

The Hindu Concept of Human Nature and Condition in a Postmodern World

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The world which we live in is changing. For the past three hundred years we have been part of an age called Modernity. Since the mid to late 20th century the modern age started giving way to the postmodern age. This transformation is supposed to change how people view the world, how they understand reality and truth, and how they approach the fundamental questions of life.

Initially, Postmodernism¹ arose as an anti-Enlightenment movement to Modernism in the 19th and 20th centuries and challenged the universal nature of ideas like objective truth, knowledge, reason, and morality. It denied the existence of an ultimate truth, and displaced it back into the individual. In the same way, the postmodern pattern treats the human individual in a different way than the modern one. For example, though the modern individual merely cares about his/her body, the postmodern one is open to all kinds of intervention and change on it². According to

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1. On Postmodernism, see: J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press 1979. P. Anderson, *The origins of postmodernity*, Verso, London 1998. S. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism*, Scholargy Publishing, Wisconsin 2004. B. Duignan, "Postmodernism", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy>. Retrieved 15 July 2020. "Postmodernism", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>. Retrieved 20 June 2020. "Postmodernism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, first published Fri Sep 30, 2005; substantive version Thu Feb 3, 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>. Retrieved 27 June 2020.

2. Concerning human's body concept in the postmodern age, see: M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth, B. Turner, *The Body: Social Process Cultural Theory*, Sage Publications, London

social psychologist K. J. Gergen (1991)³, in the context of Postmodernism, humans are going through a state of perpetual construction and reconstruction. In that situation technology and biomedicine play a very important role, since by means of them it is possible for the appearance and condition of an individual to be radically changed.

Plastic surgery, transplant and other medical interventions reconstruct the appearance of postmodern man. In this way it is easier to manage the body which is treated as a complex machine that could be repaired and renewed with the help of technology, chemistry and mechanical support. Under these circumstances the body ceases to be considered as a whole and scatters into small pieces which become objects of intervention.

This undertaking is not only medical in nature but also concerns the aesthetics industry. Through special products promoted by professionals, physical appearance changes whenever and in whatever man wishes. The postmodern man lives in a consumer society that emphasizes material goods. The physical body, assumed fragmented into separate parts, such as eyes, lips, etc., is disintegrated and transformed by means of plastic surgery and other medical interventions. And all that transformation takes place in accordance to the social ideal of beauty. Generally, the postmodern man treats his body as one of its belongings. That means he/she can use it as he/she wishes; most of all, as an object which can serve as a projector of his/her identity.

Man, as projected nowadays by philosophical, scientific, political, and social ideas is considered nothing more than a biological unit. The

1982. R. Porter, *Disease, Medicine and Society*, Macmillan, London 1987. B. Turner, *Regulating Bodies*, Routledge 1991. K. J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, Basic Books, New York 1991. P. Falk, *The Consuming Body*, Sage Publications, London 1994. C. Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage, London 1998. See also N. Γιόφτσιος, *Τὸ σῶμα μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς ἀντιλήψεις τῆς μετανεωτερικότητας*, <https://pemptousia.gr/2018/07/to-soma-mesa-apo-tis-antilipsis-tis-metaneoterikotitas>. Retrieved 19 June 2020. By the same author, *Τὸ ἰδανικὸ τοῦ τέλειου σώματος στὸν ἀθλητισμὸ & στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη παράδοση*, https://pemptousia.gr/vivliothiki/gioftsios_book/mobile/index.html#p=1, pp. 33-36. Retrieved 19 June 2020.

3. Especially, pay attention on the 5th chapter “The Emergence of Postmodern Culture” (pp. 111-138), and on 7th “A Collage of Postmodern Life” (pp. 171-198).

epicenter of human substance in the pre-modern age was soul, in modern times logic, and nowadays the body. Today the postmodern man aims to acquire information, while the modern one aimed to the acquisition of knowledge, and the pre-modern one to wisdom⁴. In general, the postmodern man rejects the notion of absolute truth. He/she no longer trusts authority and rejects any institution that claims to have an access to the truth. He/she has become highly suspicious of facts. He believes that all truth, even to some extent scientific knowledge, is subjective, biased, and socially constructed. Therefore, the truth is not really true.

In postmodern worldview, people become their own authority and accept only what they personally experience. There is a sense that feeling is all that counts because, in the end, feeling is all there is.

Apart from these preliminary remarks we have to say that Postmodernism is a product of Western thought. Thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Richard Rorty, John Fiske, Rosalind Krauss, Avital Ronell etc., are representatives of Postmodernism but, on the other hand, they are products themselves of Western thought. Besides, we must not forget that Postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon firstly appeared in Western societies.

The world is changing; technology effects every part of earth. Communication by means of modern technology has become rapid. All these changes affect human societies. However, religion still plays an important role in them, effecting human behavior, suggesting special ways of life and spirituals ambitions. Besides, every religion has formed its own concepts about human nature and condition. What does Hinduism have to say on this point and how can its concept on human nature be accommodated (or not) in a changing postmodern world?

4. See N. Γιόφτσιος, *Τὸ ἰδανικὸ τοῦ τέλειου σώματος στὸν ἀθλητισμὸ & στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη παράδοση*, p. 36.

What does “Hinduism” and being a “Hindu” mean?

Talking about human nature in Hinduism is not an easy task since the term “Hinduism” accommodates a variety of religious, philosophical, social and cultural implications that makes difficult for a scholar to define it in a few lines. In fact, there is no such thing as “Hinduism”; the term is a western abstraction, coined in the beginning of 19th century, giving the false impression that Hinduism is a block reality, a unified religion, a homogeneous religio-cultural system, which all Hindus acknowledge in more or less the same way. On the other hand, if Hinduism cannot be defined, at least it could be described on a number of pages or in a volume.

Apart from this difficulty, we are in need to provide a short description for the sake of the goal that the present article aims. So, Hinduism is an aggregate of culturally similar traditions over which distinctive characteristics are distributed in overlapping ways such that we may identify each one of them as belonging to the same cultural family. Some of these traditions may have more of these characteristics in common; others may share fewer traits; yet, if these traits are the dominant ones, they would still allow us to identify the traditions to which they belong as “Hindu”. So, in the course of time “Hinduism” embraces the cultural inheritance of Indus-Sarasvati civilization (3000-1750 B.C), Aryan Vedism (1500-900 B.C), Brahmanism (900-500 A.D), indigenous Tantrism, the formation of six classical Hindu schools of thought (*darśanas*), Puranic Hinduism and Post-colonial Hinduism or Modern Hinduism and local forms of worship -that may be unique just in one location- known as “Hinduism of villages” or “*grāma-Hinduism*”. That inheritance is expressed through a vast bulk of texts such as the four Vedic *Samhitās*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas*, the *Dharma-śāstras*, the *Āgamas*, the two Epics (*Itihāsas*), the *Purāṇas*, and a plethora of texts representative of specific schools of Hindu thought and sects. That bulk of thought accommodates pantheism, henotheism, monism, polytheism, monotheism and “schools” which do not accept the existence of any god (such as *Pūrva-mīmāṃsa* and *Sāṃkhya*, at least in the earlier phases of their formation).

Then a question arises: Who is a Hindu? Considering the vast variety of religio-philosophical attitudes that Hinduism embraces, a person who defines himself/herself as a Hindu is not necessary to be religious, namely to believe in some world-transcending reality, either personal or impersonal, in terms of which human fulfillment may be attained. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of Hindus are religious, and the overwhelming proportion of human endeavor that has gone into the making of historical Hinduism has been religious as well. Just a visit to the birth-place of Hinduism, that means India, is sufficient enough to ascertain the prevailing religiosity. But it is important to mention that someone may be accepted as a Hindu by Hindus, and declare himself/herself validly as a Hindu, without being religious in the afore-mentioned sense. So, a Hindu may be polytheistic or monotheistic, monistic or pantheistic, even agnostic or atheist, and still be a Hindu⁵. As Prof. K. N. Mishra said in one of his lectures at the Banaras Hindu University when I was studying (1990-1993) “for a Hindu it is not important in what someone believes or not, but how he or she behaves”. This is why renowned scholars as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Julius Lipner described Hinduism as a cultural phenomenon⁶. However, for shortness, we could say that someone is a Hindu when he/she observes the prescribed rules and duties applied to all the Hindus (sadhāraṇa dharma) as well as those specific rules of the caste he/she belongs (viśeṣa dharma) - even though there are some Tantric and Śaiva sects, such as the Aghoris, who follow an unconventional way of life.

Apart from these preliminary remarks we have to investigate what Hindu traditions have to say about human nature and condition in a changing world.

5. K. K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 45: “The great strength of Hinduism has at all times been its capacity to absorb and assimilate ideas from many different sources without giving up its own peculiar fundamental orientation”.

6. See, S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, Unwin Paperbacks, London 1927, 1988, p. 12 and J. Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge, London and New York 1994, p. 7.

What is a human being in Hinduism?

The most common terms which denote a human being in Sanskrit language are the words “mānava” and “puruṣa”. For the male the terms “nara”, “puṃs” and “dehin” are in use and for the female the terms “nārī”, “strī”, “jāyā”, and “vanitā” are the most common.

A human being is a combination of body and ātman, “the spirit” or “the soul”, but in a more accurate meaning, the real Self. Both terms are connected with the concept of liberation (mokṣa, mukti). Let examine each of them separately.

The Body

The most common term for body in Sanskrit is the word “śarīra” derived either from the root “śri” (“support” or “supporter”) or from “śri” meaning “that which is easily destroyed or dissolved”⁷. The well-known Ayurvedic saying “śīryate anena iti śarīram”⁸ means a thing which gradually decays or degenerates. Therefore, decay or degeneration is the inherent quality of physical body (sthūla śarīra). Its most important synonym is the word “deha”. The term “deha” is derived from the root “dih” meaning to “grow” or to “develop”. In other words, the root means “to degenerate” owing to its continuous combustibility. According to the ancient physician Caraka (1st cent. A.D)⁹, all the component parts (dhātus) of the body are getting digested continuously as time passes on without resting even for a moment¹⁰. The word “kāya”, another synonym for the body, derives from the root “ciñ cayane” which means to “collect”. In the Amarakośa¹¹ the term is derived from the root “kini”

7. See, M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1057. See also, A. A. Macdonell, *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 309.

8. Caraka Saṃhitā 4. 6. 4.

9. Caraka, who is reputed to have lived in Vedic times, is the author of the Caraka Saṃhitā, one of the most important texts of Indian medicine (Ayurveda) through the ages.

10. Caraka Saṃhitā, 1. 28. 3.

11. Amarakośa is the popular name of Nāmaliṅganuśāsanam. It is a thesaurus in

meaning to know whether a thing is hot or cold. The next common synonym for the body is the word “tanu”, derived from the root “tan” which means to “grow” because body is growing since the time of birth. All these synonyms are indicative of the variety of meaning that the human body may have in Hindu traditions.

Apart from these etymological and semantic approaches we could say that for Hindu traditions and philosophies the body has been a central concern. On the one hand, in some traditions it has been given a positive evaluation as the vehicle of the journey to liberation (mokṣa, mukti) or enlightenment (bodhi). On the other hand, in some other traditions it has been given a negative evaluation as a restriction or a confinement of the soul from which it must break free. As the renowned Indologist Klaus K. Klostermaier mentions: “Hinduism has an ambivalent attitude towards the body. On the one hand, there is a sharp dichotomy between body and spirit and most Hindu systems insist on ‘viveka’ (discernment) through which a person learns to identify with the spirit and to consider the body as ‘non-self’. On the other hand, the body is valued as a vehicle of salvation: all acts necessary to obtain liberation require a well-functioning body”¹².

Most of the traditions that are designated by the term “Hindu” have understood the universe in cyclical terms as going through periods of creation and destruction over and over again. As part of this cyclical process the ātman is believed to be reincarnated in different bodies, animal or human, according to its previous actions (karma). Thus the kind of body that a being has is constrained or determined by its actions in the past. The body along with its pleasure and suffering is the result of previous actions in a previous life. Some traditions claim that the ātman can be set free from the confinement of the body through meditation and ritual, while some Yoga traditions (such as Haṭha Yoga for example) believe that the body can achieve immortality or at least great longevity. In popular or folk forms of Hinduism the body is important as the locus of a deity in ritual possession, making the

Sanskrit written by Amarasimha (around 400 A.D. or according to some other sources in 7th century).

12. K. K. Klostermaier, “Body”, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, p. 41.

body analogous to the statue or icon (mūrti) in the temple¹³. In some forms of Hinduism the body is important in being part of the body of God and conversely as symbolically containing the cosmos within it (e.g. Tantrism, Kashmir Śaivism etc.)¹⁴. The body is also of central importance from a sociological point of view; the kind of body a person has is a determining feature of the endogamous social group or caste (jāti) to which he/she belongs. Thus caste is a property of the body that one is born with, although according to some Tantric and devotional traditions (bhakti) caste is eradicated at initiation (dikṣā) and also at formal renunciation (saṁnyāsa). Irrespective of soteriological and ritual concerns, the body has been the focus of medical research and discourse, the Ayurveda, that cannot be separated from general Hindu cosmological and philosophical categories.

Apart from these general remarks, the question arises what a human body is made up of. What is it composed of? According to Hindu philosophy and physiology, a human being has three bodies: a gross body (sthūla śarīra), a subtle body (sūkṣma śarīra), and a causal one (kāraṇa śarīra), emanating from Brahman, the ultimate reality. That doctrine is known as the Doctrine of Three Bodies or Śarīra Traya¹⁵ and is essential in Hindu philosophy and religion, especially in Yoga, Advaita Vedānta and Tantra.

The gross body (sthūla śarīra) -which corresponds to the mortal, material, physical body- is produced out of the gross forms of the five basic elements (pañcabhūta): ether (ākāśa), air (vāyu), water (ap), fire (tejas), and earth (pṛthivī). It is said to be built of skin (tvacā), flesh (māṁsa), blood (rudhira), muscles (snāyu), fat (meda), marrow (majjā), bones (asthis) and is subject to a six-fold change: birth, subsistence,

13. A. Michaels and C. Wulf (eds.), *Images of the Body in India: South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity*, Routledge, New Delhi and Abingdon 2016.

14. See, G. D. Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 2006. By the same author, *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Śaivism*, Mellen Research University Press, San Francisco 1993.

15. On the Hindu doctrine of three bodies, see: K. K. Klostermaier, "Body", *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Oneword, Oxford 1998, p. 41. "Three Bodies Doctrine", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-Bodies-Doctrine>. Retrieved 24 april 2020. D. Chaube, *Mind-Body Relation in Indian Philosophy*, Tara Book Agency, Varanasi 1991, pp. 27-54.

growth, maturity, decay, and death¹⁶. This body is determined by one's actions (karmas) in a previous life out of the elements which have undergone the process of pañcīkaraṇa, i.e. a complicated combination of the five primordial subtle elements that results in subtle matter to transform itself to gross matter. This body is the instrument of experience of jīva ("soul"). Jīva being attached to the body and dominated by the sense of "ego" or "I" (ahaṃkāra or antaḥkaraṇa) uses the external and internal organs of sense and action of the body. In this way jīva, identifying itself with the physical body, enjoys gross objects in its waking state (vaiśvānara). So, that body has the capability to experience joy and sorrow and to form the basis of mundane relationships. Its main features are birth (sambhava), ageing (jāra), death (maraṇam) and the waking state (vaiśvānara). At death the physical body perishes and its five constituent elements are dissolved. That body cannot be considered as the real Self (ātman), but as "non self" (anātman).

The subtle body (sūkṣma śarīra)¹⁷ is made of the subtle forms of the five subtle elements (ether, air, water, fire, earth) before they have undergone pañcīkaraṇa. Those subtle forms are unseen by physical eyes. Apart of being composed of the five subtle elements, it contains: a) the five organs of perception (sravanadipanchakam), that is, eyes, ears, skin, tongue and nose, b) the five organs of action (vagadipanchakam), i.e. speech, hands, legs, anus and genitals, and c) the five-fold vital breath, viz. respiration (prāṇa), evacuation of waste from the body (apāna), blood circulation (vyāna), excretion (udāna), like sneezing, vomiting, crying etc. and digestion (samāna), d) mind (manas), and e) intellect (buddhi). So, that body is the body of mind and vital energies which keep the physical body alive. It is the receptacle of thoughts and memories and continues to exist after death, serving as a vehicle of transmigration. Combined with the causal body it is the transmigrating "soul" or jīva, separating from the gross body upon death. However, still we cannot say that jīva is the real Self (ātman).

16. Viveka-cūḍāmani, 89, 93.

17. In a number of books and articles that term is rendered as "astral body". In my point of view, it is a mistranslation deriving from a theosophical context.

The causal body (*kāraṇa śarīra*) is finer than the subtle body. It records past thoughts, habits and actions of an individual and carries the “soul” (*jīva*) of him/her from one life to another upon reincarnation. The causal body is merely the cause or seed of the subtle and the gross body. It made up of “ignorance” (*avidyā*), ignoring which is the real Self (*ātman*), instead giving birth to the notion of “soul” (*jīva*). As such, the causal body is characterized by emptiness, ignorance and darkness. It is the most complex of the three bodies and it contains the impressions of past experiences. For sure, this is not the *ātman*, as it has a beginning and an end and is subject to modification.

All three bodies are for the fulfillment of desires, gross and subtle, but *ātman* is totally different from those three bodies.

Hindu scriptures further described the body-mind complex of man as consisting of five sheaths, or layers (*pañcakośa*): the physical sheath or the sheath of food (*annamaya kośa*), the sheath of vital air (*prāṇamaya kośa*), the sheath of mind (*manomaya kośa*), the sheath of intellect (*vijñānamaya kośa*), and the sheath of bliss (*ānandamaya kośa*). These sheaths are located one inside the other like the segments of a collapsible telescope, with the sheath of the physical body being the outermost and the sheath of bliss being the innermost¹⁸.

The sheath of the physical body (*annamaya kośa*), corresponding to the *sthūla śarīra* or gross body, is dependent on food for its sustenance and lasts as long as it can absorb nourishment.

The sheath of the vital air (*prāṇamaya kośa*) is the manifestation of the universal vital energy (*prāṇa*). It animates the gross body, making it inhale and exhale, move about, take in nourishment, excrete and reproduce. The sheath of mind (*manomaya kośa*) is the seedbed of all desires. It is changeful, characterized by pain and pleasure, and has a beginning and an end. The sheath of intellect (*vijñānamaya kośa*) is the seat of I-consciousness (*ahaṃkāra*). Though material and insentient by nature, it appears intelligent because it reflects the light of the Self (*ātman*). It is the cause of embodiment. These three sheaths correspond to the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*).

18. Taittirīya Upaniṣad, II. 2-6.

Finer than the sheath of intellect is the sheath of bliss (*ānandamaya kośa*), corresponding to the causal body (*kāraṇa śārīra*), the main features of which are pleasure and rest. It, too, is material and subject to change. The five sheaths are the five layers of embodiment and they veil the real Self (*ātman*).

On this point it should be mentioned that in the Indian philosophical tradition, the atheistic school of *Cārvākas* or *Lokāyatās* are of the opinion that body is the sole reality and consciousness ceases to exist whenever the dissolution of the body starts. According to them, the mind or consciousness is merely a product of the combination of elements, just as wine is the result of chemical combination. All thoughts, sensation and emotions are material in nature. It is the material body that feels, remembers and experiences happiness and sorrow. On the other hand, in the theistic and absolutistic Hindu traditions what is called “mind” (*νοῦς*) in Western tradition, is unconscious, serving simply as a tool reflecting (by means of intellect) the real conscious reality, the true Self (*ātman*), which is identical with the real human nature¹⁹. This view would serve as a striking contrast to the almost unanimous view of the Western philosophy that consciousness is the essential characteristic of mind. The Hindu thinkers regard consciousness (*caitanya*, *citta*, *cetana*) as an attribute of, or as identical with the Self (*ātman*) alone. According to the logician *Śrīdhara* mind is not conscious, because it is an instrument of consciousness, like a jar²⁰. It does not possess any specific quality, namely colour, taste, smell, touch, viscosity (*sneha*), natural fluidity, knowledge, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion (*dveṣa*), effort, merit, demerit, mental faculty (*bhāvanā*) and sound²¹. So, being a form of matter and a sense organ, it has no consciousness²². According to Umesh Mishra “if it had consciousness, then there would have been two conscious elements in a single organism, which would have made the production of knowledge

19. D. Chaube, *Mind-Body Relation in Indian Philosophy*, p. vii: “[...] Indian thinkers do not equate mind with the self. In Indian philosophy the word mind is used in the sense of *manas* or *antaḥkāraṇa* (internal organ) and not in the sense of *ātman* (self)”.

20. *Nyāyakandālī*, p. 161

21. *Praśastapādabhāṣya*, p. 95.

22. *Nyāyamañjarī*, p. 68: *acetanaṃ ca tat karaṇatvādītareṣāṃ [...] tasmādevaṃ rūpaṃ manaḥ*.

impossible and would have thereby upset the entire worldly usages”²³. Consciousness is regarded as an adventitious attribute, possessed by the Self (ātman). It is adventitious because the Self does not possess that quality during the deep sleep. Consciousness is not the property of senses or body or even mind. It resides only in the Self (ātman).

On this point it should be mentioned that Hindu scriptures describe four states of existence that a human being experiences²⁴. The first is called vaiśvānara or waking state, when human beings identify themselves with the physical body. The second is taijasa or the dreaming state, when they identify themselves with the subtle body. The third is prajñā or the deep sleep state, when they identify themselves with the causal body. So, waking, dream and deep sleep are equated with the three bodies; physical, subtle and causal. The fourth state which is called turīya, is the real state of consciousness. It is pure consciousness or super-consciousness which transcends the three common states of consciousness and experiences the infinite (Ananta) and the non-different (advaita, abheda), equated with ātman, the real Self²⁵.

The Self²⁶

While Hinduism is incredibly diverse a common characteristic of it is the idea that all being is one. We could call it as ontological unity.

23. U. Mishra, *Conception of Matter according to Naya-vaishesika*, p. 137; cited also by D. B. Dubey, *Mind-Body Relation in Indian Philosophy*, p. 2.

24. For example, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5. 14. 3; Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 7; Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8. 7-12; Maitrāṇīya (or Maitrī) Upaniṣad 6. 19, 7. 11.

25. In Kashmir Śaivism there exists a fifth state of consciousness called turīyātīta, namely the state beyond turīya. Turīyātīta, also called śūnya (void), is the state where someone attains liberation (mokṣa, mukti).

26. On the concept of Self in Hinduism, see: K. K. Klostemaier, “Self”, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Oneworld, Oxford 1998, pp. 169-170. S. K. Saksena, *Nature of Consciousness in Hindu Philosophy*, Nand Kishore & Bros., Benares 1944. L. Stevenson and D. L. Haberman, *Ten Theories of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press 1974, 3rd ed. 1998, pp. 45-67. E. Valea, “The human condition in world religions”, <https://comparativereligion.com/man.html>. Retrieved 11 June 2020. K. Srivastava, “Human nature: Indian perspective revisited”, *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 2010 Jul-Dec, 19 (2), pp. 77-81. <https://nebi.nim.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3237135>. Retrieved 30 March 2020.

That means that all reality is one. This ultimate ground of all being is called Brahman. Brahman (lit. “expanded”) is a force, power, or energy that sustains the world. It is the ultimate reality that causes or grounds existence. It is an essence which pervades all reality. Ultimately all reality is one; all is Brahman.

But why then this unique and unified reality appears in human eyes to be a plurality composed of many things? A possible answer lies in a Hindu creation myth. All originates in nothingness except for Brahman. Being lonely, Brahman, which existed as Puruṣa, divided itself into two parts, male (pati) and female (patni), and from this the entire plurality of the elements of the universe came into being²⁷. However, the original unity has not been lost. It simply has taken on the appearance of multiple forms²⁸. This also implies that Brahman is both immanent and transcendent—it is within and outside all reality. It is both all the changing things of the world and simultaneously the unchanging ground of all things. It is the one ultimate reality, the Absolute, seen from different perspectives, but in the end, there is only Brahman.

From this context derives the concept that all humans are essentially one, and radically interconnected with all being. The self or soul within all, which is called ātman, is nothing else but Brahman. Ātman is identical with Brahman. So, all humans are like spokes connected to a central hub, or to say it more clearly, they are identical to all of reality. Thus, Hinduism distinguishes the transitory self as “ego” (ahaṃkāra) or sense of “I am” (asmīta) from the eternal, immortal Self, the ātman or individual Brahman. The identification of this true human self with Brahman is denoted in Hindu literature by phrases such as “aham brahmāsmi” (I am Brahman)²⁹ or “tat tvam asi” (“that [viz. Brahman] you are”)³⁰.

Besides, ātman is not an object of consciousness but the subject of it. It is consciousness itself and thus it cannot be known like other objects. The true human self is identical with the consciousness which

27. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1. 4; c. f. Rig Veda 10. 129, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11. 1. 6.

28. Taittirīya Upaniṣad 1. 1. 1.

29. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1. 4. 10.

30. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6. 8. 7.

animates all consciousness. In this sense humans are not transient egos inside bodies but identical with the ultimate reality. In fact, ātman is (ultimately) Brahman. Moreover, there are two divergent attitudes within Hinduism whether Brahman is saguna or nirguna. In the first case, saguna Brahman means a Brahman with attributes (guna), or a personal god with specific characteristics. In contrast, the second alternative of a nirguna Brahman means an impersonal Absolute, an impersonal non dual ultimate reality without characteristics.

In addition, this true Self migrates from body to body. That means people die and other people are born, but Brahman/ātman remains always the same. However, most of the humans are unable to realize their true nature and that is caused by ignorance (avidyā). The most of them do not distinguish the transitory from the permanent, the temporary from the eternal; subsequently the temporal ego from the eternal true Self. As a result, humans identify their temporal egos with the phenomenal, transient world, instead with Brahman. They relate themselves with their transient egos instead of Brahman/ātman, ignoring that their little egos are essentially illusory (māyā). In consequence, they alienate themselves not only from true reality, but from their true selves and from other human beings. So, they are isolated, lonely and incredulous.

This misguided individualism is caused by karma³¹; the moral law of cause and effect. It means that a person's present condition and actions are determined by his/her past desires and actions. Moreover, his/her existential condition has been predetermined by his/her actions in his/her previous rebirth. To be rich or poor, a member of a low or a high caste of Hindu community, a male human being or a female one, healthy or unhealthy, all depends on his/her previous actions. Hindu meditational practices, or to say in a more accurate way, Yoga, is an attempt to discover the true human nature and relish it from egoistic desires and subsequently from the bondage in karma and rebirth.

31. On karma, see W. Doniger O' Flaherty (ed.), *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1983. W. K. Mahony, "Karman: Hindu and Jain Concepts", στί: L. Jones (ed. In Chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 8th, 2nd edition, Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills 2005, pp. 5093-5097.

Hindu concepts in a postmodern world perspective

This is in general the Hindu concept on human nature and condition. May many Hindus do not know it in detail, but generally the concept that human body is a transient reality and the real Self is totally different from what is conventionally called mind or consciousness, is the prevailing attitude in the long history of Hinduism. Moreover, it is worthy and blissful for a Hindu to seek the Self, to know it and reach to self-realization. He/she can succeed on this purpose by means of detachment from worldly allurements, the undertaking of an austere way of life, meditative practices and introspection. However, the question what is the place of this concept in a postmodern world³² is difficult to be answered. Let us start from the Hindu individuals. Are they postmodern? It depends on the place or the country where they live. Probably the Hindu farmers who live in the villages of India or Nepal could not be considered as postmodern. For sure, the most of them could be identified as pre-modern. In the same way Hindu scientists who teach in Indian universities and experiment in technological institutes and laboratories are in touch with modernity. In touch with modernity are the Hindu civilians of Bangalore, one of the largest technopolies of the world, as well. Hindu diaspora in countries of the West may be in touch with postmodernism.

Then another question arises: Could Hinduism have a place in a postmodern world? And the answer is: Definitely, yes. A postmodern society is an open one. As it accommodates many “truths”, it is able to accommodate the Hindu “truth”. But we must have in mind that Hinduism is not postmodern in its essence. Concerning “truth”, postmodernists consider it as relative, but Hinduism holds that “truth” is one³³. For

32. Very informative is the article of S. Datta, “Hinduism in a Postmodern World” (in three parts), <https://pragyata.com/mag/Hinduism-in-a-postmodern-world>. (for further details see Bibliography). See also A. Collins, “Foucault among the Demons: Power and the Self in India Thought and Western Postmodernism, Dharma Association of North America, 2010,

https://academia.edu/9564750/Foucault_among_the_Demons_Power_and_the_Self_in_Indian_Thought_and_Western_Postmodernism. Retrieved 4 June 2020.

33. S. Datta, “Hinduism in a Postmodern World (Part III)”: “According to postmodernists, truth is only relative - it depends upon the observer’s culture. Hinduism has a radically

Hinduism, that one truth could partly be known by different observers as long as they are conditioned by their own cultural and intellectual impressions, habits and presuppositions, worldly attachments (by one word, māyā) which are the results of thoughts and actions (karma) accumulated through a cycle of numerous rebirths (saṃsāra). However, it is very much possible to see (through darśana, “vision”) the whole of “truth” by breaking away from all those accumulated conditionings. In addition, from a postmodern perspective, a postmodern religion is that one which considers that there are no universal religious truths or laws. Rather, reality is shaped by social, historical and cultural contexts according to the individual, place or time. On this point, let us bring to mind that “Hinduism” is defined by the Hindus themselves not as “Hinduism”, but as “Sanātana Dharma”; the “eternal law”, the “eternal religion” or the “eternal order”.

But, it is not only the pre-modern metaphysical principles of Hinduism; it is also its social ideas (the caste system for example) and a trend of Hindu fundamentalism which prevails Indian society in the last decades. The burden of accommodation of Hinduism in a postmodern world depends on the postmodern world itself. Western societies for example have accommodated aspects of Hindu culture such as various kinds of Yoga (mainly Haṭha Yoga) and Ayurveda.

Besides, a new term, “Post-postmodernism”³⁴, has been around for over a decade. Since the late 1990s there has been a small but growing

different approach to Truth. It holds that the Truth is one: different observers can only partly know the truth as long as they are conditioned by their own cultural and intellectual impressions, habits and presuppositions which are the results of thoughts and actions accumulated through numerous lives (...); and yet it is very much possible-even inevitable-to see (...) the whole of Truth by breaking away from all those accumulated conditionings. Hence postmodernism is essentially an orientation-specific worldview, while Hinduism is a worldview which posits that the Truth is ever-present, and is not affected by our ignorance or cognizance of it”.

34. On Post-Postmodernism, see: G. Potter and J. Lopes (eds.), *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, The Athlone Press, London 2001. A. Kirby, “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond”, *Philosophy Now*, no. 58, November-December 2006, https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond. Retrieved 30 June 2020. J. T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, Stanford University Press 2012. “Post-postmodernism”, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-postmodernism>. Retrieved 23 June 2020.

feeling –without being a mainstream– in academic community that Postmodernism “has gone out of fashion”³⁵. According to the American theologian Kyle Roberts, as stated in the title of one of his articles in 2016, “We Are Witnessing the End of Postmodernism and the Beginning of Post-Postmodernism”³⁶. He explains further: “It seems that the lid of gentility has come off, the postmodern concept of ‘political correctness’ is going out of style, and the universality of globalism, while not being replaced, is being challenged by an intensified nationalism, an angry tribalism/localism, and an open disregard for the well-being of anyone outside ‘my’ group, or my language-game. It seemed that postmodernism, at its core, has a deep tolerance for difference and otherness. But, this tolerance of otherness is turning into an intensified angry rejection of difference and otherness and the attempt to overcome the problem of difference, not by rational argument or toleration, but by the sheer exertion of power, by the politics of fear, and by a polemics steeped in rhetoric but devoid of substance”³⁷.

Besides, the British scholar Alan Kirby portrayed the “typical intellectual states” of Post-postmodernism (“pseudo-modernism” as he calls it) as being “ignorance, fanaticism and anxiety” producing “a trance-like state” in those participating in it³⁸.

35. G. Potter and J. Lopez J. (eds.), *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*, The Athlone Press, London 2001, p. 4. Cf. M. Werner, “Postmodernism’s Dead End”, September 23, 2019, <https://quillite.com/2019/09/23/postmodernisms-dead-end>. Retrieved 16 August 2020. Concerning the death of Postmodernism in literature, see A. Gibbons, “Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?”, <https://the-tls.co.uk/articles/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/#>. Retrieved 25 June 2020. On the continuance of Postmodernism apart the skepticism for its end, see H. Pluckrose, “No, Postmodernism is Not Dead (and Other Misconceptions)”, February 7, 2018, <https://areomagazine.com/2018/02/07/no-postmodernism-is-not-dead-and-other-misconceptions>. Retrieved 14 August 2020.

36. K. Roberts, “We Are Witnessing the End of Postmodernism and the Beginning of Post-Postmodernism”, July 25, 2016, <https://patheos.com/blogs/unsy-stematic-theology/2016/07/we-are-witnessing-the-end-of-postmodernism-and-the-beginning-of-post-postmodernism>. Retrieved 20 August 2020.

37. K. Roberts, *idem*.

38. A. Kirby, “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond” *Philosophy Now*, no 58, November-December 2006, https://philosophynow.org/issues/58/The_Death_of_Postmodernism_And_Beyond. Retrieved 30 June 2020.

Conclusively, “in the post-postmodern mood, there may be recognition that we do not have the Absolute Truth, but that does not make any difference, because we do not care. It does not change the way we relate to others; it does not change the way we understand our place in the world. It is not chastened by difference and otherness, but angered by it. It is not motivated by peace, but by war”³⁹.

It seems that this short analysis on Post-postmodernism is a pessimistic one. However, what will happen in the future is too early to be answered. Concerning Hinduism, we must not forget that it is a large community of more than a billion believers who interact with the global; who affect and are affected by the global changes. Hinduism is a part of this world. Being such, neither can it be ignored, nor can it be overestimated. From a Christian viewpoint, which is the viewpoint of the present article’s author as well, the prevalence of love and peace could be the only answer in any turmoil affecting a postmodern or a post-postmodern human society.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ἡ Ἰνδουιστικὴ ἀντίληψη περὶ ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως καὶ καταστάσεως σὲ ἓναν μετανεωτερικὸ κόσμον

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Ζοῦμε σὲ ἓναν μεταβαλλόμενον μετανεωτερικὸ (μεταμοντέρνο) κόσμον. Στὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν δὲν ἰσχύει μία ἀπόλυτη ἀλήθεια, ἀλλὰ ἀλήθεια εἶναι γιὰ τὸν καθένα ὅτι αὐτὸς ἀντιλαμβάνεται καὶ αἰσθάνεται ὡς ἀλήθεια. Ὁ μεταμοντερνισμὸς ὡς ἀντίδραση στὴ νεωτερικότητα δίνει χῶρον στὸν ἐπαναπροσδιορισμὸ τῶν φιλοσοφικῶν, ὑπαρξιακῶν,

39. See, K. Roberts, “We Are Witnessing the End of Postmodernism and the Beginning of Post-Postmodernism”, *idem*.

βιολογικών, σεξουαλικών, συμπεριφορικών, ήθικων και καλλιτεχνικών ἐπιλογῶν και τάσεων τοῦ σημερινοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Πρόκειται γιὰ ἓνα ρεῦμα στοχασμοῦ, λογοτεχνικῆς και καλλιτεχνικῆς ἔκφρασης, ποὺ πρωτοεμφανίζεται στὸν Δυτικὸ κόσμο και σταδιακὰ ἐξαπλώνεται (χάριν τῆς σημαντικώτατης συμβολῆς τῆς τεχνολογίας) και σὲ ἄλλες περιοχὲς τῆς ὑφῆλιου.

Ἐν τούτοις, παρὰ τὶς ὅποιες μεταβολὲς στὸν σύγχρονο μεταμοντέρνο κόσμο, οἱ διάφορες θρησκείες εἶναι παρούσες ἀρθρώνοντας ἡ καθεμία τῆ δική της ἀνθρωπολογία. Μία ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶναι ὁ Ἰνδουισμὸς· μία πανάρχαια και πολυσύνθετη θρησκεία ποὺ γιὰ λόγους καθαρὰ κατανόησεως ἀντιμετωπίζεται ἀπὸ τὸν δυτικὸ νοῦ ὡς μία ἐνοποιημένη θρησκευτικὴ παράδοση. Στὴν πραγματικότητα πρόκειται γιὰ διάφορες παραδόσεις ποὺ γεννήθηκαν στὴν Ἰνδικὴ ὑπόγειο και φέρουν πολλὰ κοινὰ χαρακτηριστικά, γεγονός ποὺ μᾶς ἐπιτρέπει νὰ τὶς χαρακτηρίσουμε «Ἰνδουιστικές» (Hindu). Τὸ σύνολο αὐτῶν τῶν παραδόσεων συνιστᾷ αὐτὸ ποὺ ἡ θρησκευτικὴ ἔρευνα ὀρίζει ὡς «Ἰνδουισμό» (ἀγγλ. Hinduism, γερμ. Hinduismus, γαλλ. Hindouisme). Ἐν προκειμένῳ, μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς παραδόσεις ἀναδύεται μία ἐν πολλοῖς κοινῶς ἀποδεκτὴ «ἀνθρωπολογία», οἱ γενικὲς ἀρχὲς τῆς ὁποίας βρίσκονται μέχρι σήμερα σὲ ἰσχύ. Τί ὀρίζεται ἐπομένως ὡς ἀνθρώπινη φύση ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰνδουισμό και ποιά εἶναι ἡ θέση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέσα στὸν κόσμο;

Τὸ ἀνθρώπινο ὄν κατὰ τὸν Ἰνδουισμό συνίσταται ἀπὸ σῶμα (śarīra, deha) και «ἐαυτό» (ātman). Τὸ μὲν πρῶτο, τὸ σῶμα, εἶναι μία σύνθεση τριῶν σωματῶν. Τουτέστιν, τοῦ «χονδροειδοῦς» (sthūla śarīra) ποὺ ἀντιστοιχεῖ στὴ βιολογικὴ ὑπόσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τοῦ «λεπτοφυοῦς» (sūkṣma śarīra) ποὺ ἐπιβιώνει τοῦ σωματικοῦ θανάτου και ἐξυπηρετεῖ ὡς ὄχημα τῆς ἐπόμενης μετενσάρκωσης και τοῦ «αἰτιώδους» (kāraṇa śarīra), τοῦ φορέα τῆς «ψυχῆς» (jīva), χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ὁποίου εἶναι ἡ αἴσθησις τοῦ «ἐγῶ» (ahaṃkāra). Τὰ τρία αὐτὰ σώματα ποὺ συναπαρτίζουν τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ὑπόσταση σχετίζονται μὲ τὸν πραγματικὸ «ἐαυτό» (ātman) μέσω μιᾶς διαστροφώσεως πέντε «περιβλημάτων» (kośas). Πρόκειται γιὰ τὰ περιβλήματα τῆς τροφῆς, τῆς ζωτικῆς πνοῆς, τοῦ νοῦ, τῆς διάνοιας και τῆς μακαριότητος. Ὁ νοῦς (manas) δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα ἐργαλεῖο, ποὺ χάρη στὸ περίβλημα

τῆς διάνοιας (vijñana, buddhi) φαντάζει νοήμων, ἀκριβῶς ἐπειδὴ ἡ διάνοια ἀντανακλᾷ τὸ φῶς τοῦ πραγματικοῦ ἑαυτοῦ (ātman).

Κατὰ τὴν Ἰνδουιστικὴ σκέψη ἡ συνείδηση (caitanya, cetana, citta) εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀνεξάρτητη ἀπὸ τὸν νοῦ (manas). Ἡ συνείδηση ταυτίζεται μὲ τὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ παντός, τὴν ὑπέριστατη πραγματικότητα, τὸ brahman. Σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο οἱ Ἰνδουιστῆς στοχαστῆς διαχωρίζονται σὲ δύο τάσεις. Σύμφωνα μὲ τὴ μία, τὸ «χονδροειδές» σῶμα θεωρεῖται ἀναγκαῖο μέσον γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τῆς λύτρωσης (mokṣa, mukti), ἐνῶ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἄλλη δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα ἐμπόδιο πρὸς αὐτὴν ποὺ πρέπει νὰ ἀπαξιωθεῖ, καθὼς δὲν ἀποτελεῖ μέρος τῆς πραγματικῆς φύσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ο ἄνθρωπος τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ (āman) ταυτίζεται μὲ τὴν ὑπέριστατη πραγματικότητα, τὸ Brahman.

Πέραν τούτων, ἡ ἐπίγεια θέση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου προκαθορίζεται πάντοτε ἀπὸ τὶς πράξεις τῆς προηγούμενης ζωῆς του, τουτέστιν τοῦ karma, τοῦ νόμου τῆς ἀνταπόδοσης τῶν πράξεων.

Ὅλες αὐτὲς οἱ ἀντιλήψεις εἶναι σαφῶς προνεωτερικῆς. Χάριν ὅμως τῆς ἀνεκτικότητος ποὺ διακρίνει τὶς μετανεωτερικῆς κοινωνίες, ἀποκοτῶν τὴ θέση τους μέσα σὲ αὐτές. Εἶναι ὅμως ἀπὸ δύσκολη ἔως παρακινδυνευμένη ἡ προσπάθεια νὰ προβλεφθεῖ ποιὰ θὰ εἶναι ἡ θέση αὐτῶν τῶν ἀντιλήψεων σὲ ἓναν ἀναδυόμενο κατὰ τὴν τελευταία δεκαετία μετα-μετανεωτερικὸ κόσμον.

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