

2. War and Peace in Hinduism

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A mob of violent intruders storms an ancient mosque and destroys it within about five hours. Thousands of people get injured; later on violence sweeps the country and hundreds of people die. All for the glory of Lord Rama whose alleged birthplace needed to be liberated from Muslim desecration. Two of the most powerful Hindu organizations – the Vishva Hindu Pradishad (VHP) and the Rasthriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS), supported by the ruling political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – had called for a resurgence of Hindu ideals. ‘Hindutva’ (‘Hindu-ness’) was the political slogan which united millions of people to establish a new political Hindu identity to fight secularism which only had weakened the Hindu majority and had given the minorities of Muslims, Christians and others too much recognition and power. The events happened on 6 December 1992, when a politically orchestrated campaign led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which had been built in 1528. It is a property taken over by the modern Indian state and it has been under dispute since 1885. Countless courts have tried to solve the problem, but to no avail. Hinduism was and is on the warpath. According to tradition, the mosque had been erected on the site of the birthplace of Rāma, the righteous king of the glorious past and an incarnation (*avatāra*) of God Viṣṇu who came to bring peace on earth. The myth which connects the site of the mosque with Rāma’s birthplace is an ideological construction made up for political reasons and the creation of a Hindu identity against the threat of Islam, as militant Hindus would see it. Is this an aberration from a predominantly peaceful religion,

or do we see here structures of behaviour which are deeply engraved in the Hindu way of life?

Harmony and Unity

What we call Hinduism is a plurality of different traditions. It has evolved from at least three different cultures which need to be recognized and analysed in order to understand the synthesis which is in the making even today. These three cultures are, first, the Dravidian background which is the dominant culture in South India leaving important traces also in the North; second, the Indus culture, so called because the first important excavations were the cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa at the River Indus, which however was spread all over Northern India until about 1500 BCE; and third, the Indo-Germanic culture of the migrating tribes who crossed the Hindukush and invaded the North Indian Plains in the middle of the second millennium BCE. They carried with them the oral tradition of the Vedas which later became the holy scripture of India; they subsisted on the cow and had elaborated the complex ritual of sacrifice and offering which would become the centre of ancient Brahmanical religion until the time of the Buddha in the middle of the first millennium BCE. Different tribes, peoples, cultures and religions were involved in this process of a highly complex cultural encounter. The most important and stable cultural construct which developed as the organizing matrix of this process was the caste system. This is a kind of apartheid structure that saved the relatively small Indo-Germanic tribes from becoming engulfed by the inhabitants who had already established cultural systems. However, not only the caste system but also the different hierarchies of gods, the various myths and models of reality, the bewildering diversity of philosophical systems and patterns of values are a result of these cultural amalgamations.

What is so characteristic for the Indian cultural processes is a constant assimilation and dissimilation of different ways of perceiving and constructing models of reality. What can be called the mode of identification, that is, identifying one aspect of real-

ity with another, one god with another, one cultural value with another, the most stunning Hindu way of identifying everything with anything, has its root in this process. It seems to me that there are two outstanding forms of thought that are a typical result of this, and they are most relevant until today in terms of socio-psychological analysis.

The first one is a certain trend towards other-worldliness, a withdrawal from the world, because what humans can touch, see and hear such as trees, animals, other humans, inanimate matter, etc. is understood as only the external side of reality which represents (in various ways) a deeper and hidden aspect of the real reality. That is to say, what is graspable by the senses and the intellect is only the superficial construct of '*māyā*' ('supernatural power' or 'illusory appearance'), an external representation or expression, only derived reality, not reality as such (*satyasya satya*).

The second one has just the opposite tendency which I like to call the sacramental perception and understanding of reality. This is most prominently documented in the literature of the Tantras, and nearly all religious and philosophical systems are penetrated by Tantrism, including, of course, Buddhism. Accordingly, any piece of matter, any phenomenon and form of reality – an atom, a piece of dust, a tree, humans, the whole universe of hierarchies of gods and reality as such – are nothing other than a condensation of one spiritual energy. Everything, precisely that which we would consider to be unclean or dirty or less real or the dark side of reality, is an expression of the divine oneness. This divine nature of reality can be experienced, grasped and understood due to a transformation of our perception and insight. According to this basic attitude towards reality, it is not proper to devalue the world or aspects of it but to engage with it in all possible ways because everything is expression of the divine.

It is this tension between other-worldliness or asceticism and the perception of the whole of reality as divine, that marks the special flavour of Hinduism and a number of other Asian cultures. What Hinduism derives from it is its synthetic power to integrate and transform all cultural differences and place them into this cultural construct.

I want to refer to two different myths of creation which express a basic polarity that is relevant to our topic here because the tension expressed is somewhat reflected in these myths. Only together these myths represent what we can call a basic understanding of reality in Hinduism. They do appear as two different psycho-social structures which in their polarity shape the Indian cultural consciousness until today, and this holds true for the basic question of war and peace in Hinduism as well.

Two of the great gods of Hinduism who represent the ultimate standard of Indian experience of reality are Viṣṇu and Śiva. They are prototypes for a possible appearance of reality, both of them synthetic gods due to their cumulative histories. I do not need to go here into their respective histories but want to trace only some of their phenomenological traits which are relevant in our context.

Viṣṇu rests dormant down at the bottom of the ocean of the world, resting on the primordial snake Śeśa. His rhythmical breath creates time and makes the navel move upwards and downwards. From the navel a marvellous and mysterious lotus flower grows slowly upwards, and, as in all Indian symbolism and iconography, this lotus is a representation of the power of transformation – unclean reality is transformed into the beauty of the spiritual attainment, because it is in the smelly and dirty waters that the lotus grows and extends itself above the water level in order to raise above and display a most beautiful and spotless flower of perfection. So Viṣṇu sleeps and dreams, and he manifests this lotus flower from his navel above sea level. Right in the midst of the flower sits a figure in lotus posture and this is Brahmā, the God of creation who contains everything in himself. In this miraculous manifestation the whole world of all potential and actual phenomena is contained and mirrored. That is to say, in the dream sleep of Viṣṇu the whole reality grows in the rhythm of breathing which is the unconscious aspect of reality, the preconscious movement as creative process, the systole and diastole, the exhalation and inhalation. From the pre-conscious dream of unity (Viṣṇu) emerges the all-conscious reality in differentiation (Brahmā). All contradiction of reality – creation and

withdrawal, coming forth and going back – is contained in this ‘coincidentia oppositorum’ (‘coincidence of opposites’).

Śiva is a totally different character. His name means literally ‘the benevolent one’. He does not dream at the bottom of the sea, but dances ecstatically on the summit of Mount Kailāśa. He is the supra-conscious counterpart to the pre-conscious God on the snake. Dance is the creative power, the unity of rhythm in a temporal sequence, the unity of the temporal movement in different special dimensions. This dance creates the order which is its matrix right in the moment of the process of dancing itself; it is not a pre-given idea, but creative presence. Time is not the frame in which the dance would occur but time is constituted by the dancing energy itself. However, Śiva bears also a second significant trait; that is to say, he is in constant sexual embrace with his spouse Parvatī, the great Goddess. From this conjunction the world is born. But at the same time he is the unmovable meditator who sits for ages deeply absorbed in contemplative union. His meditation generates creative energies. In Sanskrit this is expressed by the word *tapas* signifying heat and energy which can be experienced during meditative practice. This heat can be used to create, to destroy and to create again; in other words, the energetic process is a process of constant transformation of reality. Therefore Śiva represents three aspects of reality which are usually experienced in contradiction to each other: sexual union (his symbol is the erect phallus), meditative absorption and the ecstatic dance which creates time and differentiation and at the same time subdues the negative and evil forces of demonic (‘asuric’) nature.

It is in this polarity that according to Indian understanding reality is explicated. Śiva generates creative energy by his dance, and this creation process has two sides: emergence of forms and destruction of forms. Creation means both sides of the coin: there is no creation without destruction, for reality is called into being, transformed and destroyed in order to re-emerge in different forms. Life and death are not two opposites which would follow each other in temporal sequence but they are two aspects of the same process activated at the same time. This polarity of

birth and death is being represented in the myth of Śiva, for explication and implication are the two sides of the one rhythmical dancing movement. The movement is the unity of creation and destruction and Śiva himself as the graceful and benevolent one keeps the process going. Better still, he is the process himself, as the myth shows in a number of highly interesting variations. The dark side – suffering, violence, the sublime, the terrible and so on – is not excluded but is one moment in the process, made an experience in the story of Śiva.

A similar intuition lies behind the Vedāntic parlance of the *ātman* ('self'). In all Vedānta it is the *ātman* which is conceived to be the final reality, which on the cosmic level is called *brahman*. Those who attain to the *ātman* by analysis or meditative intuition experience the unity of reality. The *ātman* is also called the inner steering force (*antaryāmin*). Expressed in theistic terms this is to say that the one God is the inner steering force in all cosmic and human procedures; he is the hidden subject in all possible activities, the subject of knowing, hearing, smelling, etc. It is not the graspable 'I' or I-consciousness that is the actor but this unmoved mover, the 'thinker in thinking', the 'hearer in hearing' as it is expressed in the Upaniṣads. He is all in all. The eternal is not apart from the temporal, but right in the midst of the seeming temporal contradictions. Therefore, the temporal is nothing in itself. Not to know this is ignorance (*avidyā*). Being is not a quality of individual forms, but being (*sat*) is the reality of the One that expresses itself in ever-changing forms without being touched or changed by this process. This is quite clearly expressed in the *Bhagavadgītā* (13, 27 f.):

Who sees the Highest Lord as existing in all beings,
 who does not perish when they perish, sees right.
 For who sees the same Lord, who dwells in everything,
 Hurts himself not by himself¹
 And thus attains to the highest goal.

¹ *Na histaty ātmanā `tmānaṁ* ('he does not hurt the self by the self'), i.e. the self of all beings is the same, so that each act of violence would be an act of autoaggression. This is the strong argument for non-violence according

In their original nature all beings are explications of the One, and this is why one should recognize in them the *ātman*. What follows is that one should behave toward all beings as one would behave towards God. The Indian greeting *añjali mudrā* is a greeting of God who is present in all beings. Because this *ātman* is the real nature of all, there cannot be hatred. For the other one is the same in different form. Whoever encounters the difference in its real nature experiences always the One. The transcendent is totally present in the immanent, and the immanent cannot be without and apart from the transcendent. There is no abyss of the strange, and the otherness of the other (which might be dangerous and could require annihilation of the other in order to stay alive) fades away. The other is different only under certain aspects, but in reality it essentially has the same nature as everything else. Therefore all beings should be without fear – they encounter only themselves. When fear fades away there is no place for violence and annihilation of other beings.

Peace by Violence?

In Vedic times the cosmic order (*ṛta*) was secured by the brahmanical sacrifice. The social *dharma* ('law') however, which is derived from this cosmic order already in late-Vedic time, extends to all aspects of human life. The *dharma* structures society, establishes a system of values and provides everybody with a given place and status in society. Inasmuch as the *dharma* is practised and cherished, peace and harmony are guaranteed. Violation of the *dharma* means violence and war. *Dharma* is the source for harmony in terms of cultic as well as psychological, social and political balance. Hinduism is marked precisely by the fact that these realms and levels are distinguished but not separated.

The social and political aspect of *dharma* has produced a social order that was already established in principle in the first millennium BCE but was changed and newly regulated over the

to the Gītā but it does not exclude the idea of a just war, i.e. if war is necessary to keep up the 'dharma'.

succeeding centuries. However, we need to be aware that it is a brahmanical system which has had enormous influence on the upper and middle classes but less so on the lower classes and the outcastes. This order has expressed itself in two basic hierarchical value systems, i.e. the caste system (*varṇa* and *jāti*) and the system of life cycles (*āśrama*).

The caste system is, as shown above, the result of historical processes on the subcontinent; it has evolved over three millennia. Its basis seems to be the overlapping of different peoples which got mixed during the processes of invasions from the West, especially by the Indo-Germanic tribes. It has given India a stratified social order which has determined peace and war until today. Tribal cultures, Dravidian cultures and the urban civilizations extending all over the northern plains, known as the Indus culture, had existed already during the second millennium BCE before the Indo-Germanic newcomers from the West crossed the Khyber Pass and settled all over the plains. Demographically they were not strong enough to use their military advantage to assimilate the conquered populations, and this is why they invented a system of apartheid in order to avoid being assimilated by the conquered ones. This system is an exogamic caste system which was differentiated enough to evolve later into a system that also structured society according to labour and professional characteristics, much like the medieval system of guilds in Europe. The caste system made it possible that very different cultures could co-exist, though at the expense of lower castes and the excluded ones. This enormous cultural and economic gap within the system became aggravated during the British period due to the collaboration of the upper classes and castes with the British. Thus the matter of war and peace in Hinduism is not a political question alone which would require an analysis of foreign policies by the different Hindu states until independence and secularization; it is rather a topic which is intrinsically connected with the specific social structure of Indian societies, and this structure is ultimately defined by the Hindu *dharma*. Therefore we need to investigate some of the most prominent reflections of the *dharma* in normative Hindu scriptures, notably

the *Epics*, the *Dharmaśāstras* and *Arthaśāstras* and especially the influential *Bhagavadgītā*. This is a selective approach which does not cover the whole range of Hindu value systems at all, but it is hoped that the selection is convincing, based on the influence that these scriptures have had on centuries of formation of Hindu societies.

Narratives

The *Mahābhārata* reports extensive wars. Most of these wars are conflicts of succession of established dynasties. Later on these wars are interpreted religiously, not only in terms of the philosophical teaching of *svadharma* (i.e. one's own duty or nature in the social and cosmic order) as it is the case in the *Bhagavadgītā*, but also in terms of mythological patterns such as fights between good and evil, the realm of *devas* ('gods') against the *asuras* ('titans' or 'demons') etc. But quite surprisingly the horror and terror of war is a topic in the *Mahābhārata* which is clearly addressed and the killing and bloodshed is not taken for granted. Thus messengers are exchanged between the enemies in an attempt to avoid the need for war. Yet the author comments, with some resignation, that humans are slaves of their lust and greed and this might never change.² An interesting story depicts the creator Brahmā as he realizes that there might be an unwholesome overpopulation on earth. So he sends a female being in order to destroy as many beings as possible. With tears in her eyes she refuses to perform her duty and asks that humans at least might mutually destroy themselves by their own vices.³

Indra is the Lord and Master of the universe. His weapons are the cosmic powers, notably thunder, and his chariot is the world. People at war call on him for help in their military undertakings so that they can conquer enemies, obtain victory and get as many material goods as possible.⁴ However, it needs to be noted that Indra is not only in charge of war but also presides

² MB 6, 4, 41.

³ MB 12, 248-50.

⁴ RV 1, 7, 4.

over peace after he has helped to destroy the evil forces.⁵ He is called upon in fervent prayers to support his friends and nobody else.⁶ This henotheistic and exclusivistic trend in the *Ṛgveda* is already overcome by a different mentality which asks universal and metaphysically inclusive questions so that the unity of the cosmos and the unity of history is an idea on the horizon at a very early stage in history.⁷ It is not only the very abstract and impersonal One (*ekam*) but also this powerful warrior god Indra who contains all the worlds and events of this world in himself like seeds or growing potentials. The explication into the variety of forms and contradicting experiences, such as violent and non-violent events, is his self-manifestation.⁸

Dharmaśāstras and Arthaśāstras

As already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Hinduism is not a clearly defined religion but a whole cluster of ways of life in India which encompasses all peoples there, apart from those who explicitly do not want to be part of the Hindu fold (such as Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians and a bunch of outspoken atheists). To classify Hinduism as 'religion' is not unproblematic because the term *dharma* means something else. Dharma is the cosmic law with which society as a whole, as well as each individual, has to live its life in accordance. The *dharma* is known through divine revelation of the Vedic scriptures (*śruti*) which has been interpreted through the brahmanical literature in the Śāstras. The interpretation, however, is not confined to written sources but is also codified in oral tradition, i.e. in rules and patterns of behaviour by those who claim to live in accordance with tradition. In terms of this source of values and laws there is an enormous flexibility and potential for adaptation within the Hindu culture.

⁵ RV 3, 46, 2; 8, 1, 2; 1, 7, 5.

⁶ RV 1, 7, 10.

⁷ This, of course, refers to RV 10, 129, but it is also present in RV 3, 51, 4 where Indra is praised for being the only ruler of the world and thus in RV 6, 36, 4 is worshipped as the single king of the whole universe (*viśva bhuvana*).

⁸ AV 10, 7, 30.

In this context it is important to mention the most significant classifications because they determine what society, or different groups or subcultures, call peace and war. The caste system, historically conditioned and endowed with religious legitimacy, provides the 'warrior caste' (*kṣatriya*) with the duty to uphold the *dharma* also by the means of *daṇḍa*, i.e. the 'stick' or sanctioned violence. This includes war. Violence and war may be used either as punishment or as a threat to ensure that the violator will not disturb the *dharma* again. According to the 'Laws of Manu' (*Manusmṛiti*) and especially to Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, war is unavoidable.

According to the classification of the stratified Hindu society, the *dharma* does not remain on an abstract level but needs to be implemented in different ways according to the *svadharmā* ('duty' or 'nature') of the respective caste, i.e. the individual duty is determined by belonging to a specific caste. There is not much of individual choice. It is only when the different castes perform according to the predestined duties and each fulfils their *svadharmā* that peace and order in the universe (*śānti*) are guaranteed. Thus the Brahmin has the duty to observe non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), an idea that originates in Jainism and was not yet binding for the Brahmins in Vedic and post-Vedic times. The *kṣatriya*, i.e. the king, all nobles and the upper classes, execute the punishing force (*daṇḍa*) according to the law in order to maintain harmony. It is said that a king who does not *daṇḍa* according to his *svadharmā* brings evil upon the country like a Brahmin who would neglect the study of the Vedas.⁹ According to the caste system not everybody has the same status and dignity in legal terms though, in abstract terms, the 'Laws of Manu' agree that all humans are metaphysically equal but not so in social terms. An example is Kauṭilya's rule concerning adultery. If higher males molest a woman of lower status they have to pay a financial compensation according to the status of the respective woman. If, however, males of a lower caste get too close

⁹ Quoted by Walker 1983, p. 267.

to a high-caste woman, they will get most severe punishment, possibly the death penalty.¹⁰ The modern secular Indian constitution has done away with those discriminations but they are still values in the society and shape moral consciousness. This is a cause for conflicts which instigate aggression and violence, as can be observed in the daily clashes based on caste conflicts throughout the country. In any case the 'Laws of Manu' and Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (which was rediscovered only in 1908) are certainly the most influential sources which described, systematized and at the same time shaped the cosmo-social norms of Hinduism at their time (about first or second century CE, but in their basic assumptions much older); and their influence reaches down to the present generations in India. All social rules are interpreted in the context of cosmic order, and the cultic and ethical aspect of life cannot be separated at all. The social order (of castes) is an aspect of the Indian theogony, or the self-explication of the one Brahman, and so implies an absolute authority.

Manu teaches a distinction of two powers: teaching and education which is the business of the Brahmins; and military force to protect the people from internal and external enemies, which is the business of the Kṣatriyas. It is to be noted that teaching and education is a specific power regarded as being on the same level of importance and functional validity as military power. Why? Because both, education and *daṇḍa* (controlled violent force), link and re-link a society and her individual members with the *dharma*. War is necessary to protect and enact the *dharma* against evil forces, education is necessary to link up with the contents of the *dharma* and apply it to present questions. But the main focus of using force is to strengthen and defend the caste order.¹¹ The key term used here is *daṇḍa*. As J. J. Meyer has shown convincingly, this term implies not only the punishing power of the king in a juridical sense, but also the use of power and force in general.¹² The *Mahābhārata* states that *daṇḍa* makes possible the

¹⁰ Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra* 2, 36, 56.

¹¹ Manu 7, 24 and 35.

¹² Cf. Meyer 1926, p. LVIII.

preservation of creation, otherwise 'the strong ones would eat up the weaker ones like fish in the water'.¹³ Without *daṇḍa* the girls would not live in virginity, the boys would not learn the Vedas, nobody would milk the cows and acknowledge the property rights of others, there would be uncontrolled fighting and killing, and even the animals could not be brought under the yoke in order to carry the cart.¹⁴ The authors of the *Mahābhārata* are quite realistic; their arguments take into account the selfishness and craving of human nature for lust and wealth, the 'tamasic' aspect of laziness as well, and that it requires force to create and maintain a workable social order.

However, there is a distinction of different forms of *daṇḍa*, and this again depends on the specific stratifications of caste:

The *daṇḍa* of the Brahmin (priest) is executed through the power of the word, the *danda* of the Kṣatriya (warrior, ruler) through the physical strength of his arm, the *danda* of the Vaiśya (artisans, merchants, farmers) through the giving of material goods. The Śūdra (serving class) does not have any *daṇḍa*.¹⁵

Concerning the mentioning of the Vaiśya, whose *daṇḍa* is regarded as the giving (*dāna*) of material goods, we have to be aware that what is meant here could be called 'bribing'. This, according to the *Mahābhārata*, is also a form of force to keep society going; and if it is used in accordance with the cosmic laws (again, this is basically the reflection of these laws in the eternal caste system), bribery is a legitimate means to maintain harmony in a given society. Thus the execution of power by humans is restricted by the cosmic laws and insofar it is always bound to be used to maintain harmony. However, the masses of low caste people and much more so the no caste people are excluded from the responsible use of *daṇḍa*; this implies that they do not have any legitimate means to fight for their rights, for they just do

¹³ MB 12, 67, 12.

¹⁴ MB 12, 14 ff.

¹⁵ MB 12, 25, 9.

not have specific rights. This is certainly one of the reasons why violence within Hindu history has on occasion swept uncontrollably, as it continues to do in present communal clashes.

In any case, for Manu who sings the praise of *daṇḍa*, this *daṇḍa* is certainly a divine gift.¹⁶ He legitimizes a war of aggression but calls for appropriate means. A war which is directed at gaining territory and material goods is like a purification, and this is necessary especially in times of the *Kali yuga*, the evil age, when lawlessness prevails everywhere.

I will now discuss some arguments as they are presented in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*. Here the theory of politics is rooted in the harmonious interplay of the four castes which are supposed to function like an orchestra in a concerto, with the difference that the lower castes have hardly any rights and the outcastes may be regarded as existing on a subhuman level. The legitimacy of power of the higher castes is grounded in the myth as related and quoted by Manu. However, this does not legitimate individual misuse of power, as for example by a mad ruler. This is documented by the law that a king, however powerful he may be, cannot confiscate land once it has been leased. Brahmins, however, enjoy special privileges. Two interesting areas of their special or even exempted status is the lower taxation and milder form of punishment in case of offences.

The sixth book of the *Arthaśāstra* discusses foreign policy and especially the theory of the circle of states. Here Kauṭilya refers to the idea of the *cakravartin*, i.e. the ruler of the world, which the Maurya dynasty already understood to be the founding ideology of their kingship. The most famous king of that dynasty was Aśoka (c.250 BCE) who is said to have converted to Buddhism and is celebrated as one of the first emperors of peace in world history after he had conquered a huge territory in extremely bloody military actions. After uniting his kingdom, however, he was disgusted by the bloodshed of his conquest and tried to rule not by violence and harsh punishments but by educating his subjects in the *dharma*. He sent messengers all over the

¹⁶ Manu 7, 14–25.

country to erect pillars with his inscriptions of the common law and to teach the people righteousness. But Aśoka was a Buddhist and certainly an exception to the rule of Hindu kingship. What is obvious from his story is that his conquering of a territory was seen to be completely legitimate. Conquering other peoples was to gain wealth, to stabilize the kingdom and so on, but it had always the more or less open connotation of civilizing other people as well in the name of the real and universal *dharma*, in other words it had a missionary impulse. In Kauṭilya, however, this concept is used and 'secularized' in order to formulate a strategy of pure power politics. Here the ancient *cakravartin* has changed into the *vijigīṣu* who is a power politician with all ambitions to increase his kingdom by any means. He is seen as being surrounded by several concentric circles of states. The states bordering his kingdom form the first circle around him, and they are his natural enemies. The next ring of states surrounds them and, conversely, they are supposed to be potential friends of the *vijigīṣu* in the centre, and so on. Power politics plays on this scheme, and a good king should know and exercise all possible means to make gains. Everything which may lead to success is not only allowed but commanded by the law, including lies, bribery, espionage, etc. A treaty of peace might be useful in case the two opposing powers are equally strong, but it is not an end in itself. As soon as the king can get an advantage to break the peace treaty he may do so.¹⁷ Against other authorities, Kauṭilya argues that the fortune of a king would not so much depend on his own intelligence and vigour (*vīrya*) but on his financial strength which would allow him to buy allies and perhaps employ people who could provide better advice. On the other hand, on that basis, it would also be useful to use reason and treason in order to gain the maximum result with a minimum of financial expenses.¹⁸ Kauṭilya advises the king to use treason, bribery, mimicry of the military forces, special forms of battle arrangement such as circular battle orders, etc.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Arthaśāstra* 6, 1

¹⁸ *Arthaśāstra* 9, 1.

¹⁹ *Arthaśāstra* 10, 3.

The Bhagavadgītā

Hardly any other text has shaped the values of educated Hindus of different *sampradāyas* (cultic forms and religious persuasions) as much as the *Gītā*, so that one can regard this poem of 700 verses (*ślokas*), which is part of the *Mahābhārata*, as a universal Hindu scripture. It has influenced even the illiterate Hindus and outcastes to quite some extent. It roughly originates from the same time as the *Dharmaśāstras*. Its narrative frame is a battle which is fought in the context of succession of royal power which happened historically at an early time after the Aryan invasions into the Northern Indian plains. This battle is the context for a *dharma* teaching that is given by Krishna to Prince Arjuna. Krishna appears as the charioteer of the prince and during the discourse reveals himself as the highest god beyond comprehension to normal mortals (chapter 11). The *dharma* teaching is first of all an exhortation to fight a just war, in which Arjuna hesitates to engage. But it is much more than that: it is a complex teaching on ethics and on its foundation in a comprehensive religious world-view which is explained in a highly differentiated manner. The problem is that, for Prince Arjuna, a conflict of duties has emerged, and the resolve of this conflict, by a number of arguments, does not only give an excellent insight into the problem of war and peace in Hindu thought but is also a most influential statement of the Hindu view of life in general.

Arjuna is a prince; that is to say, he belongs to the warrior caste of the Kṣatriyas. He is preparing for the final battle against his enemies, and there is no doubt that they are the ones who transgressed the *dharma*. But Arjuna hesitates; he does not want to fight the war but Krishna persuades him to do precisely that without any bad conscience.²⁰ Arjuna does not refuse to fight because he entertains any abstract idea of non-violence (*ahimsā*) or a pacifistic anti-war complex (those thoughts emerge in Hinduism not before the nineteenth century under the influence of the European Enlightenment, the British–American Transcen-

²⁰ BG 2.

dentalists and Tolstoy), but he sees among the hostile army all his relatives, uncles etc. His dutiful connectivity with the family and the clan, his *kula* ('family') *dharma*, obliges him to protect his relatives; but at the same time, as a warrior prince, he is obliged to fight for the universal *dharma*, i.e. to fight the battle against the unlawfulness. Thus we have a classical conflict of duties. Arjuna's *svadharmā*, as a member of the Kṣatriyas, contradicts his *kuladharmā*. Krishna convinces him successfully that his duty to uphold the universal *dharma* in society is a higher value than his duties towards his relatives because it is a just war which serves the reinstallation of the true and right dharmic order in society. Arjuna's war, therefore, is not a war of aggression (as in the case of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*), but a form of *daṇḍa* in a universal dharmic sense. Hence, the battlefield of historic *Kurukṣetra* (north of Delhi) is, in reality, the battlefield of trans-historic *dharmakṣetra* ('*dharma*-place') which includes the historic dimension and realization.

Krishna actually presents three arguments to Arjuna to encourage him to fight the battle.

1. The difference of spirit and body. Krishna declares that during the war only the physical body is killed which would be perishable anyway, whereas the eternal (*nitya*), unborn (*aja*) and therefore imperishable (*anāśina*) Self (*ātman*) could not be killed.²¹
2. Selfless action. Action as fulfilling duty and responsibility, with respect to the *dharma*, should not aim at any goals. There should be no intention to reap the fruits of action (*phala*) which would be to obtain wealth or power.²² The war should be fought, not considering the question who would win it, but only on the basis of the *dharma*. As a Kṣatriya Arjuna is to defend the *dharma*, so he needs to fight.²³
3. Participation in divine action. Salvation is not to be obtained either by asceticism or by the attempt not to act at all but by dedication of one's will and action to God who is the

²¹ BG 2, 18.

²² BG 2, 47 *et al.*

²³ BG 2, 38.

ultimate source and cause of all acting. The highest Creator God himself is present in any action for he creates, sustains and destroys the world permanently.²⁴ Therefore it is not Arjuna who is ultimately acting in killing, but the divine power itself.²⁵ This power is beyond time; therefore, due to the transtemporal nature of God, all those who are to be killed right now in battle have already been killed.²⁶ Again this killing is not to be misunderstood: it is part of the loving and saving action of God.

This discourse of the *Gītā* is significant for the whole of Hinduism for two reasons: first because of the combination of *dharmā*, *svadharma* and *karman*; and second because of the spiritual qualification of all action, including political action. Both aspects shall be explained further.

For the issue of war and peace the concept of *karma* (*karman*) is of crucial importance. It signifies the interdependence of reality and the reciprocal causality between cause and result. This causality works not only in the physical but also in the mental and moral sphere. An old Hindu saying, quoted in the Upaniṣads, says that what one thinks, one becomes. This is to say that any action has consequences for the actor; it shapes the karmic field and forms the actor's character. And this again has consequences for the actor's further intentions and future actions. The karmic field is not interrupted or finished once a person dies but, quite to the contrary, it shapes the conditions for the person's future existence in a different physical form. Only when all karmic formations have been worked out and the potential karmic energies have been spent can an individual experience peace, that is the cessation of the results of karmic conditioning. Thus salvation or liberation (*mokṣa*) is a process that is neither a purely spiritual event, nor is it exhausted in external, that is historical material action, but it is a reality comprising both, because it is rooted in the cessation of new formations in the field of intentions and motivations which would lead to further action. Peace of

²⁴ BG 3, 15.

²⁵ BG 3, 24 ff.

²⁶ BG 11, 26f. and 34.

mind (*śānti*), which is the central goal of Hindu life, is the end of *karman*. How this can happen is interpreted quite differently under the influence of different philosophical systems (*darśana*) in Hinduism; but that it can happen and will happen is one of the central tenets of Hinduism.

Thus any action in war or other circumstances in which a living being is killed has a result not only to the object of this action (the loss of life) but it has also immediate consequences for the acting subject. Hindu thinkers are usually much more interested in this second aspect when dealing with the consequences of violence and killing in war. Aggression is the result of an I-consciousness (*ahaṃkāra*) which is the product of an illusion anyway. The illusion consists of a wrong assumption that the actor in an action is the individual ego on the basis of its will power whereas, in reality, the acting subject is somebody else: God who works in the individual as the person's inner life-force (*prāṇa*).

All reality, including war and peace in the history of humankind, is the result of the divine energies or the divine play (*līlā*). The game follows certain rules and they are defined by the *dharma* which humankind has to acknowledge. *Dharma* is not only the law which rules the contradicting reality of the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), but *dharma* is the guideline for the kind of behaviour and action that does not cause any more karmic consequences which would bind humans again in the cycle of rebirth. Here we have to point to the four ends of human life (*puruṣārtha*) according to Hinduism. They are wealth (*artha*), sensual pleasure (*kāmā*), virtue or harmonious action (*dharma*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of rebirths. The first three are concerned with worldly existence and they interpenetrate each other in such a way that they are to be pursued in harmony with each other. That is to say that to acquire wealth and enjoy sensual pleasure is all very well but it needs to be in accord with *dharma*, otherwise negative karma would be created. And all three are the prerequisite for the final end of karmic conditioning, that is the cycle of rebirth, in order to attain liberation (*mokṣa*). Any worldly action needs to be seen in this perspective and thus is to be qualified through such a spiritual end.

So far we have not yet mentioned Mahātma Gandhi,²⁷ the father of the modern Indian nation, whose name comes to mind first when war and peace in Hinduism are being discussed. His method of 'holding on to the truth' (*satyāgraha*) on the background of unconditional non-violence (*ahimsā*) has become standard, not only in Hindu social ethics. However, one also has to note that his concept of non-violence comes from Jainism and is not what the *Bhagavadgītā* teaches historically. He reads this concept into the *Gītā* and into much of Hindu thought. This might be one of the reasons why Gandhi's thinking and morality in present-day India are not much followed by the majority of Hindus, though he certainly has become an icon. Gandhi's non-violence is not compatible with the classical concept of *svadharma* as it is taught in the *Dharmaśāstras* and the *Gītā*; that is why both Gandhi and the one who assassinated him justified their action with reference to the teaching of the *Gītā*. This again refers to an ambiguity which is at the heart of Hinduism and probably other religions as well: an ideal of harmony and peace is preached and ritually enacted but the attempt to realize it in the historical-political sphere creates violence and disharmony.

Conclusion

Taking into account the social reality, Hinduism offers an ambiguous picture which is not only the result of the common difference between ideal and reality. There is no need to argue that the repressive caste system, and especially the justification of the repression of the outcastes (pariahs or *harijans*, children of God, as Gandhi euphemistically called them; *dalits*, the oppressed ones, as they call themselves today) is the reason for a continuous civil war within Hindu society. This problem is one of the main reasons for violence in present-day India. Tensions and violence between Muslims and Hindus are caused culturally and historically but in most cases they are the cultural expression of an eco-

²⁷ Gandhi's religious thought has been convincingly investigated by Chatterjee 1985.

conomic and political frustration, an outlet for the group solidarity which is defined by the caste. Mass conversions of Hindus towards Islam in the 1970s are an example of how social deprivation was used religiously and this led to open violence and war between different groups of Indian society.²⁸ On the basis of our analysis of the *Dharmaśāstras*, it is obvious that the Hindu myth as such has to do with the justification of this social and political violence which seems to be regarded as an unavoidable condition of the *saṃsāra*, the cycle of rebirth.

As an example of a classic Hindu response to the problem of peace and war I would like to recall the following experience. During the 1980s I lived in Madras and one of my obligations was to organize academic seminars on the basis of inter-religious dialogue. Thus, in 1983, I organized a seminar on 'War, Peace and Disarmament' at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Madras. I also invited a Hindu speaker to represent the Hindu perspective. He was one of my Yoga teachers, a respected guru living in the outskirts of Madras, Pundit Kanniah Yogi from Ambattur. After he had entered the room to deliver his presentation on peace in Hinduism he climbed on the table, squatted in the lotus-posture (*padmāsana*) there, fell into a *samādhi* state of consciousness and remained for about 20 minutes in this position. Afterwards he bowed to the audience who remained in peaceful silence and left. He had demonstrated what it means to experience silent peace of mind in Hinduism in the midst of all turmoil on the social level of *māyā*.

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²⁸ See the excellent analysis by Khan 1983.

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