



TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT
Exploring Approaches to Development from Religious Perspectives
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The Hindu Perspective
by
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I Opening remarks

The 2007 annual report of the United Nations on the progress to date on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), midway between 2000 and 2105, gives mixed reviews with some goals being met and on target while progress on the others lagging¹. However, despite some success in engaging Faith Based Organisations in achieving the MDG targets, the full potential and the intended benefit of this historical partnership is yet to be realised.

We have come a long way in engaging Faith Based Organisations in a constructive dialogue at the Global level. In 1893, the then Archbishop of Canterbury politely declined to attend the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago on the grounds that, in his personal view, the Christian faith could not confer equal status to other lesser religions in a Parliament of Religions. To be fair, he was not alone, for unbeknownst to him the Sultan of Turkey and the head Priest of the Shinto Monastery in Tokyo echoed similar sentiments against the other two lesser faiths.

In 1998 his Holiness George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, and James D. Wolfensohn, then President of the World Bank, hosted the first of three summits (2000 and 2002) inviting leading theologians and leaders of diverse faiths focused on joint efforts to help attain the Millennium Development Goals⁵. These meetings, between the high priests of finance and the high priests *period*, were both memorable and inspirational in that all participants expressed profound commitment to work together in seeking solutions to poverty and social injustice within the context of morality, compassion, ethics, human dignity, and international solidarity -“a turning point for humanity” as some called it.

For the first time in recent history, International Development Agencies and the official aid organisations in many Donor countries have made a paradigm shift in their thinking by acknowledging that Material and Spiritual development are two sides of the same coin and that

one cannot succeed without the other. Throughout this phase, very incisive and thoughtful opinions and policy guidelines have been enunciated, among others, by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)⁶, Centre for Development Studies, the World Faith Development Dialogue and the Civil Society Forum both established by the World Bank⁷ as well as by our co-hosts the Institute of Social Studies⁸ (I note Professor Gerry Harr is with us at the conference), and by individual opinion makers like Katherine Marshall, Richard Marsh, Lucy Keogh, Gerard Clarke, Wendy Tyndale to mention just a few.⁹ Above all, one has to applaud the initiative of the Dutch people, one of the World's highly respected, tolerant, generous and, progressive societies in having created the Knowledge Centre for Religion and Development.

While there is no dearth of research material documenting the recent discourse on the engagement of Faith Based Organisations in transforming development initiatives, conspicuous by its absence to some extent is the Hindu perspective due largely to two factors:

- 1 The Hindu Aid recipient population and the actors involved in developmental work in this sub-group, though large in numbers, are geographically concentrated in South Asia (primarily in India) and in a few countries in the Caribbean.
- 2 The possibility that to the International Development Agencies and Civil Societies in Donor Countries, equally keen on tapping the moral resources of the Hindu Faith Based Organisations, Hinduism itself defies conventional norm of an organised religion, making it difficult in identifying representative voices within the Hindu faith community which can speak globally.

It has no founder, no beginning point, no one single prophet, claims no hierarchical central authority – baffling indeed to a casual observer used to seeing identifiable Founders, Prophets, Messiahs, commandments, injunctions (often stern), prohibitions. There are the deep philosophical speculations of the *Upanishads*¹⁰ and the *Darshanas*¹¹ (Schools of Philosophy), inspired by *Vedic* revelations, containing some of the most original thoughts in the history of human thought, which have had deep influence on Pythagoras, Yeats, Schopenhauer, Aldous Huxley, Xuan Zang, Carl Jung, Einstein, Schrodinger and Neils Bohr etc. On the other hand, one is perplexed by the seemingly inextricable caste system and at what appears to be rampant idol worshipping – Pantheism and Polytheism run amok. Even though Hinduism is anything but Polytheistic, as we shall discuss in a minute, a casual observer nevertheless gets that impression from what he hears and sees.

So before we focus on what we can learn or adapt from the Hindu perspective in looking for new approaches to Development, let us briefly review some of the key aspects of the Hindu religion.

II Hinduism – Some Key Aspects

To begin with, there is no such thing as Hinduism. That being said, I can now sit down. The word Hindu was used by the invading armies of Alexander referring to the people east of the Indus River called *Sindhu* which the Greeks pronounced as Hindu. However, for the sake of convenience, we shall continue to refer to it as such in this presentation. The correct phrase is *Sanatan Dharma* where Sanatan means **Eternal** and Dharma being **that which makes a thing or a being what it is** – thus it is the Dharma of fire to feel hot, of ice to feel cold. Man, however, being more evolved is faced with competing Dharmas as a child, as a parent, as a member of his community, as a human being. In Hindu thought, there is no last word of a prophet, no one set of rules which fit all people, in all eras, at all times, in all circumstances. As the *Bhagavad Gita*¹² asserts, ultimately Man has to decide for himself **alone** which of the higher Dharmas to follow in any given situation.¹³

Every culture, in order to flourish, must have certain dominant central thoughts which can withstand the test of time, and be independently verifiable in all eras by all people. The Hindu faith has three dominant themes which have kept this longest continuing culture alive and vibrant for thousands of years. These central thoughts are:

- 1 Macroscopically, creation as a whole is animated by an intentionality, an Ultimate Reality, and at the micro level a *reflection* of that same Ultimate Reality animates the individual self.
- 2 Only humans have the power of the intellect to academically grasp the Unity between the individual self (*Atman*) and the Universal Self (*Param Atman*) and the means to experience and to ultimately transcend that Oneness.
- 3 Man's aim should not be to reach Heaven or to avoid Hell, for both are constructs of the human mind, but the recognition of the separate existence of the Ultimate Reality (The Supreme Spirit) from the world of matter and of the soul (individual spirit) from the body and its senses.

These broad central themes¹⁴ accommodate within them Monism, Dualism, Theism, Deism, Pantheism, Polytheism, and Agnosticism. In which even Atheism has a place - it simply means a delay, procrastination, something we are very good at.

To elaborate on these Central thoughts:

To speak about the Ultimate Reality is in itself a paradox. As the *Kena* Upanishad says,if you think you know well the truth about Ultimate Reality, know that you know very little, for it is not known to those who think they know it but to those who know they **cannot** know it in its entirety.¹⁵ One of the most sublime Hymns of the Rig Veda, *the Hymn to Creation*¹⁶, speaks of this certitude..... "Before there was Being or non-being, before Death or Immortality, before Space or even Time, when Darkness was concealed within Darkness.... who could say when or why it all came to be... surely the gods would not know for they are the later creations of man's imagination... perhaps He in the highest Heaven would know, **but who amongst us can say with certainty what even He knows.**"¹⁷ This is not to suggest disrespect to the Prophets in the more recent religions, for even amongst some Hindus there is a notion of Deity itself having descended to Earth - not once but nine times and still counting.¹⁸

This Ultimate Reality of a thousand names or of no name (Deep Silence), One without a Second, is explained by the sages and the Prophets in many ways from different perspectives.¹⁹ In its unmanifest state, it cannot be defined, described, thought of, inferred, proved or disproved by logic or debate²⁰ prompting one Vedic Seer to use the power of negation – Neti, neti, neti...not this, not this²¹ exhausting all human attempts at describing the indescribable. For any description of the Infinite by the finite, including by the Prophets, the Sages, and the Realised Souls is partial, incomplete. The Sanskrit word for Religion is *Matam* which means opinion. Thus every Prophet expresses his opinion explaining relationship with Ultimate Reality from his or her viewpoint relevant to the people of his time. Even as *this* fullness is a part of *that* fullness, and even if this was three quarters of that, *that* is still infinite and can never be reduced by *this*.²²

Microscopically, a reflection of that same intentionality animates the world of matter like sparks from a fire or a spider and its web.²³ Swami Chinmayananda, in his commentaries on the Upanishads²⁴, asks us to imagine a wall well lit by sunshine. A magnifying glass will produce a brighter, more brilliant, reflection on the wall. That is you and I.

Understood in Quantum terms, wherever the Field is intense, it gives rise to particle matter. However, the Hindu perspective points to the entire Creation from Galaxies, to solar systems, to plants and animals, to microbial sub-atomic particles to pin-points of energy of the Quarks being animated by a reflection of the Ultimate Reality - the well lit wall - with varying shades of intensity from the non-living to the living.²⁵ Thus the non-living have consciousness (*Chetna*, the intelligence principle) which prevents, for example, clouds of orbiting electrons, planets, galaxies from collapsing to the center. The plants and animals with more evolved *Chetna* exhibit higher intelligence and finally the still evolving humans at the Apex possess (though hard to believe at times) the highest consciousness (*Jeeva Atman*).²⁶



Single flame in bright Sun -metaphor of individual/universal consciousness

The deeper Self – understood by some as the personality – the unity of conscious experience with imagination – offers a foundation and forms the basis of the Hindu concept of Atman for which there is no comparable word in the English language - Soul, Consciousness, Self are all close approximations. Much has been made by the pedantic arguments about the denial of Atman in Buddhism. This is not true since Gautama Buddha simply disagreed with some of the definitions of Atman.

The Atman - a silent witness – for it is the body, mind & intellect which act not the Atman – *is that which cannot be expressed in words for it is that by which words are expressed. It cannot be explained or even understood by the Mind for it is that by which the Mind understands in the first place.*²⁷

Hindu thought gives very high importance to the intellect - the discerning function of the mind. All lower beings have varying functions of the mind to feel heat, cold, hunger, thirst, pleasure and pain etc. but it is the intellect - the finest, subtlest Evolute of Nature - which is invoked in one of the most sacred and commonly recited Hindu prayers - the *Gayatri Mantra*²⁸ *may our (not mine alone) intellect be guided in the right direction.* Recited equally by the rich and the poor, the Gayatri Mantra does not ask for wellness, wealth, prosperity, forgiveness, mercy, long life or even *Moksha*, the primary aim of the Hindu, release from the endless cycles of Creation-Evolution-Devolution. Essence to existence back to Essence.²⁹

By way of an illustration, let's follow the path taken by a single drop of water as it journeys across the sky and the lands merging with the oceans from where it originated, and of which it is a part, in a never ending cycle. Ten years ago I travelled to Tibet to walk around the sacred Kailash Mountain, formed before the rest of the Himalayas. Shaped like a pyramid, the 24,000 feet high Mount Kailash, also known as Meru (Center of the Universe), is the watershed of five major river systems of the Indian sub-continent and can be circum-ambulated in three days.

Early on the second day, one crosses a small stream flowing West-ward, cutting across the Himalayas, as it merges with other streams becoming rivers with distinct names and forms ending in the Arabian Sea as part of the Indus river. By mid-afternoon, there is another stream flowing North West, exiting around the K2 Peak – also joining the Arabian Sea 1,700 KM later. At dusk, one passes yet another stream flowing South East to become the Brahmaputra ending up in the Bay of Bengal some 1,500 Km to the East. Same cloud burst. Some drops of water, by accident of birth, become known as the Indus, others as Yarlung, Ganges, Sutlej or the Brahmaputra River. Each with its own name and form.³⁰ Just like the gold of this ring which came into being as part of a supernova explosion, to become my wedding ring today, part of someone else's necklace tomorrow, or to serve as a tooth filling someday. Names and forms. As the *Gita* says ... *that which exists never ceases to be, that which is not - does not come to Be.*³¹

As for the single drop of water - made up of two atoms of Hydrogen and one of Oxygen - one cannot touch, taste, smell or even feel it in its vapour form as a cloud when the electrons are in their excitable outer orbits. One can do all this when it is in the liquid state, but not even a bullet can pass through when the same molecule forms part of solid ice in its frozen state. In its journey as part of glaciers, lakes, and as pristine rivers which become polluted with toxins,

the H₂O, the very essence of our drop of water, remains H₂O and does not become H₂ arsenic or H₂ lead.



It finally joins the seas where it merges with the waters in all the oceans, no longer a Ganges, Euphrates, Colorado, or the Mississippi. There it may remain merged in the depth of the oceans for Millennia, or evaporates falling as rain immediately, or may get locked in as part of an iceberg, or may take on another name and form as a new river. As do you and I.

This metaphor of the Hindu perspective on re-birth has one caveat - our drop of water does not carry any impressions of the joys or the havoc it may have created as part of a Major River.

You and I, on the other hand, carry the impressions, our actions (*Karmas*), until these embedded impressions (*Sanskaras*) are exhausted like a burnt seed well into the next cycle of creation. ***This accounts for perhaps the greatest solace to a Hindu when faced with calamities*** - his greatest source of spiritual strength in the face of adversity.

The Black Hole of Calcutta being called the "City of Joy" is no idle play of words.

To sum up:

Many million verses, laid out with such precision and brevity so as not to be lost when committed to memory, accompanied by detailed commentaries from different perspectives, passed on from teacher to the student engaged in dialectic.

Amongst this incredible storehouse of scriptural texts, if one had to choose a text which captures most of the essential points of the Hindu faith, it would have to be the Bhagavad-Gita. An incredibly daring creative strategy, according to Krishna Chaitanya³², on the part of sage *Vyasa* to put in the mouth of historical Krishna, the essence of the understandings and impressions of the Vedic Seers emerging from varying stages of *Samadhi*³³ – akin to the revelations of the burning bush.

Reality according to Hindu thought, as also in Quantum theory, cannot be known with certainty. An important principle is the ancient concept known as *Chatursh Koti**It is, it is not; it both is and is not; it neither is nor is it not.*³⁴ All contradictions are in fact complementary, forming an integral part of the Whole. For every matter there's anti-matter, every light Photon and the electron behave both as particles and as formless waves.³⁵

One contradiction in the Hindu society that is in fact not complementary is the slow pace in rooting out the caste system, particularly as it affects those deemed at the lowest rung of the ladder. It's not good enough to say that it is constitutionally illegal to discriminate on the basis of caste, or that members of this sub group whom Gandhiji referred to as *Harijans*, children of God, are beginning to hold positions as Heads of State, ministers, lawmakers, in the judiciary or armed services. Or that one third of most government jobs are reserved for this sub-group. Or that caste consciousness is practically non-existent in urban centres. Not when 70% of the 200 Million Harijans and tribals live in rural areas. Why should there be even a ***single*** Harijan?

Slavery came and went, burning of witches and non-conformists on the stake came and went, deforming little girl's feet has long since gone, mutilation of female genitalia is on its way out, but denying human dignity to fellow human beings is something for which all thinking Hindus must lower their heads in shame. As part of the sacred commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the custodians of the Hindu Faith must make one last effort, one final push and take the lead in eliminating the lingering residue of this historic aberration – the ultimate in Homo Hierarchius.

As for idol worshipping, it can be summed up in one sentence It's NOT that many gods are being worshipped but that the Hindu devotee values and worships the **many-ness** of the one and only Ultimate Reality, which is neither Hindu nor Muslim nor Christian. In fact the Gita asserts "...*whenever, wherever, whosoever, seeks Me in earnestness, I appear and strengthen his or her faith from whatever perspective he or she seeks Me*".³⁶ The Hindu devotee has total freedom to focus on the impersonal absolute of the Upanishads or a manifest personal deity for whom he even has complete freedom to postpone his quest.

Intentionality is incessantly and immanently at work in Nature. While the Hindu thought agrees fully with the theory of Evolution, it is not the evolution of pure chance of Carl Becker, Bertrand Russell, Darwin and Monod etc. An example of the most potent and conscious intentionality in nature is at the terminal of organic, inorganic, and biological evolution where man appears – after having lived 8.4 Million lives in lesser forms, Man finally arrives as part of Directed Evolution.

In the spirit of opposites, it would be equally correct to say that Hindu thought concurs with the observation of Bertrand Russell that, at times, Man behaves as the most irritating species inflicted by Mother Nature to lord over her creation, or as Jonathan Swift says in the context of Lilliputians: Man is the most pernicious race of mischievous vermin which Mother Nature has ever suffered on her Creation.

We shall next see how Man has earned that reputation. Hindu thought describes these aberrations in terms of *Yugas*, cycles, rhythms both short-term, as swings of the pendulum, as well as of a very long duration lasting Millions of years.

III Some Lessons from the Hindu Perspective Related to Development

In keeping with the theme of the Conference, I have selected four areas where the Hindu Faith provides an insight into the causes of extreme poverty and offers practical solutions from the Spiritual perspective.

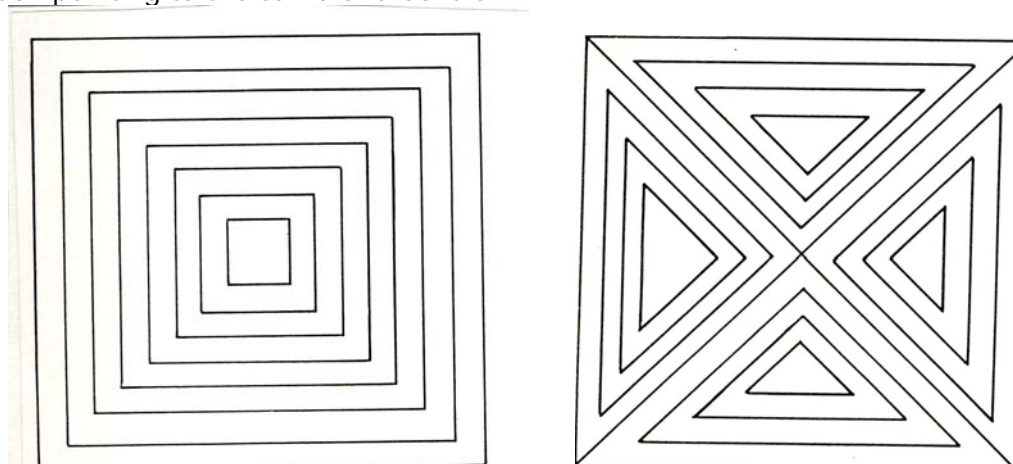
III A Hindu Perspective on Reducing Inter-Religious Conflicts - often the source of untold misery creating the most marginalised and disenfranchised people in our midst. Despite the genius of the common man throughout the ages to live harmoniously with people of different faiths, it has been very easy for the demagogues to inflame, from time to time, the passions and fury in the name of Religion. In the brief span of our existence, what havoc we have created in the name of our faiths, our belief systems. From Jihads, Crusades, to the Inquisitions. The irrational claimant of the Biblical land, the fanaticism of the Hindutwa crusader, the relentless Fatwas against anyone questioning the interpretations of this or that doctrine. The killing fields of Cambodia, the Gulags, the ethnic cleansing of the Third Reich, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Biafara. The suicide bomber blowing up innocents in the skyscrapers, air, land and on the high seas. It matters little whether the supremacy of one's own doctrine is dreamed up by the uncivilized Taliban in the caves of Afghanistan or by the civilized SS Gestapo eating with forks and knives while listening to Bach. The list goes on and on. At least it's democratic. It transcends all cultures in all eras.

These are examples of people being inflamed by passion rather than by reason. How easy it is to make people forget basic plurality of their identities in favour of one dominant identity - my faith, my belief system, whether dogmatically Muslim, Hindu or Christian. According to some, Religions would have done a better job had they accepted human authorship, at least for the historical part. To the Hindu mind to accept something as the last word, the last prophet, is one of the greatest blunders of the rational mind.

Fortunately, the converse is also true for the vast majority of ordinary people of faith, when left alone, do live in harmony.

At the UN Peace Summit in 2000 which adopted the Millennium Development Goals, a very senior monk of the Indian Swami Order, Swami Veda Bharati³⁷, made an offering "Unifying Streams in Religion" in which he traces hundreds of examples of harmonious and unifying streams that have also existed and continue to exist amongst people of all faiths. Copies of this booklet, which is being used as a starting point in conducting further research in documenting and cataloguing religious harmony, are available at the front desk.

Swami Veda gives a beautiful description of the ancient Hindu concept of *Sarva Tantra Siddhanta*.³⁸ Epistemological approach to harmony - which goes beyond mere acceptance or tolerance of other view points or belief systems. As explained by Swami Veda, there are three approaches to acquiring knowledge: i) the dogmatic path taken by the fundamentalists who view their particular belief systems as Perfect Squares, ii) the more egalitarian approach is to view all belief systems as squares nestled within each other, each satisfying the attributes of a perfect square except that *my* square is of course the outer one. This is an approach taken by most of us in this room. The third path, the enlightened approach, is to think in terms of triangles within the Square, with each triangle having its own internal logic and consistency, each pointing to the same one Centre.



When Mahatma Gandhi was approached by a grief stricken Hindu family whose only son was killed by rioting Muslims at the height of the carnage created by the Partition of India, Gandhiji's handed them an orphaned Muslim boy with the plea that the child be raised as a Muslim – the faith into which he was born, not as a Hindu.

Wouldn't it be nice to see that starting with Gandhiji's birthday, October 2nd, being celebrated as International Day of Non-Violence, if Missionaries of *all* faiths involved in development work were to comfort those in need in the faith they - the recipients of the aid - were born into and not in the faith of the donor.

III B Ascribing Altruistic Motives to Aid – A Paradigm Shift away from Self-Interest in attaining Prosperity

In answer to the question - Where do I come from? Where do I have to go? How do I go there? Creation - Destiny - Quest, the Gita discusses three approaches.

For some it is through the path of Devotion, complete surrender. For others it is deep Contemplation. For the Man of action not content with praying in public places of worship and not quite ready for a life of quiet contemplation, Gita offers a unique solution – to connect with divinity through Altruistic Action by doing one's duty as an *offering* without *entitlement* to the reward of one's actions.³⁹ Expectation of success yes – but not the entitlement to a personal reward. It's a very original thought which can be better understood by the following metaphor.

A surgeon performs surgeries. He or she is not elated when the surgeries are successful. Conversely, if the patients die the surgeon is not despondent but carries on. He or she is not indifferent to the fate of the patient, far from it; they keep abreast of the latest in saving lives. But they are detached from the success or failure in the execution of their duty – akin to accepting the element of grace in the final outcome of their actions.

The philosophy of self-less action (*Nishkama Karma*) links with the design itself of creation as partnering with the Deity for the faithful.

This is a complete denial of the economics of Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* in which he declares that self-interest alone creates prosperity. While this view may well have served the conditions prevalent just before the Industrial Revolution, abuses inevitably set in and the pendulum has swung too far. We all know the disastrous side-effects of pure self-interest. Naomi Klein in her recent book *The Shock Doctrine*⁴⁰ painstakingly documents abuses of self-interest in post Tsunami / Katrina relief efforts and the excitement of global business opportunities in the aftermath of surgically carried out shock and awe in Iraq. According to the Gita it is not in the true nature of Man to act with self-interest for pitiable are those who are motivated by desire for personal gain from the fruits of the action.

III C Secular Angst – being Secular or being Religious is not mutually exclusive

There is a totally unnecessary disconnect between Secular governments, Secular civil societies, Secular funding agencies and Secular donor policies on the one hand, and “non-secular” Religion on the other. What a monumental waste of energy in the context of development. In the Hindu context it is the very deeply religious who are the most secular. In Europe, a somewhat narrow definition of Secularism as a corollary to the separation of State and Religion was, until now, a historical necessity. However, as European societies become increasingly pluralistic, the definition of Secularism may need some fine-tuning. Something to learn from the meaning of Secularism as understood in the Hindu perspective which goes back thousands of years – *neutrality* as opposed to outright *prohibition* against religious engagement. Secularism in modern India is intended to be strictly neutral in all matters of faith with symmetry in the State’s treatment of multiple religious practices. However, as noted by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen⁴¹ the framers of the Indian Constitutions wisely set forth an initial ameliorating phase, to correct historical social inequities like the Hindu dominated cast system.

Finally, it’s a mistake to think that as societies become more “civilised” there is less dependence on religion or that its influence correspondingly declines. According to Hindu thought it would be ideal for the two to move in tandem but civilisations, including all scientific discoveries, by themselves are not at odds with Religion. According to Amartya Sen, Huntington’s Clash of Civilisations is a misnomer, there being no such thing as a Muslim or a Christian or a Hindu civilisation – clash of cultures perhaps. Civilisation vs. culture - former being materialistic, the latter dealing with Spirituality - civilisations mark the progress of breaking open a coconut with a rock to a more civilised way of eating the fruit from a can opened with an electric can-opener and serving the fruit on fine bone china. To many Colonial rulers, Mahatma Gandhi was an uncivilised *Fakir* because he walked around half naked wearing pieces of cloth which were not even tailored.

Societies, a group of people, can be at the bottom of the material ladder but be very advanced spiritually. Conversely, a society can be very highly civilised but low on the scale of humanistic values - the aberration of the SS Nazis listening to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven eating with silver cutlery and drinking the finest wines, yet capable of unspeakable inhumanity.

III D Redefining Development - an alternative understanding of Development as it relates to the extreme poor – the primary theme of this Conference.

Having made the commitment to engage Faith Based Organisations in development, the challenge faced by the Donor Agencies including institutions like the World Bank is not just who to deal with but how to contextualise the engagement – and this will have to be an ongoing process not just limited to the MDG targets. Clearly it is not intended to channel development funds through organised religious institutions most of whom are already involved in development work, some purely altruistic, others motivated by the desire to attract more adherents to the faith, and still others because of affiliation with this or that political ideology.

Hinduism, being more a way of life, presents a slightly different challenge. As discussed in the introductory remarks, the total freedom in connecting with Divinity, does not lend itself to an institutionalized central hierarchy. Almost every Hindu house has a special place, even a tiny altar, set aside for worship with the members of the family often serving as their own lay priest. The visits to any of the estimated 2.5 Million places of worship are more to mark anniversaries or are in celebration of religiously inspires festive events. The absence of a

centralised priestly hierarchy also presents opportunities for transformation as in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, though a barrister by training, appealed the most to his countrymen as a man of religion.

In economic terms, the most cost effective way to harness the moral energy of the Hindu faith communities is by mobilising the collective influence of the opinion makers who are from within the international development community, who speak the language of economics and finance, who work amongst the very poor and who are at the same time deeply spiritual.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen⁴² sends a very profound and powerful message on freedom linked Social Development. Others like Dr. Kamala Chowdhry⁴³ Co-chair of the World Bank's Advisory Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development as well as eminent scientist-cum activist Dr. Vandana Shiva⁴⁴ echo similar thoughts. There are former International civil servants like Dr. M. S. Swaminathan⁴⁵, credited with bringing the Green Revolution to the farmers of India and pioneers like Dr. M. L. Dewan⁴⁶ who embraced Sustainable Development long before the others and who have devoted their entire adult lives working selflessly amongst the disadvantaged in achieving integrated development.

As thinkers, activists, doers speaking the language of the official development agencies and also possessing very deep ecumenical spiritual underpinning, it is opinion makers like these who are potential catalysts of change in engaging the Hindu faith communities.

In a series of thought provoking essays, Dr. Vandana Shiva, recipient of Right Livelihood award (alternative Nobel Prize) presents one of the most coherent alternative understandings of Development as it relates to the extreme poor. According to Dr. Shiva⁴⁷:

- In order to end poverty, we must address the conditions that create poverty. She emphasises that the poor are not those who were left behind in the wake of the riches created by the industrial revolution, but are those who were *pushed out* and *excluded* (my italics) from access to their own wealth and resources. They are poor because their wealth has been appropriated and wealth creating capacity destroyed.
- The prosperity of the industrial revolution was based on riches appropriated as a result... of the violent take over of Third World resources and Third World markets that created wealth in the North - simultaneously creating poverty in the South.

Here, I would like to add that, in all fairness, the plundering of resources by the Colonial Rulers (which no one can or should deny) continues to be matched, if not surpassed, in many lower income countries by the indigenous, local, home-made rulers both in scope and viciousness.

- Two economic myths facilitate a separation between.....the growth of affluence and the growth of poverty. ... with growth being viewed only as growth of capital and poverty is seen as causing environmental destruction. The disease is then offered as a cure: growth will solve the problems of poverty and environmental crisis it has given rise to in the first place.
- The second myth that separates affluence from poverty, is the assumption that if you produce what you consume, you do not produce..... and if you are not part of the free market economy you are not part of... national accounting that measures economic growth.

Dr. Shiva takes exception to the analyses of commentators like Jeffrey Sachs whose work supports perpetuation of the above myths contributing to the mystification of growth and consumerism, since according to her, they also hide the real processes that create poverty.

She makes a very compelling case for a distinction between self-provisioning sustainable lifestyle *by choice* versus one that is lived because of *forced deprivation* - whether created

by Man or by natural causes. According to Dr. Shiva sustenance economies, which satisfy basic needs through self-provisioning, may be perceived as poor but do not necessarily imply a low physical quality of life. She notes that on the contrary, because sustenance economies contribute to the growth of nature's economy and the social economy, they ensure a high quality of life measure in terms of right to food and water, sustainability of livelihoods, and robust social and cultural identity and meaning.

Conversely, a system that creates denial and disease, while accumulating trillions of dollars of super profits for businesses is a system for creating poverty for people. When seeds are patented and peasants will pay \$1 trillion in royalties, they will be \$1 trillion poorer. Patents on medicines increase costs of AIDS drugs from \$200 to \$20,000, and Cancer drugs from \$2,400 to \$36,000 for a year's treatment. When water is privatized, and global corporations make \$1 trillion from commoditization of water, the poor are poorer by \$1 trillion.

Finally, Dr. Shiva reminds us that modern economies and concepts of development cover only a negligible part of the history of human interaction with nature. She points out that trade and exchange of goods and services have always existed in human societies, but these were subjected to nature's and people's economies. The elevation of the domain of the market and man-made capital to the position of the highest organizing principle for societies has led to the neglect and destruction of the other two organizing principles - ecology and survival - which maintain and sustain life in nature and society.

The following internet blog illustrates the contrast between a self-provisioning sustenance life style and market driven view of development. *A solitary fisherman, somewhere in a low-income tropical island is sitting with two fishes in a pail watching the sunset. A Wall Street financier lounging nearby in a posh resort is getting irritated by the minute watching the fisherman's lack of enterprise. He finally approaches the fisherman asking him why he is not catching more fish, to which the fisherman replies that he has caught all that he needs – one for his family and one for his neighbour who is sick.*

The Wall-Street financier mutters under his breath, "... this is typical of third world countries... no enterprise, no industry...no wonder they are where they are". He engages the fisherman in a lesson in free market economy by telling the fisherman how he could become a lot happier if he were to catch more fish generating income with which to buy a boat and start a business.

As the fisherman appears to show interest, the happy capitalist proceeds to lay out a scenario, how profits from the business could be ploughed back to invest in plant and equipment to process fish for export. Of course the fisherman would have to put in years of hard work, forego dividends, forget about a personal life while focussing on exports through export credits arranged from the Exim Bank which would naturally expect him to buy American fishing trawlers with the financing thereby benefiting both economies. With sound investment banking advice he could acquire one or two existing distribution networks, through strategically positioned leverage buy-outs spinning off the unnecessary divisions, to supply much needed Sushi for the American Mid West cattle ranchers who have developed a strong taste for everything exotic.

The fisherman would of course have to incorporate his business in tax havens (not in his own tropical Island though) and set up holding companies to shield income from withholding taxes but more importantly to limit his liabilities from Mercury or salmonella related law suits. With each success, the enterprise would reach higher goals, getting listed on the stock exchange with an Initial Public Offering while still retaining control and the Chairmanship of the conglomerate.

To the fisherman's question of what he would do after all that hard work, the Harvard MBA beams with mild indulgence... "why, don't you see you could do anything then, you could spend more time with your family, take a vacation to the beaches of a tropical island, catch a fish or two, watch the beautiful sun as it sets in the horizon." The fisherman nods gently..."you mean what I am doing already"

Some Pragmatic Considerations

- i. In his *Gita for the Modern Man*, Krishna Chaitanya⁴⁷, questions why in today's affluent world, despite everything being in abundance (except for the very poor), is the Man of plenty so unhappy? According to Hindu thought, this is partly because we - and this includes all of us in this room - grossly exaggerate our survival needs, something an animal never does. Not with Being more but having more.
- ii. We multiply our wants in a cult of consumerism; endlessly satisfying desires which according to the Gita leads to attachment, in turn leading to craving. Unfulfilled craving leads to anger and frustration resulting in delusion. Delusion leads to faulty functioning of memory which ruins reason from which Man perishes.⁴⁸
- iii. The Artha Shastras, a body of Vedic literature dealing with wealth and prosperity, tell us that Man has the right to subsistence in order to live and the householder through his means supports others, but that incessant competitive rivalry in amassing wealth inevitably leads to conflict.
- iv. The cult of consumption by the affluent, whether in the North or in the South, whereby we acquire all that we need as well as that we do not need, really means war on the very subsistence of the poor, war on nature and on fellowmen obscuring the Sun, polluting the air and chewing up great forests. The world may have enough for everyone's needs, but certainly not for everyone's greed.
- v. This is not to demonise Billionaire entrepreneurs, epitomised by Ayan Rand in her trilogy *Atlas Shrugged, Fountainhead and Values of Selfishness*⁴⁹ as Spiritual Materialists because of their genius to create. Creativity, productivity, innovation are all as much a part of Ritam (Order) as non-materialistic Spiritual quest. In fact the Isa Vasyo Upanishad reminds us...*those who worship materialism alone are doomed to darkness but those who neglect action to pursue Spirituality alone are doomed to even greater darkness.*⁵⁰
- vi. Instead of senselessly curbing production, we must all drastically reduce senseless consumption by reversing built-in obsolescence, the use-once-throw-away-buy-another culture creating mountains of garbage – a legacy of the “civilised” affluent. That less than 25% of the World's population wantonly consumes and lays waste more than 70% of the world's dwindling resources, creating ecological holocaust, is the **ultimate Human Rights Violation for which all of us must hang our heads in shame**. At least one Millennium Development Goal, reducing extreme poverty by half, can not only be achieved but even surpassed, completely, if all of us were simply to reduce consumption of the non-essentials by a mere ten percent.

IV Conclusion

I would like to conclude by citing the examples of India and China - accounting for one third of the World's population with a large segment of their citizenry still in deep poverty. Now embarked on stupendous economic growth, implicitly competing with each other for the planet's scarce resources already brought to near exhaustion by the so called pernicious West. Will these two nations simply produce more billionaires? Or will they seize the opportunity to integrate Material and Spiritual development of not only their own people but extend a helping hand to the extreme poor of other countries? Will their patronage of resource rich nations like Burma, Biafra and Sudan under ruthless dictatorships be motivated by pure self-interest or will they also lend a helping hand in bringing about a transformation amongst some of the most disenfranchised fellow human beings?

Sharing ancient connections going back thousands of years in the philosophies of pure *Sankhya* and early *Upanishads* transmitted through the Buddhist canon, will these two emerging giants re-embrace the ethics, the morality and compassion towards the less fortunate as enunciated by Confucius, Lao Tze (founder of Taoism), and Gautama Buddha?

May Soesterberg II continue to light many more candles through reflection and meaningful dialogues like these.

Thank you.

Notes

- 1 Knowledge Centre for Religion and Development: <http://www.religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl/> Cordaid: <http://www.cordaid.nl/>; Oikos: <http://www.stichtingoikos.nl/>; Seva Network Foundation: <http://www.sevanetwork.net/>; ICCO: <http://www.icco.nl/delivery/main/nl/>; Islamic University Rotterdam: <http://www.islamicuniversity.nl/en/index.asp>; Institute of Social Studies: <http://www.iss.nl/>
- 2 First Conference - Religion: a source for human rights and development cooperation, organized by ICCO, Cordaid and ISS in Soesterberg in September 2005 which launched the Knowledge Center, http://www.icco.nl/documents/pdf/BBO-Rapport-180406_DEF.pdf
- 3 UN Millennium Development Goals: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html; and the 2007 mid-term report: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg2007.pdf>; Also see World Bank Atlas of Millennium Development Goals: <http://devdata.worldbank.org/atlas-mdg/>
- 4 Diane L. Beck, *Encountering God*, Beacon Press, 1993
- 5 K. Marshall and Marsh, *Millennium Challenges for Development and Faith Institutions*, World Bank 2003 for PDF file click http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/06/12/000160016_20060612174030/Rendered/PDF/272090REVISED01institutions01PUBLIC1.pdf
- 6 COMPAS: <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/> ;
- 7 World Faith Development Dialogue: <http://www.wfdd.org.uk/>; Civil Society Forum: <http://www.worldcivilsociety.org/pages/1/en/presfor.htm>;
- 8 Institute of Social Studies: <http://www.iss.nl/>
- 9 Katherine Marshall, *Faith and Development: Rethinking Development Debates*, the World Bank, 2005; Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough, *Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight against Poverty*, The World Bank, 2004. Wendy Tyndale, Faith & Economics in Development: a bridge across the chasm? *Development in Practice* 2000. Link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/09614520052466 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614520052466>; Gerard Clarke, Agents of Transformation? Donors, faith-based organisations and international development, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp 77 – 96, 2007, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Also, *Faith Matters: faith based organizations, civil societies and international development*; *Journal of International Development*, 2000; Rev. Professor Richard Bonney and Asaf Hussein, *Faith Communities and the development Agenda*, Report presented to the UK Department for International Development 2001; D. Narayan et al, *Voices of the poor: Crying Out for Change*, World Bank, 2000. An in-depth study documenting the views and experiences of more than 60,000 men and women from 60 countries.
- 10 About 300 Upanishads are believed to have been composed, of which only 108 exist today. Some of the more popular commentaries on the 11 principal Upanishads are by:
 - a. Swami Chinmayananda, published by the Central Chinmaya Mission Trust
 - b. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, 1953
 - c. Swami Prabhavananda *The Upanishads* (with Frederick Manchester) 1947. Very concise.
 - d. Swami Ranganathananda, *The Message of the Upanishads*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971
 - e. Commentaries of Sankracarya translated by Swami Gambhirananda, Advaita Ashram 1979-1995
- 11 The six orthodox schools of Philosophy called Darshanas (Visions as per Plato) of the same Ultimate Reality from different perspectives are (1) Nyaya: a system of logic, epistemology, forming the basis of scientific inquiry, (2) Vaishesika, focusing on physical sciences, (3) Samkhya, the oldest system of philosophy known to Man dealing with dualistic school that accepts two eternally present systems Matter and Spirit or Consciousness, (4) Yoga, practical application of philosophical and religious life (5) Mimamsa, guidelines for conduct in society and (6) Vedanta, dealing with Ultimate Reality itself. There are also six heterodox Schools which include Buddhism and Jainism. Although not endorsed by any of the Schools, even the atheism philosophy of eat drink and be merry finds a place amongst the Schools of Philosophy. For overall dissertation on the Schools of Philosophy please see:
 - a. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, Vedanta Press, 1963 Chapters 10-14. Also *How to Know God, The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (With Christopher Isherwood)
 - b. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, (First President of India) *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 2, Chapters I-XI
 - c. Dr. Rajmani Tigonait, *Seven Systems of Indian Philosophy*, The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy of the U.S.A. 1983
 - d. Dr. B. L. Atriya, *The Philosophy of Yoga-Vasistha*, Banaras Hindu University, 1935
- 12 There are more than 100 major commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. Of these the following deserve special mention because the authors have used metaphors of the 20th century AD to explain the concepts enunciated in the 21st century B.C.
 - a. Krishna Chaitanya recipient of the Critic of Ideas Award and widely regarded as being closest approximation to India's Renaissance Man, *The Gita for Modern Man*, Clarion Books 1986
 - b. Swami Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta*, Central Chinmaya Trust 1992
 - c. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita with Introduction by Aldous Huxley*, Mentor Religious Classics 1944.
- 13 C. Rajagopalacharya's commentaries on the epic Ramayana illustrate the struggle over fourteen years of the members of the Raguvansh clan, in particular of Lord Rama – approaching perfection but not quite there, as he navigates between competing Dharmas, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1968
- 14 Satyavrata Siddhantalankar (former Vice Chancellor of Gurukul University), *Heritage of Vedic Culture*, D. B. Tarporevala & Sons 1969, *Central Thought of the Vedic Culture* pp. 1-17
- 15 Kenopanishad II.3
- 16 Nasadiya Sukta (Creation Hymn) Rig Veda X.129.1
- 17 Jean Le Mee, *Hymns from the Rig-Veda*, Jonathon Cape Ltd.1975. Beautiful pictorial commentaries
- 18 According to some scholars, there is a curious correspondence between the evolutionary thread amongst the nine Earthly incarnations of the Deity (Avatars) codified more than 2000 years before Darwin enunciated his Theory of Evolution: i) Matsya the Fish of the primordial waters, ii) Kurma the Tortoise – transition to land, iii)

- Varaha the Boar – of the animal kingdom, iv) Narsimha half man-half beast - bi pedal apes, v) Vamana the Dwarf – transition to the first hominids vi) Parasurama the intelligent being– Homo Sapien Sapien, vii) Shri Rama man of perfection – almost, but not quite, viii) Shri Krishna the Divine man, ix) Buddha the Enlightened One and x) Kalki yet to come on a horse with wings to lead into inter-galactic homelands as Kali Yuga (decay from Entropy) makes life uninhabitable on this planet.
- 19 *Truth is One; Sages describe it in many ways.* Rig Veda 1.164.46; Atharva Veda 9.10.28; Svetasvatara Upanishad VI.11 & VI.12; Kathopanishad II.2.12;
- 20 Mandukya Upanishad 7. This short Upanishad covers the waking, dream and the state deep sleep of the unhealthy as well as the healthy mind.
- 21 Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad, II.3.6, III.9.26, IV.4.22, IV.5.15
- 22 Invocation at the beginning of the Isavasyopanishad, the only Upanishad which is directly a part of the Veda, being the 40th chapter of the Yajur Veda.
- 23 Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad II.1.20; Mundaka Upanishad II.1.1
- 24 See 10.(i) above
- 25 Field in Rig Veda X.72.4, II.35, X.82; Taittiriya Upanishad II.1.1; Brahma Sutra II.3.14; Chhandogya Upanishad I.11.5, I.9.1, VII.12.1, VIII.14.1; Mundaka Upanishad II.1.3; Kathopanishad II.1.7
- 26 Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, Harper Collins, 1976. For a more thorough and comprehensive discussion see Dr. N.C. Panda's, *Maya in Physics* (1991), *The Vibrating Universe* (1992) which synthesises the Superstring Theory of the vibration concept of Advaita Vedanta, *Mind & Super Mind Vol. I & II* (1994) all published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- 27 Kenopanishad I.5 to 9
- 28 *Gayatri Mantra*, Yajur Veda 36.3
- 29 Dr. Tulsi Ram, *The Original Philosophy of Yoga*, Harayana Sahitya Sansthan, 1989. I am grateful to Dr. Tulsi Ram for his valuable input in preparing this paper.
- 30 Chhandogya Upanishad VI.1.4.6 Nama - Rupa
- 31 Gita II.16.... That which exists does not convert to nothing nor does it come from nothing.
- 32 Krishna Chaitanya, *The Gita for Modern Man*, Clarion Books 1986
- 33 Brhadaranyaka Upanishad V.1.1; Isavasyopanishad Invocation
- 34 Chatursh Koti,- Brahma Sutras Sankrabhasyam 1.4.3; Svetasvatara Upanishad 1.9; further expanded by Gautama Buddha in the Abhidharama component of Tripitaka
- 35 S. Weinberg, *The Cosmic Code* 1984; M. Capek, *Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics*, Princeton, 1961.
- 36 Gita 7.21
- 37 Maha Mandaleshvara Swami Veda Bharati (Dr. Usharbudh Arya), *Unifying Streams in Religion*, An offering on the occasion of the UN 2000 World Peace Summit and its follow up published in 2003 *Meditation The Unifying Stream in Religion*. Swami Veda earned his Doctorate in Philosophy from the Uterecht University and is widely regarded is one of the most authentic living teachers of Yoga and Meditation. He is best known for his 1,400 commentary on the first two chapters of the *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* and *Yogi in the Lab; Future Directions of Scientific Research in Meditation* 2006. www.swamivedabharati.org, www.swamiveda.com, www.bindu.org. I am grateful to Swami Veda for aiming higher – to gain the right of being called his student in this lifetime.
- 38 *Ibid. Yoga Sutras of Patanjali Vol. I – Samadhi-pada*, The Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy of the U.S.A. 1986, pp 23-26.
- 39 Gita: Chap III
- 40 Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, Alfred A. Knopf 2007.
- 41 Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, Penguin Books, 2005. Contains brilliant critique on Secularism and its different interpretations, pp. 16-21, pp. 294-316, Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom and Rationality as Freedom* Anchor Books 2000
- 42 *Ibid*
- 43 Dr. Kamala Chowdhry, *Healing the Earth: Bridging Science & Spirituality*. Dr. Chowdhry, a visiting Professor at Harvard is a member of UN Secretary-General's Eminent Persons Advisory Group for Sustainable Development and Co-chair - Member of the World Bank's Advisory Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development;
- 44 Dr. Vandana Shiva, Physicist, activist, author, recipient of Right Livelihood award (Nobel Prize alternative). Leading member of the International Forum on Globalization; known for her campaigns against genetic engineering.
- 45 Professor M.S. Swaminathan acclaimed by TIME magazine as one of the twenty most influential Asians (third after Gandhi and Tagore in India), widely regarded for having introduced the Green Revolution in India.
- 46 Dr. M.L. Dewan; FAO Soil Scientist, Chairman Himalayan Conservation (HIMCON); *Towards Sustainable Society; Perceptions* with Foreword by H.H, Dalai Lama, Clarion Books 1995; *Human Values; A Task for All* co-authored with Prof. M.R. Chilana, 1998; *Uttaranchal; Visions and action Programme*, co-authored with Dr J. Bahadur 2005, both by Concept Publishing Company 2005. I, along with many others whose lives have been touched by him, are grateful to Dr. Dewan for showing us how to live a life in equal measure of Bhakti Yoga (devotion), Jnyan Yoga (self-knowledge) and above all, Karma Yoga (altruistic action).
- 47 Excerpts from Dr. Vandana Shiva essay; *How To End Poverty: Making Poverty History And The History Of Poverty* *May 11, 2005*
- 48 See 12.a above
- 49 Gita II.62-63
- 50 Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* Random House 1957; *Fountainhead*, Harper Collins 1961; *Values of Selfishness* Penguin Books 1961
- 51 Isa Upanishad I.9

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- 52 A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, Sedgwick & Jackson Ltd. 1954

- 53 Sri Aurobindo three Volumes on *The Synthesis of Yoga and Indian Philosophy*, Sri Aurobindo ashram Trust 1914-1921
- 54 Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Vol I & II Penguin Books 1966
- 55 Shri Purohit Swami *Patanjali's Path to Yoga*, Introduction by W. B. Yeats, Faber & Faber Ltd. 1973
- 56 James Horton Woods, *The Yoga-System of Patanjali*, Harvard Press 1931