. Development and science are related to Hinduism in this sense: the ideal of benefiting humanity in all ways possible.

Thus it is the paradigm of development in which there is a synthesis of the two complementary disciplines — science and religion — being used for the well being of self and society, that will produce fully integrated and developed human beings, and would bring about holistic development — physical, economic, social, environmental, moral, and spiritual.

Muktinathananda (personal communication, 1998³⁰)

Tremendous confusion surrounds the question of whether science and religion have a meeting point and, if so, what its precise nature is.³¹ The general perception in the Hindu world, today, apart from some of the intelligentsia, is that there is no connection, or at best a tenuous one. The relationship between science and development is well accepted, but the nexus between religion, economic development, and the role of science seems to many very vague.

The way forward for the Hindu world as it faces the next century is, I believe, to integrate science and religion, broadly speaking, in all spheres of life; development is a process that seeks to sustain and improve human life and well-being and, as such, needs to understand, incorporate, and implement the strengths of both discourses. Religion provides, for example, access to the inner being — human hopes, goals, and motivations — the place from whence all action stems. It provides insight into thousands of years of experience and experiment with how to live a fulfilling and balanced human life. Equally important, science

³⁰ Swami Muktinathananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Calcutta, India, personal communication, 1998.

³¹ Among the religionists and the scientists in India, one encounters various perspectives on the convergence of science and religion. An informal survey based on structured conversations with a cross-section of employees at various levels at a New Delhi university indicates that many Hindus approach the question from the perspective that both science and religion are made by God (expressed as Bhagwan, Ishwara, Sri Krishna, or Ram). Nothing God made can be bad, but humankind has made use of both science and religion in negative ways. I found that many informants thought of science in terms of the help it can provide in enhancing daily life, whereas the role of religion was to inculcate faith in God and encourage people to do good deeds to improve present and future lives and to accept one's conditions in the present life. Some pointed out that science would ultimately "prove" the findings of religion, and people had a strong bias in favour of religion as the primary source of any lasting spiritual benefits. For many Hindus, science is "Godless" and "atheistic," whereas religion has the concept of a transcendent Ultimate Reality. Certain knowledgeable persons among the sample insisted that the world could advance only if science recognized the validity of religion, rather than treating it as an aberration or an elaborate superstition.

provides both insight into the workings of the outer world and the means to effect change in that world.

One way to bring about such integration at the personal, community, national, and international levels is to provide for a much broader dissemination and much better understanding of the spiritual component of the scriptures and holy texts so as to help make them relevant to today's issues. We should gradually reduce obsessive rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. We should work to do away with the misuse of science and religion for selfish gains, along with the obsession with economic and political power for personal aggrandizement and ill-gotten fame. With the help of modern S&T and the media, the cardinal principles of Vedanta can, through proper understanding, practice, and dissemination, change the attitudes and behaviour of the masses of people and revive the human and spiritual values of mutual love, respect, and sharing and caring.

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Above, I discussed the problems of the unequal division of wealth and distribution of resources. In India, however, one cannot ignore population growth as one of the biggest problems standing in the way of socioeconomic development. Every year, the population of India grows at almost the same rate as the economy, thus negating whatever positive effect new economic growth might have on poverty, unemployment, or related problems. Indian demographers and economists have been working on population control with considerable success in some states, such as Kerala, but with little success in others. The *varnaashram* system (described earlier) divides human life into four stages and prescribes celibacy before marriage, moderate sexual indulgence within marriage, and complete marital fidelity. I feel that reviving the *varnaashram* scheme might provide guidance and part of a solution to the population problem, as well as to the problem of HIV-AIDS. In addition, education for girls and women, as well as for boys and men, with the consequent employment potential that it creates, would be one of the key factors in controlling population growth.

Along with education and awareness, what is acutely needed is change, through formal and informal mass media, in the attitudes of all members of society toward girls and women. In this way, Indian society can work (as so many societies need to work) to become female positive and egalitarian, that is, to empower women and girls and to improve their status.

I strongly feel that we cannot pursue and achieve development without the integrated development of women, who after all constitute half the world's population. We must, for this reason, increase, implement, and realize the measures already being undertaken all over the world for women's development and empowerment. For these efforts, we can take inspiration and guidance from the spiritual texts of other faiths, such as those of the Bahá'í Faith, in which one can find the following: "The world of humanity has two wings — one is woman and the other man. Not until both wings are equally developed can the Bird

fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible” (BPT 1994, p. 11). Here again, I feel that regenerating ancient Vedic values of gender equality and equity would be of great help in improving the situation of women.³² Metaphors for an approach to equality could be derived from the depiction of the gods and their consorts together in Indian religious culture. The consorts are worshipped along with the gods, and, during rituals, prayers, and devotional songs, the names of the consorts are often used first (for example, Radha–Krishna, Sita–Ram, Parvati–Shankar, and Lakshmi–Narayan). The symbol of *Ardhnareshwar* — the god Shiva as half male and half female — also indicates that men and women should have the same status in society.

The most important task for the Hindu community (and for the other great faiths) is to evolve a national syllabus for education that includes spiritual factors. In presenting Vivekananda’s ideas about education and religion, Bhajanananda wrote that the purpose of education is to make humans. With that purpose, religion and spirituality sit at the innermost core of education and should be a core subject. Vivekananda strongly felt that the purpose of education is not merely to provide information but also to impart knowledge and wisdom, “by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanding, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet” and face the problems of life (Bhajanananda 1976–77, p.39). Of course, education should also take up internationally important issues in science, religion, spirituality, and development and add lessons on the nexus among them. Education has the twin responsibility of equipping people with the latest technical skills to enable them to become economically independent and providing them with the relevant spiritual and moral strengths to enable them to improve the world in which they live (for example, by making them aware of the thoughts and insights of spiritual masters, scientists, and philosophers).

Education should build capacity and character, self-confidence, and the ability to manifest for self- and social transformation the potential divinity that is in each of us. Educators can accomplish these goals by conveying to students the principles and elements of religion (along with its inherent human and spiritual values) through stories, parables, and the life stories of religious masters and divine messengers. Accompanying this should be instruction in the scientific techniques of concentration and yogic meditation. These ideas have been in circulation for some time now, variously articulated by scholars such as Kireet

³² Certain contemporary Hindu sects also provide inspiration for female equality and equity. Take, for instance, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, which is run by and caters mainly to women and provides knowledge about the Creator and creation. It asks questions such as, Who am I? Who is God? What is the world? It preaches spirituality, promotes universal values of life, and teaches Rajyoga meditation for the betterment of self, others, and the universe. It also preaches celibacy and purity of mind, body, and soul.

Joshi and institutions like Aurobindo Ashram. But until these ideas gain currency in the formal and informal education systems, they will have little therapeutic effect on the psyche of humankind or do little to bring about the needed development. I feel it is important to go back and remember that source of guidance — God — and have religious faith, because that is what ultimately empowers people.

After all, in the final analysis, development involves changing people's psyche and behaviour, for it is people who are behind all the planning and execution of development paradigms and it is people who are intended to benefit from them. And I believe that people cannot be fundamentally changed unless they receive divine guidance or wisdom, whether through holy scriptures or through the writings of divine messengers, such as Bahá'u'lláh, Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Mohammad, or Guru Nanak. Global unity begins with a global mind; the best way to think globally is to at least have a working knowledge of religions, Eastern and Western. Only religion and spirituality — as approaches that strive after the ultimate realization of truth — will provide the guidance and inspiration human beings require to rise above the instincts of retaliation and unmitigated self-interest and to solve their problems with dignity and nonviolence, recognizing contributions from all cultures, particularly indigenous ones. Obviously, this is easier said than done, as vested interests support the current system and many people wish to live for themselves, even at the cost of future generations. Thus, science and religion have to create a more balanced development in which people seriously consider the consequences of their lifestyles for future generations.

I would like to conclude this piece with the words of Swami Jitatmananda (1997, p. 11): "Truth Unites. Newton's laws of motion or Einstein's Relativity is common to all humanity. Universal truths of all religions, compatible with reason, will unite humanity." Jitatmananda (1997, p. 10) draws his model for a new society, based on practical Vedanta, from Vivekananda's words to European scholar Jules Bios: "[It will be] a successful "Superior Fusion" of Brahmin's spiritual culture with Kshtriya's administrative efficiency, Vaisaya's wealth-generating capacity, and Shudra's dignified dedication to all labour, as service to mankind." Jitatmananda also clarified the changes that could be made at an individual level:

Acceptance of the spiritual and holistic values by today's high-tech econo-socio experts like scientists, technicians, industrialists, managers or state leaders will help us to create complete human beings equally enriched with the higher excellence of Western science, technology, the Western dynamism, and organisation, along with Eastern spiritual vision of the infinite capacity and excellence hidden within each individual. The ultimate success, and wealth, as the Bhagavad Gita asserts, are available through a holistic living for all.

Jitatmananda (1997, pp. 10-11)

I strongly feel that the existing development paradigm, with its overemphasis on economic development and scientific–technological achievement, should be balanced with the critically examined concepts and values of religion. Thus, the empowerment of marginalized peoples and the creation of a just society, which should be the goals of any integrated development paradigm, could be brought about through education and individual and societal synthesis of science and religion, the cardinal elements of which are universal in nature.

ANNEX 1: SELECTED ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF HINDUISM-INSPIRED MOVEMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The ethical guiding principles of the movements discussed in the text can be synthesized into some basic premises that help to elucidate the principles of ethical action in Hinduism:

1. God is incorporeal, eternal, omnipotent, all intelligent, all compassionate, all truth, love, beauty, and bliss, the creator of the universe.
2. The ancient scriptures of India — the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita — are sources of the true knowledge, the highest truth, and a guide to living. They should be studied, lived, and taught to all.
3. The power of love and necessity of world unity are paramount, because we are all children of the same Supreme Power.
4. The principles of a good life include work, worship, and selfless service to humanity — including physical, mental, social, moral, and spiritual improvement — especially for the benefit of women and the weaker segments of society.
5. Humans should cultivate a constant remembrance of God.
6. Humans should inculcate in themselves divine qualities by acquiring wisdom through spiritual–religious study, education, and prayer.
7. Humans should work to improve and care for both their inner and their outer environments.
8. Humans should work to bring about communal and interfaith harmony.
9. Humans should practice nondiscrimination, refusing to discriminate on the basis of caste, class, sex, race, creed, or religion.

10. Humans should accept the concept of the world as one family and live and practice in accordance with this principle.
11. Humans should work for the welfare and well-being of all. Humans should live at peace with themselves and their fellow beings.
12. Humans should work to bring aid and solace to less-privileged people in an altruistic spirit.
13. Humans should act according to the idea that an inherent divinity exists in all life and within each one of us. We are all equally worthy human beings. There is a fundamental unity in diversity.
14. Humans should not cause suffering to anyone.
15. Humans should devote themselves to truth and nonviolence in thoughts, words, and action.
16. Humans should proceed with their actions without expecting specific fruits or benefits from them.
17. Humans should carry out their duties toward themselves and others; it is through duty that a human reaches perfection.
18. Humans should be guided by the principle that our present life is the result of our good or bad actions in the past and that our present conduct moulds our future lives.
19. Humans should know their human rights and responsibilities and respect those of others, treating others as they would like to be treated themselves.
20. Humans should be guided in their conduct by the principles of love, respect, righteousness, justice, equity, equality, and service toward one and all.
21. Humans should limit their wants and needs and thereby live a simple life without exaggerated materialistic desires.
22. Humans should work constantly and seek wealth but share it with those in need; riches are but the means to do good and should not become the goal of life.
23. Humans should pursue the aims of becoming good human beings and help others in their efforts to do the same.

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Farzam Arbab's doctorate in theoretical particle physics led him to Colombia to work with the University Development Program of the Rockefeller Foundation to strengthen the Department of Physics at the Universidad del Valle. While there he began to study the relationship between science, technology, and educational policy and their effects on development, which led him and a group of colleagues to form the Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (Foundation for the Application and Teaching of Science). This organization still functions as a successful development program in Colombia and has earned an international reputation for its application of spiritual principles in education and development. In 1993, Dr Arbab was elected to the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, on which he currently serves.

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Dr Baharuddin's degrees in biology and the history and philosophy of science allowed her to pursue her interest in the relationship between Islam and science. Her research interests and teaching areas include the history and philosophy of science; science and religion; ethics, environmental ethics, and bioethics; gender studies and human development; and futures studies. She has written various publications on the issues of science and faith and ethics and the environment. Dr Baharuddin is an associate professor in the Department of Science and Technology Studies at the University of Malaya.

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With degrees in mathematics, sociology, and Catholic theology, Dr Baum has for 40 years been a professor of theology and religious studies. He currently teaches religious studies at McGill University in Montréal, Quebec. He has written more than 20 books on ethics and economics, solidarity, and various approaches to social justice within the Christian churches. He is a member of the Karl Polanyi Institute at Concordia University and was a member of a research team on environmental ethics at Université du Québec à Montréal. He is also an officer of the Order of Canada.

Pierre Beemans

Pierre Beemans has degrees in education and philosophy and has worked in the field of international development for more than 30 years, including living and working for extensive periods in Latin America and Africa. He has held both field and management positions with CUSO and the Canadian International Development Agency and was for 3 years a policy adviser in the Privy Council Office of the Government of Canada. Since 1992, he has been Vice-President, Corporate Services Branch, of the International Development Research Centre.

Sharon Harper

Her degrees in journalism, law, and theology led Sharon Harper to seek a position that would allow her to explore the scriptures and practice of the world's religions and their manifestations, roles, and effects in the public sphere. After graduating from Harvard Divinity School, she became the project officer for the International Development Research Centre's Science, Religion, and Development project. She is a lawyer and legal researcher with experience in human-rights and discrimination issues, both domestic and international; an experienced writer and editor; and a program manager who is knowledgeable about mediation and arbitration techniques, issues of gender and research for development, and feminist ethics and epistemologies.

Promilla Kapur

With degrees in psychology and sociology, Dr Kapur has worked as a researcher, teacher of sociology, and counselor–therapist for more than 30 years. She specializes in the sociology of women, family, and marriage and has done extensive empirical research on women, adolescents and girl children, working women, family violence, and sex workers. She has published extensively in these areas, with books in English, Hindi, and Japanese. She has been a student of Indian culture, Hinduism, interfaith dialogue, and integrated human development. Since 1984 she has been the director of the Integrated Human Development Services Foundation, a charitable organization providing counseling and crisis intervention based on the principle of whole health, which includes human and spiritual values. She has been honoured by the British

International Biographical Centre, the American Biographical Institute, and the All India Conference of Intellectuals.

William Ryan, S.J.

Dr Ryan entered the Jesuit Order in 1944 and was ordained into the priesthood in 1957. He has an MA in labour relations and a PhD in economics from Harvard University and has been very active in Canada and the United States thinking, writing, and organizing around social-justice, ethics, and economic issues. He was the founding director of the Center of Concern (Washington, DC) and has been a senior research fellow at the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security and held the chair in Social Faith and Justice at St Paul University in Ottawa. He is the director of the Jesuit Project on Ethics in Politics in Ottawa and was recently appointed coordinator of the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice. Dr Ryan is the author of many articles and lectures on multinational corporations and the new international economic order, the poor, the relationships between faith and social justice and between faith and culture, and the role of religious people in socio-economic change. He has been working with the Science, Religion, and Development project since its inception in 1993.

APPENDIX 2

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSWR	Center for the Study of World Religions
DAV	Dayanand Anglo Vedic
FUNDAEC	Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences) [Colombia]
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IIT	International Institute of Islamic Thought
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAIS	Malaysian Academy of Islamic Science
MINDS	Malaysian Institute for Development Studies
NGO	nongovernmental organization
S&T	science and technology
SAP	structural-adjustment policy
SRD	science, religion, and development
TNC	transnational corporation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme