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Modern Hindu Culture

A Study on Modernization of Hinduism by Considering the Parallels in Modern Christianity

By

Edmund Weber

The Christian culture experienced a deep-going change with the uprising of the Civil Society ("Bürgerliche Gesellschaft"), the industrialization of economic production, the urbanization of life-style and the individualization of religiosity in the 19th century. The Christian formation of inner- and outer-world in those days became obsolete. From this conflict the civil or modern Christianity originated. In a painful changing process most of the people of this new society have newly interpreted religion, moral and ritual of traditional Christianity and created to their new conditions of life new institutional forms of transmission and realization of Christian cultural heritage. Under the recourse of the Reformatorian heritage the modern Christianity developed the religious-moral doctrine: A true Christian is before all a citizen who is living in the midst of the world self-determinate and socially engaged fulfilling all his worldly duties; the modern Christian has to get this motivation for a world-oriented existence on his own responsibility because religion is not restricted anymore.

In the view of such a new Christian self-understanding a new external Christian culture came up. The church reform of the 19th century adapted the external shape of Christianity to the modern civil conditions - by an explosive foundation of civil associations. These associations of modern Christianity dedicated themselves to the development, maintenance, propagation and defense of modern Christian culture[1]; they took care of forming the inner-world of the modern human being;[2] they organized material charity.[3] All these associations mostly constructed the necessary outer frame for their activities by themselves. Last but not least the building of numerous new churches and parish halls - especially in the new urban areas - had its origin in these civil associations. Even the reinforcement of the self-government of the Christian religious communities and their

gradual emancipation from state tutelage would not have taken place without these new organizations. This huge movement of modern Christian mass organizations was completed by the foundation of civil Christian political parties.[4] These parties offered permanent resistance to anti-religious ideologies and politics and made their own politics and still make.[5] All these developments seem to be quite obvious to us. The churches and the societies in the West and particularly in Germany live on this culture even today. And today in most of the non-Christian countries we can recognize the same upheavals of religious culture in the inner- and outer- world.

An outstanding example for this is India. The mighty industrial revolution which India has been experiencing for some decades has led to an enormous increase of urban life culture; particularly the people living in the urban areas are set out to a cultural revolution which is unhinging their traditional religious way of life. In this cultural upheaval the village masses are involved increasingly, so that the question of a new thinking and forming of the religious culture gets highly dynamic. Therefore a modern formulation of the present and future basic moral problems and an equal modern culture of religious experience is demanded today. In view of the mighty problems of the country and the personal moral conflicts emerging from these problems the Hindu members of the productive classes ask their leaders and spiritual teachers to give convincing answers to their practical life; the extremely self-confident and successful urban classes are not asking for arguments to escape the world; they want to get justification to do their worldly work and motivation for social and political engagement for the public welfare.

In this modern understanding of public welfare the caste boundaries are intentionally, definitely and practically blasted. The public welfare is interested in each citizen without consideration of any social distinction. In a declaration of Vishva Hindu Parishad it is said decidedly: "Caste has not been created by God on nature."[6] To the seven main aims of their whole work Vishva Hindu Parishad has declared to wipe out the nuisance of untouchability:"To eradicate the concept of untouchability from Hindu Society."[7] The radicalism of this socio-cultural revolution will be obvious to the expert of the situation, by reading in a wide spread propagated official paper, that in Andhra Pradesh qualified brahmin pandits of the highly famous Tirumala Tirupati temple are educating hundreds of harijans to become temple priests.[8] Precisely from such radical innovations in the field of religion, moral, ritual, culture and charity an enormous demand for ethical orientation and religious stabilization is followed. In order to treat all these typical modern problems of Hindu culture in an analytical and individual way, more and more systems of modernization of traditional Hindu culture are created. Increasingly civil associations prove to be themselves as effective carriers of outer and inner modernizing of Hinduism; they dedicate themselves to spiritual orientation, to social charitable engagement, to political world formation and to defense the cultural interests of modern Hinduism.

Vishva Hindu Parishad[9] is the most powerful force of these pressure groups. It is not only the main speaker of the Hindu masses in between, but has also become

the most effective association for modernization of Hindu culture. Just in this view the function and meaning of Vishva Hindu Parishad can be compared with the Evangelical Federation ("Evangelischer Bund") in German Protestantism[10] as it has been in former times. Another civil Hindu association is Seva Bharati (established 1979), an association or social service. Since a lot of years it's working successfully 1. in eradicating the practice of untouchability, 2. in infusing the spirit of service in masses by awakening self-confidence, 3. to promote and conduct activities of literary, cultural, social or charitable nature among the poor and neglected sections residing in backward colonies; 4. to serve economically weaker and socially backward sections of society and help in their physical, educational, social, moral and economic development without consideration of caste or creed, language or province so as to make them self-reliant and socially integrated.[11] Only in the area of the Delhi slums Seva Bharati has got more than 400 projects; e.g. Moral Education Centre, Ladies Sewing Centres, Couching Centres, Dispensaries & Mobile Medical Vans, Hostels, Sewa Dham, Matri Chhawa, etc.[12] Also the work among the so-called Vanvasis (forest people) is not of less importance. The organization Vanvasi Kalyam Ashram in Maharashtra, e.g. takes care of the social security and integration of forest people, who are set out by the exploitation of merchants and ignorant pressure of administrators.[13]

The civil associations of modern Hinduism intending to reform the Indian society on the base of experiences, values and institutions of the Hindu culture are confronted with a pseudo-secular power. This pseudo-secularism is participating in the central power since the Independence of India and has risked and still risks to maintain the antiquated religious and cultural segregation of Indian society, which all the time was interest of the British colonialism. The political representatives of pseudo-secularism have maintained e.g. the feudal-patriarchal Civil Code of India, which was made by the British. This maintenance cemented the cultural gap between the different religious communities. This Civil Code is unworthy for a democracy which claims equality for all citizens. E.g. it gives Indian males the right of polygamy according to their religious adherence by birth. And if someone only for this purpose enters that religion, which has got the privilege of polygamy, he can obtain a conversion certificate very easily. But this right is refused to a woman of the same religion. In addition this patriarchal mentality becomes evident in the inhibition of the traditional polyandry in Ladakh. As the ethno-religious minority of 100 000 Ladakhi Buddhists are officially marked as Hindus, *they* in contrary to the over 100 0000 000 Indian Muslims have not the right to follow their traditional marriage law. Not enough: The Civil Code has even laid down that the form of hereditary right is based on the heirs' adherence to a particular religious community. According to the Hindu Succession Act (Sect.26) the children of a Hindu - converted to another religion - born after the conversion are disqualified from inheriting the property of any of their Hindu relatives, unless such children or descendants are Hindus when the succession opens. It is obvious that this kind of law encourages the irreligious corruption and perverts the religions .The civil German Marriage Law, estab-

lished 1874/5 by the Protestant Reich Chancellor Otto von Bismarck against the resistance of the Catholic hierarchy, was a real blessing for inter-religious harmony of German society and long-termed it has been very useful particularly for women's emancipation. A succession law based on religious community terms at the end of the 20th century: that is one of the wonders of pseudo-secular India.

The pseudo-secularism of India is not even today ready to fulfill the demands of the Hindu-democrats to introduce the same Civil Code[14] for all their citizens. This "right" to shape the personal way of life, which is validating if not even producing the religious-cultural communalism, is only a grotesque attack of pseudo-secularism on the civil equality of all citizens and the separation of state and religion - just demanded by all the great modern Hindu organizations. It's really astonishing: the political powers, that officially are indignant of fundamentalism, that preach emancipation, that propagate secularism and support minoritism, but allow dreadful discrimination of women and hold on a socially destructive system of state religions. This mentality has only in mind to maintain privileges of powerful groups. By that their total distance to the non-privileged Hindu masses is demonstrated e.g. in the articles and advertisements of "India Today". The aftermath of this mentality is that future-oriented inter-religious mass movements, particularly those, which want to subdue the traditional religious and cultural barriers, are denounced in the controlled media landscape as almost illegal, even criminal associations. The violent fixation of Indian family, religion and culture to the status quo of colonial era, is one of the contemporary main reasons for the caste, language and religious conflicts in India. The syncretistic osmosis, which could create a new step to an irenic Indian culture, is extremely prevented by an inter-religious isolation, forced by the pseudo-secularism.

The innovation of religion, moral and ritual, which is an urgent need for the society, is additionally blocked by the pseudo-secularism, as far as it prevents the establishing of theological faculties at the state universities and doesn't allow religious education for the Hindu masses at government schools. Exactly the opposite example of German school policy shows that the subsidiary support of the government for the development of religion connected with education and freedom, is a benefit for the social peace. The pseudo-secularism discriminates particularly the Hindus in the educational area. The education bills are valid only for them, while the minorities, constituted by the state, are over-privileged, e.g. they are exempted from all the rules. The Tamil Nadu Education Acts do show that in a special way:[15] 1) The Hindu institutions should get permission before starting a school. Prior permission is not required 1n the case of minority schools. 2) The Hindu institutions must adopt communal representation for appointing teachers, i. e. Muslims, Christians etc. The minority schools need not apply this rule. 3) Hindu schools must follow reservation rules for admission of B.Cs.,[16] SCs., S.Ts.[17] There is no such restriction on minority institutions. They can have cent per cent admissions of their own community students. 4) Every Hindu school must have a school committee including teachers. Minority schools need not have school committees. - All these the Hindus discriminating

privileges of the minorities are valid even then, when all teachers and students of such schools are Hindus and only the individual who established the school is minoritarian.[18]

The most dangerous kind of blockade against the renewal of Hinduism is, however, that the great Hindu monasteries and temples in India, which as religious centres attract millions of devotees, were forced by the pseudo-secular politicians to have so-called temple committees. These pseudo-secular politicians naturally are sitting in these committees and they decide - as they like- upon the material income and property of the Hindu monasteries and temples. While the pseudo secularism out of the political opportunism grants the non-Hindu religions the full autonomy and also the self -government of their holy buildings and places, the political advisers as new temple authorities and temple colonists have put the temples and monasteries under their own command. The result is administrative mismanagement, no interest in religious cultivation and development of the worship, the education of priests and the pilgrimage; all this however, obtains an institutional discrimination of the Hindus. As an example of such bad conditions there is Kerala's anti-Hindu personnel policy, which deliberately appointed a non-Hindu into the temple committee of the well-known Guruvayur Temple; this nomination was only cancelled after vehement protests and instead a Harijan was installed.[19] Beyond that estates of the temples are distributed by politicians of the government at their discretion, while they have not touched the property of the other religions till today.[20] For Germans it's not imaginable that in Germany the Protestant and the Catholic Churches are administered by such anticlerical politicians as their materialistic cushy jobs. That's not possible to realize because the religions' autonomy is a fundamental principle of the German constitution.

However, the resistance of the Hindus is increasing more and more. So for example a Dharma Sansad passed the following resolution in Delhi in April 1991, where Shankaracaryas and many Dharmacaryas took part: "Those so-called secular governments who do not dare to interfere in any manner in the management of the Churches, Maqbaras, mazaars, and mosques, make unjustified and most objectionable and unethical evil attempt to take over control of Hindu Mutts and Mandirs. Dharma Samsad demands that Hindu Mutts, Mandirs and place of worship should be entirely free from the government control and their management be handed over to the committees constituted by the Dharmacharyas of the concerned sects, otherwise the Hindu Sants and Dharmacharyas shall be compelled to adopt strong measures in future".[21] Although the Hindu masses can't be stopped any more, the official Indian policy concerning the religious affairs still refuses to admit the mature religious modernization of India; it even promotes the religious splitting of the country and demoralizes especially the non-Hindu religions by privileges. India pays a high price for this destructive official policy: intensification of needless inner social aggressions by the cultural humiliation of the Hindu masses, by the artificial archaization of the Indian Islam and by the highly dangerous social isolation of the Indian Christians.

A positive social life of the majority and the minority in the Indian society will only be possible, if 1). the religious privileges stop, which are unusual in a democratic community, 2) a positive and subsidiary state policy concerning the religious affairs starts, and 3) the self-determination and freedom of the individually and commonly organized religiosity will be guaranteed or to say it in a different way, if the status of the minorities is not misused any more to oppress or to discriminate the religious majority.

Wherever in Europe and in America groups of the atheistic and the radically liberal bourgeois oppressed the religious majority with bureaucratic measures, there the respective societies (e.g. Spain, Portugal, many states of South America) were weakened so much, that they have not gained strength till today. In the USA, in France, Great Britain and Germany, where the religious majority was respected officially and got positive chances to develop, there was seen a religious and philosophical balance, even religious unifications (e.g. between Lutherans and Calvinists), so that influential political groups couldn't misuse the religious cultures less and less in order to divide the society.

Since some decades the modernization of Hinduism is affecting the masses and now this process is bearing fruits in the political area, too. Similar to the Christian Democratic Parties in Europe now in India the Hindu Democratic Parties are coming up and are gaining more and more influence. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the first political power in India, which is strictly based on religious and ethical Hindu values, is not only a real parliamentary alternative but particularly because of those above mentioned values a political power, which will realize a strict but positive secular policy concerning religious affairs. BJP is already showing it, where it has taken over the administration (e.g. UP (together with the Dalit Party BSP), Delhi, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana, Panjab).

As the modernization of Hinduism becomes more and more intensive at all levels and shapes, the absurd system of state religions will vanish and a free productive development of religions will happen in India at last. To reform the inner-world of peoples' life the Hindu culture has proceeded in spite of many obstacles by private initiatives. Here reformers and new interpreters of the cultural traditions of the Hindu heritage - to begin with Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Tagore, Daynanda Sarasvati and Gandhi up to Rajneesh, Bhaktivedanta Swami, Maharishi Maheshyogi, Sai Baba and Anandamayi Ma; they all have given important experimental impulses. By this time an extensive modernization of the public Hindu culture is needed, which has to be the institutional support of a dharma strictly bound to the Bhagavadgita. Just now the modern Hinduism is going through the same development, the modern Christianity in the West already passed through in former times.

If you think of the unimaginable potential of crises that only in the East is developing by the explosion of the population and by the economical supergau, then it is easy to understand that the mobilization of all human spiritual resources will have to be beyond any question. The hasty denunciation of religious upraise as fundamentalism and the justification of the violent oppression through militant pseudo-secularism and intolerant liberalism are antiquated and irrespon-

sible considering the world's problems. The polemics against new and unwonted religiosity, that often are to be seen on the mass media, only divert from the unavoidable religious reformation even in the West. The polemics tie too many intellectual and political energies to inter-religious segregation, and they strengthen the progress of the general irreligiosity. The human fixation to religious and philosophical war-fare weakens all the mankind's spiritual potentials to survive. Only the strengthening of the religious modernization perhaps is able to cushion the power of the human crises, the mass-individual is suffering. The liberalistic people denunciate the religions that are preparing for the future; but this reveals the helplessness of a mentality which is bound to materialistic individualism. And therefore it has no answers for the whole mankind, and logically those people betake themselves to cynicism in order to oppress those answers.

The internationalism of Hinduism at last, its opening to the world, its readiness to take an active part in the solving of global problems,[22] that is a further motive power for the necessary modernization of Hindu culture. Now the conscious Hindus are shaking off the totally strange separation from outside, which non-Hindu conquerors and colonial administrations had forced upon them and which was against their very nature. For nothing is stranger to Hinduism than Indocentrism. The idea of shaking off is particularly propagated by the enemies of Hinduism in order to neutralize its ecumenical power and radiation. Before the oppression the old Hinduism was the most famous example of irenic cultural exchange: Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, China, Japan, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Bangla Desh, Pakistan and Indonesia turned it into their advantage. Still today it's profitable. That's true even in regard to countries like U.K., Canada, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius, Fiji etc., which are influenced by Hinduism since modern times.

The world community today needs Christian heritage as well as Hindu culture; this proves the extensive reception of Hindu and Buddhist ideas in the West. The exchange of cultural and religious ideas, experiences and institutions should not be one-sided; the peaceful osmosis of different kinds of social and individual life is inexorably demanded by the future. If the Hindu culture can modernize itself in an environment of peaceful solidarity, even the German society will have a fair profit. Accepting responsibility for a joint world culture the West should stop the ineffective attempts to archaisize the Hinduism by romantic and touristic motives or by neo-colonial interests. Instead of that a constructive connection to Hinduism should be developed under the condition of reciprocal approval.

Considering the coming world culture especially the Christian churches could contribute to bring forward the inter-religious joint venture, to guarantee the religious peace. In realizing such an inter-religious security system in a peaceful, sensible, and practical way the Christians could recognize that Hinduism is nearer to their own tradition than usually is thought.

Notes

[1]1846 Evangelical Alliance; 1848 Protestant kumbha mela-movement ("Evangelischer Kirchentag"); 1863 Protestant Association ("Protestantenverein"); 1876 Positive Union ("Positive Union"); 1834, Evangelical Union

("Evangelische Vereinigung"); 1886 Evangelical Federation ("Evangelischer Bund"); 1832 Gustav-Adolf-Verein; 1848 Catholic Association of Germany ("Katholischer Verein Deutschlands"). Mission associations: 1810 Board of Foreign Mission (Boston); 1816 Basel Mission Society ("Baseler Missionsgesellschaft"); 1823 Berlin Mission Society ("Berliner Missionsgesellschaft").

[2] Bible Societies; 1804 in London. Youth organizations: 1855 YMCA.

[3] Charitable associations: 1849, Protestant Home Mission ("Innere Mission"); 1897 United Catholic charitable association of Germany ("Caritas-Verband für das katholische Deutschland"). At the end of the 19th c. Christian Trade Unions ("Christliche Gewerkschaften").

[4] 1852 Catholic German Centre Party ("Zentrum"); 1878 Protestant Christian-Social Workers's Party ("Christlich-soziale Arbeiterpartei"). Protestants voted mostly "secular" but right or conservative parties while the Catholics usually voted their own party.

[5] After World War II: Christian Democratic Union ("CDU") and Christian Social Union ("CSU").

[6] Visva Hindu Parishad (Ed.): Message & Activities. Delhi n.d., p. (6)

[7] op. cit., p. (3)

[8] op. cit., p. (5)

[9] World Hindu Federation

[10] This religio-political organization defended the interests of Protestant culture against the papal German Catholicism and atheist movements.

[11] Sewa Bharati: Sewa * Sanskar * Samrid-dhi. Ed. by Sewa Bharati, Delhi n.d. (leaflet), p. (2)

[12] Sewa Bharati: Delhi (hectograph), p. 1-5

[13] Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Maharashtra: A Service Mission for Vanvasis. Ed. by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Bombay n.d. (leaflet), p. (2)

[14] Saints call to voters. In: Hindu Chetna, vol. 1 No. 15, p. 2: Common Civil Law for all the citizens of the country. Cf. Dhayagude, Suresh: It is High Time to enact a common Civil Code. In: Hindu Vishva, August 1990, p. 39 seqq.

[15] Narayanswami, R. S.: Hindu Interests and Constitution. In: Hindu Vishwa. Vol. 25, No.12 (1990), p. 37

[16] Backward castes and classes

[17] Scheduled castes and tribes

[18] Mathew, P. D.: Cultural and Educational Rights of the Minorities, New Delhi 1987, p. 8 Q. 8

[19] Lakshminarayana, T.: The Debate on Hindu Mutt Mandir Administration and Demand for Dharmik Councils, New Delhi n.d., p. 6 seq.

[20] op.cit., p. 6

[21] Hindu Chetna vol.1 no.15, April 1991, p. 5

[22] Bhisheekar, C. P.: Hindu - A World Power. In: Hindu Vishva, August 1990, p. 51. Mehta, Mahesh: Hindu Thought for a Better World. In: Virat Hindu Sammelan. Souvenir. Milton Keynes, U.K. 26th-27th August 1989, p. 47. Sudarshan, K.S.: Coming Century - The Hindu Century op.cit., p.179 seqq.

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