

Materialien zum Ethikunterricht

Indische Religionen: Der Hinduismus

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Einführung

Warum sollten wir uns über die Weltreligionen informieren?

Im Rahmen der Globalisierung wird die Welt immer kleiner. Menschen mit unterschiedlichsten Weltanschauungen und Religionen rücken zunehmend mehr und enger zusammen. Wir können nicht friedlich miteinander leben, wenn wir im Unklaren darüber sind, welche Sitten und Gebräuche die Denkgewohnheiten anderer Völker maßgebend beeinflussen. Wir müssen in der Lage sein, uns in andere Köpfe hinein versetzen zu können. Konfessionsfreien Menschen wie wir, die hier versammelt sind, fehlen oft die Kenntnisse über Gedankengänge, die in den Köpfen unserer religiös gesinnten Mitmenschen ablaufen.

Außerdem ist es so, dass in vielen Ländern die Religion auf die Politik einen sehr starken, wenn nicht gar bestimmenden Einfluss hat. Iran ist ein extremes Beispiel dafür, wo die grauen Herrscher, die Ayatollahs, die eigentlichen Machthaber sind.

Wenn wir produktive Gespräche und Diskussionen mit Andersdenkenden führen wollen, ist es dann nicht ratsam, uns ein gewisses Grundwissen über deren Überzeugungen zu verschaffen? Wir säkularen Humanisten sind auf der Suche nach neuen ethischen Werten, die nicht nur auf den in unserem Weltteil üblichen biblischen Überzeugungen beruhen sollten. Nur mit einem fundierten Wissen über die Grundwerte anderer Weltanschauungen und Religionen können wir unsere Vorstellungen sinnvoll einbringen.

Laut Knaurs großem Religionsführer gibt es heute auf unserer Welt 670 Religionen, Kirchen und Kulte. Wahrscheinlich sind es aber viel mehr, als die in diesem Buch erwähnten. Allein im Christentum gibt es mehr als 250 Sekten. Normalsterbliche wie wir können uns unmöglich mit allen

diesen Gruppierungen befassen. Sinnvoll erscheint es mir, sich zunächst mit den großen, heute existierenden Weltreligionen zu befassen, die von sehr vielen Menschen mehr oder weniger praktiziert werden. Im Gegensatz zu Religionen und Sekten von regionaler Bedeutung, sind Weltreligionen jene Religionen, die eine große Anzahl von Anhängern haben und in mehreren Ländern oder Kontinenten zuhause sind.

In der Gegenwart gibt es neun Weltreligionen, deren Mitglieder zusammen 94 Prozent der Gläubigen ausmachen. Alle diese Weltreligionen sind ausnahmslos in Asien entstanden.

Welche Religionen sind das und wie viel Prozent der gläubigen Weltbevölkerung entfallen auf jede einzelne?

Hier die Liste:

Christen	41,8 %
Muslime	21,3 %
Hindus	16,9 %
Buddhisten	7,3 %
Universalisten	4,3 %
Sikhs	0,4 %
Juden	0,4 %
Jains	0,1 %
Bahai	0,1 %
Andere	6,4 %

Dazu muss gesagt werden, dass manchmal die Grenzen ineinander verfließen. So sind z.B. die chinesischen Buddhisten gleichzeitig Universalisten, die wiederum eine Mischung aus Taoisten, Konfuzianisten etc. darstellen. Deswegen werden diese Buddhisten unter Universalisten aufgeführt und nicht als Buddhisten. Zunehmend mehr Menschen haben zwar mit dem Glauben nicht viel am Hut, aber sie erscheinen in dieser Statistik, weil sie in einen entsprechenden Glaubenskreis hineingeboren worden sind.

Heute habe ich vor, über die vier Weltreligionen, die ihren Ursprung in Indien haben, zu berichten. Wir werden sicherlich noch weitere Religionen, wie die drei alttestamentarischen, durch andere Autoren - in bunter Abwechslung mit den Themen, die wir uns eigentlich und ursprünglich vorgenommen hatten - in Augenschein nehmen.

Betrachten wir also zunächst den Hinduismus.

Hinduismus

Schlangenbeschwörer und heilige Kühe - wenn es hoch kommt, noch der Tiger von Eschnapur - das ist das Bild von Indien und seinen Hindus in den Köpfen von vielen Mitteleuropäern. Heilige Kuh, sagt der Christ, und lächelt mildtätig von oben über diese armen Unwissenden herab. Er vergisst dabei, dass sein Gott für die Christen auch eine heilige Kuh ist.

Über ihn darf man nicht lästern! Das ist strafbar!

Ist dieses hinduistische Bild der Christen haltbar? Ist das Hinduismus? Diese Leute wissen über Hinduismus gar nichts. Das kann man ihnen andererseits nicht übel nehmen, denn sie wissen im allgemeinen über ihren eigenen Glauben auch nicht viel mehr, so wie es Franz Buggle in seinem bekannten Buch mit Titel „Denn sie wissen nicht, was sie glauben“ zum Ausdruck bringt.

Was ist also Hinduismus?

Zunächst ein wichtiger Grundsatz: „Solange Du Deine Pflicht tust, ist es egal, ob Du an 10.000 Götter, an einen oder an keinen Gott glaubst!“. Dem gegenüber steht der christliche Glaubensgrundsatz: „Nicht durch Deine guten Taten, sondern durch die Gnade Gottes wirst Du selig!“.

Ist Hinduismus überhaupt eine Religion oder vielleicht eine Weltanschauung?

Wenn man Hinduismus verstehen will, muss man sich von der eurozentrischen und christozentrischen Betrachtungsweise trennen. Auch wenn man konfessionsfrei, Agnostiker oder Atheist ist, hat sich eine gewisse Betrachtungsweise in unserem Gehirn eingenistet, die kulturspezifisch ist.

Wodurch unterscheidet sich Hinduismus von den alttestamentarischen Religionen? Welches sind die besonders wichtigen Merkmale?

Zunächst einmal gab es keinen einzelnen Religionsstifter. Die etwa zweitausendjährige Geschichte des Hinduismus hat immer wieder weise Männer hervorgebracht, die mit ihren Ansichten dem Hinduismus neue Facetten hinzufügten. Deswegen existieren im Hinduismus auch keine von Gott festgelegten, unumstößlichen Wahrheiten, die bis in die Ewigkeit ihre Gültigkeit haben sollen und untastbar und unveränderbar sind. So steht z.B. in der Bibel: „Es darf nicht etwas weggelassen werden und es darf nichts hinzu gefügt werden!“

„Wenn Du ein Gebot gebrochen hast, hast Du damit die restlichen neun anderen auch gebrochen“.

Im Hinduismus gibt es keine einheitlichen Ansichten - auch keinen Kanon oder Buch, wie die Bibel oder der Koran - die die Glaubensgrundsätze für die Hindus festlegen. Deswegen gab es auch nie ein Konzil, wie das von Nicäa im Jahre 387, wo diese Ansichten als allgemeinbindend festgelegt wurden.

Es existiert also kein allgemeingültiges Glaubensbekenntnis. Deswegen ist auch kein hierarchisches System wie die Kirche vonnöten, um die Durchsetzung der Glaubensgrundsätze zu überwachen. Jeder Tempel agiert autark und regelt seine Angelegenheiten selbst.

Die übergroße Mehrheit der Hindus glaubt an Karma und an Wiedergeburt. Diese besagen, dass man je nach seinen guten oder schlechten Taten in einer entsprechenden Kaste oder Tierform wiedergeboren wird, um irgendwann Erlösung zu finden und im Nichts, bzw. in der großen Weltenseele Brahman aufzugehen, wo dann eine persönliche Entität nicht mehr besteht. Das ist mit der christlichen Vorstellung vom Jüngsten Tag nicht vereinbar, die besagt, dass alle Menschen an einem Tag auferstehen und vom himmlischen Richter beurteilt oder verurteilt werden. Je nach Gottesspruch kann man dann als persönliche Entität die Freuden des Himmels genießen oder muss bis in alle Ewigkeit die Qualen der Hölle erleiden.

Aber nicht alle Hindus glauben an Kastenwesen oder Karma. Mahatma Gandhi hat die sogenannten Unberührbaren als Gotteskinder bezeichnet und diesen Bann damit aufgehoben. Auch im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung und Globalisierung verliert der Kasten- und Karmaglaube immer mehr an Bedeutung. Die atheistischen Hindus glauben an so etwas ohnehin nicht.

Damit komme ich zum Atheismus im Hinduismus.

Im Hinduismus gab es große weise Männer und Frauen, die Atheisten waren und als solche respektiert wurden. So bricht sogar dem Gott Krishna kein Zacken aus der Krone, wenn er den Atheisten Kapilmuni als den Größten unter den weisen Männern bezeichnet. Es gab eine große Atheisten-Bewegung, die als Lokayata bezeichnet wird. An den Höfen großer Könige wurden öffentliche Diskussionen zwischen Atheisten und Deisten geführt. Diese Schule war vom 6. Jahrhundert vor unserer Zeitrechnung bis ins Mittelalter lebendig, wurde aber von den gottesgläubigen Brahmanen - also der Priesterklasse, die um ihre Macht bangte - fast vollständig eliminiert. Ihre Bücher wurden vernichtet. Das erinnert mich an die Verbrennung der Bibliothek von Alexandria im Jahre 391 durch die katholische Kirche.

Hindus betrachten den Buddhismus als einen Teil des Hinduismus, und Buddhismus ist bekanntlich eine atheistische Religion. Aber darauf komme ich später zurück. Die Mehrzahl der Hindus ist polytheistisch eingestellt. Die polytheistischen Religionen sind in der Regel toleranter als die monotheistischen. Wenn man nämlich an tausende Götter glaubt,

ist ein weiterer nur willkommen. So gibt es Hindutempel, in denen sogar ein Bildnis von Christus hängt. Auch die Schriften des Korans werden ausgelegt. Mahatma Gandhi sprach jeden Abend vor einer großen Menschenversammlung Abendgebete verschiedener Religionen aus, auch christliche und islamische.

Meine Damen und Herren!

Können Sie sich so etwas in einer christlichen Kirche vorstellen? Dabei redet die Kirche doch andauernd über den Dialog der Religionen.

Auch bei den alten Griechen existierten mehrere Glaubensgemeinschaften, die friedlich miteinander lebten. Die griechische Religion war ebenfalls polytheistisch. Die Monotheisten erlauben sich diesen Luxus der Toleranz nicht. Es steht nämlich geschrieben: „Ich bin Gott, Dein HERR. Du sollst keine fremden Götter neben mir haben“.

Oder Jesus sprach: „Ich bin der Weg und die Wahrheit! Wer meine Worte hört und mir nicht folgt, bei dem wird Heulen und Zähneklappern sein!“

So kann man viele Bibelstellen zitieren, um zu belegen, dass sich die Intoleranz hier zuhause fühlt.

Beim Koran ist es gleichfalls nicht anders.

Missionieren unter Andersgläubigen ist dem Hinduismus fremd, schon alleine wegen der Einstellung: „Solange Du Deine Pflicht tust, ist es egal was Du glaubst“.

Ich denke, ich habe damit die wichtigsten Unterschiede erfasst.

Was ist aber der Hinduismus dann?

Dazu ist zuerst ein kurzer Ausflug in die Entstehungsgeschichte des Hinduismus angezeigt.

Vor etwa 4.000 Jahren wanderten indogermanische Nomaden in Indien ein und wurden im Indusgebiet sesshaft. Als Nomaden hatten sie nicht viele Götter nötig. Mit der fortschreitenden Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft und dem allmählichen Entstehen einer Städtkultur und der damit einhergehenden Berufsvervielfältigung, wurden zu diversen Zwecken neue Gottheiten gebraucht. Gleiches ist im Christentum zu beobachten, wo Heilige und Schutzengel das Patronat für verschiedene Berufszweige, Katastrophen, Wünsche etc. übernahmen. Im Laufe der Zeit wurden die vielen mächtigen Götter durch andere Götter ersetzt. Diese Periode wird als Vedismus bezeichnet. Vedas waren die ersten heiligen Bücher der Inder. Für die vielen Götter benötigte man auch eine Vermittlerklasse – also Priester –, die im Hinduismus als Brahmanen bezeichnet wurden. Da sie ein Monopol auf die Göttervermittlung hatten, war ihre Autorität sehr groß. Als Widerstand gegen diese Machtfülle entstanden etwa 500 Jahre v.u.Z. atheistische Religionen, wie

Buddhismus und Jainismus, die sich vom Wesen ziemlich ähneln. Diese Periode wird als Brahmanismus bezeichnet, die Periode danach als Hinduismus.

Der Übergang geschah natürlich nicht von heute auf morgen, sondern war ein allmählicher. Die alten Lehren, in welcher Form auch, lebten dabei weiter.

Die Unterteilung in Brahmanismus und Hinduismus wurde von westlichen Experten eingeführt. Die Hindus halten nicht viel davon. So wurden die heiligen Bücher, die um diese Zeit entstanden, auch weiter als heilig betrachtet. Der Übergang vollzog sich also nicht so abrupt, wie z.B. bei den alttestamentarischen Religionen.

Woher kommt die Bezeichnung Hinduismus?

Der Fluss Indus heißt in der indischen Sprache Sindhu. Die Eroberer aus dem persischen Raum hatten mit dem Laut „S“ gewisse Ausspracheschwierigkeiten und machten aus Sindhu Hindu. Die Weltanschauung der am Fluss lebenden Menschen wurde dann Hinduismus genannt.

An dieser Stelle eine kurze Zusammenfassung der Ursprünge und Geschichte des Hinduismus.

Westliche Experten unterscheiden drei allmählich ineinander übergehende Perioden: Vedismus vor 4.000 Jahren, wo die als Heilige Bücher angesehenen Vedas eine große Rolle spielten, dann Brahmanismus, wo die Priesterklasse eine große Machtfülle besaß, und schließlich Hinduismus, wo verschiedene Glaubens- und philosophische Systeme friedlich nebeneinander existieren. Die Hindus selbst machen diese Unterschiede nicht, da das Gedankengut der vedischen und brahmanischen Zeit heute noch aktuell ist.

Wie sehen also die Weltanschauungen der Hindus heute aus?

Zunächst die sechs althergebrachten Denksysteme. Das wird allerdings ziemlich spezifisch. Ich werde aber versuchen, mich dabei kurz zu fassen. Sollten einige an dieser Stelle abschalten wollen, können sie das Gesagte zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt, wenn ihr Interesse und Neugier wieder erwacht sind, in meinem Manuskript nachlesen.

Welches sind nun diese Denksysteme?

1. Samkhya - auf intellektuelles Wissen gestützt.
2. Yoga - auf die Beherrschung der Sinne und inneren Kräfte gestützt.
3. Vaisheshika - der experimentelle und auf sinnliche Erfahrung gestützte Standpunkt.
4. Nyaya - der logische und auf Dialektik gestützte Standpunkt.
5. Vedanta - gestützt auf die metaphysische Komponente.
6. Mimamsa - in wörtlicher Bedeutung „die kritische Erörterung und Lösung eines Problems durch Überlegung“.

Einige der überlieferten Systeme sind insoweit atheistisch, als sie die Existenz eines Schöpfergottes leugnen. Aber anders als der Atheismus des Westens, ist der indische Atheismus nicht notwendigerweise areligiös. Der indische Atheist kann zu einem oder mehreren Göttern beten, die er als einen Teil des Weltalls - nicht als Herr und Schöpfer außerhalb des Universums - betrachtet.

Die meisten Denker des Hinduismus gehen, trotz der Verschiedenheit ihrer Ansichten, von einigen übereinstimmenden Grundvorstellungen, wie Karma, Wiedergeburt, Befreiung und der Einheit hinter aller Vielfalt, aus. Sie teilen auch die Annahme einer fortschreitenden Entfaltung der Welten und Weltsysteme bis hin zu ihrer Auflösung. Für sie ist unsere Erde nur ein winziges Pünktchen in der unbegreiflichen Weite des Raumes, und das menschliche Leben ist nur ein mikroskopischer Tropfen im Ozean der kosmischen Zeit. Im Rahmen immer wiederkehrender kosmischer Perioden wachsen Kulturen und verfallen wieder, biologische Arten erscheinen und verschwinden, große Nationen erheben sich und vergehen, Religionen steigen auf, blühen eine Zeit lang und welken dann dahin. Zeiten der Barbarei und des Krieges wechseln ab mit Zeiten des Wohlstandes und des Friedens. Diese weite Sicht ermöglicht dem indischen Denker eine distanzierte Lebensauffassung und die Einsicht in die relative Bedeutungslosigkeit und Vergänglichkeit aller Dinge und Lebewesen. Diese Art von Auffassung steht natürlich im absoluten Widerspruch zu den heliozentrischen und anthropozentrischen Ansichten des Christentums, nach denen die Erde und der Mensch der Mittelpunkt des Kosmos sind. Das Wort für Philosophie in Sanskrit heißt „Darshana“, was mit „Sehen“, „Wahrheitsschau“ oder „Gesichtspunkt“ gleichgesetzt werden kann. Deswegen sind schon vor mehreren tausend Jahren die unterschiedlichsten Denkschulen entstanden; davon, wie bereits erwähnt, auch einige atheistische.

Schon in früheren Zeiten war es üblich, dass Philosophen regelmäßige öffentliche Diskussionen mit den Angehörigen anderer Schulen führten. So konnte sich keines der großen Systeme isoliert vom anderen entwickeln. Diese geistige Offenheit und Lernbereitschaft erklärt die Toleranz gegenüber anderen Standpunkten und die ausformulierten und spitzfindigen Lehrsätze in weiten Bereichen der indischen Philosophie. Obwohl diese orthodoxen Systeme nicht alle zur gleichen Zeit entstanden sind, blieben sie über Jahrhunderte ohne Rivalität nebeneinander lebendig, und auch im modernen Indien haben sie ihre Anhänger.

(Keiner sagte: „Willst Du nicht mein Bruder sein, so schlage ich Dir den Schädel ein.“)

Ich kann diese sechs orthodoxen Systeme hier nicht ausführlich behandeln. Das würde den uns heute gestellten Rahmen sprengen. Aber

wenn die Ausführungen einen Sinn machen sollen, muss ich doch einiges erwähnen, was für Manchen strapaziös sein mag.

Zunächst die Samkhya-Schule.

Es ist System des dualistischen Realismus, im Gegensatz zu monoistischen Upanishaden, die während des Brahmanismus entstanden sind und von einer Weltseele ausgehen. Nach der Samkhya-Schule gibt es ein Geist- und ein Materie-Prinzip. Das letztere heißt „Prakriti“, wörtlich die Natur oder Materie. Vom psychologischen Standpunkt aus ist es in den einzelnen Lebewesen als Intellekt, einer Entwicklungsstufe der Materie, präsent. Diese beiden Prinzipien sind ewig. Diese Vorstellung kommt ohne Schöpfergott aus, weil die Natur die angemessene Ursache der Weltentstehung ist.

Die zweite Schule ist die Vaishashika.

Diese ähnelt in manchem Aspekt dem Buddhismus, Jainismus und dem griechischen Atomismus. Sie geht von der Vorstellung aus, dass alles auf der Welt – bis auf die Seele - sich aus verschiedenen Kombinationen von Atomen zusammensetzt, also aus ungeschaffenen, unsichtbaren, ewigen Einheiten, die zurückbleiben, wenn ein Gegenstand auf seine kleinsten Bestandteile zurückgeführt wird. Also auch hier ist ein Weltenschöpfer nicht notwendig, obwohl er später sekundär, durch eine Hintertür, eingeführt wurde. Dieser Schöpfer hat aber keine Ähnlichkeit mit dem christlichen Schöpfer, der ja alles schuf, auch die Materie. In dieser Lehre ist aber die Materie ewig. Ewig ist auch die Weltenseele, die aus der bestehenden Materie immer wieder neue Welten entstehen lässt.

Auch Mimamsa ist ein atheistisches Denksystem und heißt wörtlich: „Lösung der Probleme durch Überlegungen“. Nach dieser Lehre ist die Welt ewig. Sie hat immer bestanden. Es gibt nur einen endlosen Vorgang des Entstehens und des Sterbens. Es gibt so viele Seelen, wie Körper. Das Bewusstsein gehört nicht wesensmäßig zur Seele. Es entsteht nur, wenn die Seele mit einem Körper verbunden ist.

Nyaya ist ein System des logischen Realismus. Es ist eine Philosophie für das Leben. Es benutzt die Logik, um das Wahre vom Falschen zu unterscheiden. Gott wird in diesem System nicht genannt.

Auf die beiden letzten Systeme, Vedanta und Yoga, möchte ich hier nicht eingehen. Sie sind zu umfangreich und ein Sammelsurium von verschiedenen Systemen, in denen Monismus, Dualismus, Deismus und vieles Andere vorkommt.

Trotz dieser aufgeklärten philosophischen Systeme tummeln sich im Hinduismus tausende Götter. Die große Mehrzahl der Hindus ist göttergläubig, obwohl das nicht zwingend ist. Um das zu begreifen, müssen wir uns mit dem Thema „Die Wege der Erlösung“ befassen.

Erlösung bedeutet im Hinduismus die Befreiung aus dem Zyklus der Wiedergeburt. Grob gesehen kann man die Wege dahin in fünf Hauptgruppen aufteilen. Diese sind:

1. Weg der magischen Riten.
2. Weg der leiblich-seelischen Übungen – nämlich Yoga.
3. Weg der Werke, oder Karma, die die Wiedergeburt in einem höheren oder niederen Lebewesen bestimmen.
4. Weg der Gottesliebe und Anbetung.
5. Weg des Wissens, der Erkenntnis und Einsicht.

Ich gehe nur auf die letzten beiden ein, da sie für uns eher wichtig sind. Zunächst der Weg des Wissens. Er ist der schwierigste. Die Menschen haben unterschiedliche intellektuelle Kapazitäten. Dieser Weg sei für intellektuell Hochstehende bestimmt, so sagte es bereits Gott Krishna im Bhagwat-Gita. Die große Masse aber sei geeignet für Gottesliebe und Gottesanbetung, da konsequentes Nachdenken sehr anstrengend ist. Ich glaube, diese Erkenntnis beschränkt sich nicht nur auf Hinduismus, sondern hat Gültigkeit in allen Kulturkreisen. Wir brauchen ja nur das Verhalten unserer Mitmenschen zu beobachten und zu analysieren. Trotz Widersprüchen, logisch nicht haltbarer Annahmen, suchen viele Menschen Trost und Erlösung bei einem hypothetischen Gott. Vielleicht kennen einige von Ihnen das Buch „Pfaffenspiegel“. Darin fragt der Autor Otto von Corvin im Jahre 1844, wie es wohl kommt, dass ungeachtet offensichtlicher Fälschungen, Irreführungen, unhaltbarer Annahmen, Widersprüche, Grausamkeiten, Ungerechtigkeiten usw. so viele Menschen gläubig sind? Er selbst gibt dann die Antwort und erklärt dieses Phänomen mit der Dummheit und Denkfaulheit der meisten Menschen. Die Zeiten haben sich aber geändert!

Der heutige Mensch fragt viel häufiger nach dem Wieso und Warum. Er akzeptiert nicht mehr bedingungslos die Antworten von Autoritäten wie Papst, Bischof oder Kaiser. Der blinde Glauben an die Worte in der Heiligen Schrift schwindet. Die Zahl der Konfessionslosen nimmt zu. Die Zahl der Menschen, die zwar aus verschiedenen Gründen Mitglieder der Kirche sind, aber mit der Kirche nichts am Hut haben, nimmt ebenfalls zu. Die Gottesdienste sind nicht gut besucht. Eigenartigerweise werden die Kirchen eher von Frauen heimgesucht, obwohl die Bibel mit frauenfeindlichen Zitaten übersät ist. Wie sagte doch Franz Buggle: „Denn sie wissen nicht, was sie glauben!“

Ich komme nun zum Schluss. Vielleicht noch eine kurze Bemerkung über das Thema „Heilige Kuh“. Als die nomadischen Indogermanen vor etwa 4.000 Jahren in Indien sesshaft wurden und Landwirtschaft betrieben, war der Bedarf an Zugtieren sehr groß. Stiere und Ochsen waren sehr gefragt, ebenso die Kuh, die Milch lieferte. Also mussten diese Tiere geschont werden. Schlaue Dichter kürten die Kuh zum Lieblingstier vom

Gott Krischna, die damit heilig gesprochen wurde. Die Ursache ist längst vergessen, die Wirkung aber geblieben. Ähnliche Phänomene sind bei allen Religionen zu finden.

Meine Damen und Herren!

Ich bin auf die vielfältige Götterwelt der Hindus und die beiden Epen, Mahabharata und Ramayana, die etwa 400 Jahre v.u.Z. entstanden sind, nicht eingegangen. Wenn Bedarf danach besteht, erzähle ich mehr darüber in der Diskussion. Für Hindus haben sie eine enorme Bedeutung. Viele halten sich noch heute an diese Richtlinien, die in diesen Büchern erwähnt sind. Der Gott Vishnu nimmt darin eine Menschengestalt an, um die Welt vom Bösen zu befreien. In Mahabharata ist es der Gott Krischna und im Ramayana Rama. Allerdings sind auch hier viele Widersprüche vorhanden. So besaß der Gott Krischna mehr als tausend Frauen und hatte freie sexuelle Beziehungen zu den Dorf-Frauen, wovon viele verheiratet gewesen sein dürften. In Ramayana wird für die Monogamie plädiert. Aber den Durchschnitts-Hindu-Gläubigen stört das wenig, er denkt nicht nach, sondern glaubt.

Sie sehen, meine Damen und Herren, Hinduismus ist ein Sammelsurium von unterschiedlichsten Denk- und Glaubenssystemen. Auch heute gibt es die widersprüchlichsten Auffassungen und Aussagen. So sprach sich z.B Mahatma Gandhi für sexuelle Enthaltensamkeit aus, während Rajnish eine freie sexuelle Entfaltung empfiehlt. Die einen glauben an einen Gott, andere wiederum an mehrere Götter oder an gar keinen Gott. Da es aber keine festen Vorschriften gibt, ist ein Wandel mit der Zeit, auf Grundlage der Flexibilität, möglich. So wird Hinduismus wahrscheinlich länger existieren als dogmatisch festgelegte Religionen, die sich Denkkonzessionen nur im begrenzten Rahmen erlauben können. Allerdings wird der Hinduismus in 500 Jahren mit dem Hinduismus von heute oder dem vor drei- oder viertausend Jahren nur noch wenig gemeinsam haben. Die Bezeichnung, das Wort Hinduismus könnte gleich bleiben, aber der Inhalt wird ein völlig anderer sein. Hinduismus ist wie ein Gefäß, das Wasser, aber auch Wein enthalten kann. Das Glas bleibt, der Inhalt muss aber nicht derselbe sein.

Auf Grund dieser Erkenntnis habe ich folgende deterministische Regeln aufgestellt:

1. Alle Religionen haben sich irgendwann einmal überlebt und vergehen wieder.
2. Dogmatische Religionen verschwinden eher, als dogmatisch nicht festgelegte.
3. Je dogmatischer eine Religion ist, desto schneller wird sie eingehen.

4. Das Verschwinden der Religionen wird schneller vonstatten gehen, als man denkt, da die Rate der gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen sich zunehmend beschleunigt.

5. Dogmatische Religionen werden an ihren eigenen Waffen sterben. Als Beispiel hierfür stehen die christliche Sexual-Moral und weitere Verbote, die die Natürlichkeit der Menschen unterdrücken.

Vielen Dank.

V. J. Patel, 1.4.2006

Hinduismus

Der Begriff Hindu kommt von den Persern, die so die am anderen Ufer des Indus lebenden Menschen beschrieben. Moderne Hindus ziehen den Begriff Sanatana Dharma zur Beschreibung ihrer Religion vor. Dies kann mit "Ewiges Leben" übersetzt werden. Manche Hindus glauben, daß ihr heiliges Gesetz nur in Indien praktiziert werden kann. Die Überquerung des Kalapani, des schwarzen Ozeans, glauben sie, würde sie unrein und unfähig zum Leben als Hindus machen. Andere teilen diese Ansicht nicht. In den letzten hundert Jahren sind viele Hindus hauptsächlich aus wirtschaftl. Gründen aus Indien abgewandert. Die Gemeinschaft der ca. 1 400 000 000 erstreckt sich heute von Ostafrika bis Kanada, von Europa bis in die U.S.A. Trotz einer gr. Vielfalt innerhalb ihrer Religion teilen die meisten Hindus einen Grundbestand an Vorstellungen und anerkennen traditionelle Wege zur Erkenntnis der letztgültigen Wirklichkeit. Die meisten Hindus anerkennen die Autorität der alten Schriften, als Weden bekannt, die gesellschaftliche Viergliederung und die Berufsgruppen, Kasten oder Dschatis genannt, die sich erst später bildeten. Sie glauben, daß ihr Leben von Samsara regiert wird, was wie im Buddhismus übersetzt einen Kreislauf von Geburt, Tod und Wiedergeburt bedeutet. Weiters glauben sie, daß die Seele (Atman) bis zu ihrer Erlösung (Mokschar) wiedergeboren wird. Der allumfassende Geist und die letztgültige Wirklichkeit, der christl. Vorstellung eines unkörperl. Geistes näher als einer personifizierten Gottheit, ist Brahman. Er bestimmt die Geburt, Wachstum, Verfall und Erneuerung und gibt somit dem Weltall Ordnung und Rhythmus. Das höchste Ziel eines Hindus ist es, Mokschar, die pers. Befreiung von Samsara zu erlangen. Dies kann durch Dharma erreicht werden. Dies bedeutet in diesem Zusammenhang als Befolgung eines hl. Gesetzes, was die Ausführung bestimmter Rituale (Gebete, Kult) und ein moralisches Verhalten sich selbst der Familie und der Gesellschaft gegenüber erfordert. Darüber hinaus anerkennen Hindus eine Anzahl bestimmter traditionelle Wege zur Befreiung. Der Weg der Hingabe (Bhakti) erfordert keine fachmännische Hilfe eines Priesters oder Gurus (geistl. Lehrers), und ist die einfachste Weise, die Einheit der Seele zu erfahren. Der Weg des Handelns (Karma) fordert von den Hindus, sich selbstlos Gedanken zu machen um zu handeln. Der einfachste Weg dies zu erreichen besteht darin, einen Beruf zu ergreifen, der sowohl der Gesellschaft als auch dem Einzelnen nützt. Der Weg der Erkenntnis (Dschinana) muß von einem Guru erlernt werden, der aus den hl. Schriften das Wesen Brahmans, Atmans und des Universums, so wie den Platz des Menschen darin Erklären kann. Ein klares Verstehen diese alten Wissens führt zur Sprengung der an die materielle Welt bindenden Fesseln und zur Erlangung der Freiheit.

Eine weitere Möglichkeit die Seele zur Befreiung zu führen ist Yoga. Yoga ist auch im Westen bekannt, vor allem Hatha - Yoga, das danach trachtet, durch acht Stadien der

körperlichen Übung den höheren Bewußtseinszustand (Samadi) zu erreichen und Ratscha - Yoga, das Körperhaltung, Atemkontrolle, Konzentration und Meditation betont.

Die Hindus messen der Reinheit eine gr. Bedeutung bei - sowohl körperliche Sauberkeit und geistl. Wohlergehen. Vegetarisches Essen ist bei Hindus besonders beliebt, weil es frei von als verunreinigend geltendem Blut ist. Dem selben Impuls entspringt auch die Verehrung der Kuh, gepaart mit dem wirtschaftl. Nutzen des Tieres.

Das Kastensystem

Für Millionen von Hindus ist das Kastensystem gesellschaftlicher Gliederung das wichtigste. Die Kaste beeinflusst den politischen Weg, die Wahl des Ehepartners, die Nahrung und andere Belange. Das Wort "Kaste" kommt vom portugiesischen "casta", das Rasse und Art bedeutet. Die Hindus anerkennen vier große gesellschaftliche Kategorien, Warnas (Farben), die in zahllose Berufsgruppen unterteilt sind. Die vier Warnas sind in der Reihenfolge:

Brahmanen (Priester, Geistesarbeiter)
Kschatrijas (Herrscher, Verwalter, Krieger)
Waischas (Bauern, Kaufleute)
Schudras (Handwerker)

Um 1000 v. Chr. wurde dieser 4-fachen Gliederung eine fünfte Gruppe hinzugefügt, nämlich die Menschen, die gezwungen wurden, die unreinen Tätigkeiten, wie das Gerben von Leder oder die Entfernung toter Tiere, auszuführen. Diese Nichtarier lebten in speziellen Bereichen, weit entfernt von den Ariern. Sogar heute noch gibt es diese Form der Absonderung. Früher wurde diese fünfte Gruppe "die Unberührbaren" genannt, im 20. Jahrhundert nannte der große Hindureformer Mahatma Ghandi sie "Kinder Gottes". Doch sie ziehen es heute vor, sich "Unterdrückte" zu nennen.

Ab etwa 300 v. Chr. entwickelten sich Berufsgruppen. Mit der Zeit brachten diese unverwechselbare Bräuche und strenge Regeln hervor, die die Heirat zwischen und das Essen mit angehörigen anderer Kasten verboten. Heute gibt es Tausende Berufsgruppen. Im modernen Indien beruht die Handhabung der Kasten hauptsächlich auf dem vorher erwähnten Punkt der rituellen Reinheit. Hindus glauben, sie können durch Kontakt und von einem Mitglied einer unteren Kasten gekochtem Essen verunreinigt werden. Heutzutage ist die Diskriminierung aufgrund von Unberührbarkeit seit 1950 illegal, die "Unberührbaren" haben durch reservierte Ausbildungs- und Arbeitsplätze bessere Möglichkeiten erhalten. Doch trotz der offiziellen Versuche, eine gerechte Gesellschaft zu schaffen, bleibt die Kaste wichtig, besonders bezüglich der Ehe auf dem Land, wo diese Diskriminierung andauert.

Die Durchbrechung des Kreislaufes

Obwohl die Kastenzugehörigkeit eines Menschen während seines Lebens nicht verändert werden kann, kann der Wechsel in eine andere Kaste bei einer zukünftigen Wiedergeburt geschehen. Dies hängt vom Karma eines Menschen ab. Das bedeutet einerseits "Handeln", andererseits auch "die guten oder schlechten jeder geistigen oder körperlichen Tätigkeit". Mit anderen Worten: Jede Seele kann im Laufe einer Reihe von Leben das Ziel der Befreiung (Mokka) erreichen, in dem sie den Samsara - Kreislauf durch pflichtbewußte , selbstlose Handlungen durchbricht

Der folgende Aufsatz beschreibt den Wandel in der Kastenfrage, den der Indiens Freiheitskämpfer und Staatsoberhaupt Gandhi durchmachte.

HOW GANDHI CAME TO BELIEVE CASTE MUST BE DISMANTLED BY INTERMARRIAGE

Mark Lindley

Many a colleague of Gandhi's observed that he was greater than his writings would suggest. He himself said that they should be cremated with his body because there was a grave risk that people would swear by them.*1 [To find the footnote, search ahead for "*1".] He also said, in 1945, that as a seeker after truth he had many times in his life found himself in the wrong and therefore changed.*2 In this article I would like to trace, mainly from evidence in the writings, how his ideas about varna and intermarriage changed gradually over the years. The biggest changes in this regard took place in his 60s and 70s, when most people's opinions become ossified.

Not very long after returning for good from South Africa, Gandhi had proposed to reduce the castes to the four varnas, while nonetheless maintaining inherited vocations:

[1] 1920: "I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion, the better....

"One of my correspondents suggests that we should abolish the caste [system] but adopt the class system of Europe - meaning thereby, I suppose, that the idea of heredity in caste should be rejected. I am inclined to think that the law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead us, as it has before led [others], to utter confusion.... If Hindus believe, as they must believe, in reincarnation [and] transmigration, they must know that Nature will, without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a Brahmin, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division, and translating one who lives the life of a Brahmin in his present incarnation to Brahminhood in his next. (C, XIX, 83f)

[2] 1920: "The beauty of the caste system is that it does not base itself upon distinctions of wealth-possessions. Money, as history has proved, is the greatest disruptive force in the world.... Caste is but an extension of the principle of the family. Both are governed by blood and heredity. Western scientists are busy trying to prove that heredity is an illusion and that milieu is everything. The... experience of many lands goes against the conclusions of these scientists; but even accepting their doctrine of milieu, it is easy to prove that milieu can be conserved and developed more through caste than through class.... As we all know, change comes very slowly in social life, and thus, as a matter of fact, caste has allowed new groupings to suit the changes in lives. But these changes are [as] quiet and easy as a change in the shape of the clouds. It is difficult to imagine a better harmonious human adjustment.

"Caste does not connote superiority or inferiority. It simply recognizes different outlooks and corresponding modes of life. But it is no use denying the fact that a sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste system, but it cannot be called the creation of the Brahmins. When all castes accept a common [religious] goal of life, a hierarchy is inevitable, because all castes cannot realize the ideal in equal degree." (C, XIX, 174ff)

[3] 1921-22: "I believe that if Hindu society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the caste system.... A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique power of organization....

"To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system. [The] hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder.... It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into a Brahmin. The caste system is a natural order of society.... I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system." (A, IX, 275f)

[4] 1926: "In accepting the fourfold division I am simply accepting the laws of Nature, taking for granted what is inherent in human nature and the law of heredity.... [But] it is not possible in one birth entirely to undo the results of our past doings." (C, XXIX, 410f)

So ugly did he find Western-style competition that he would prohibit anyone who acquired a skill other than his "hereditary" one from earning a living by the new one:

[5] 1925: "There is no harm if a person belonging to one varna acquires the knowledge or science and art specialized in by persons belonging to other varnas. But as far as the way of earning his living his concerned, he must follow the occupation of the varna to which he belongs, which means he must follow the hereditary profession of his forefathers.

"The object of the varna system is to prevent competition and class struggle and class war. I believe in the varna system because it fixes the duties and occupations of persons.... Varna means the determination of a man's occupation before he is born.... In the varna system no man has any liberty to choose his occupation." (A, IX, 277) From the mid-1920s on, he would complement this by downplaying the idea (set out at the end of Reading 2 that "a hierarchy is inevitable":

[6] 1925: "For me there is no question of superiority or inferiority. A Brahmin who regards himself as a superior being born to look down upon the other castes is not a Brahmin. If he is first [in status] he is so by right of [spiritual] service." (C, XXVI, 289)

[7] 1927: "In [my] conception of the law of varna no one is superior to any other.... A scavenger has the same status as a Brahmin." (C, XXXV, 260)

In 1931, he met Ambedkar, and an incipient influence seems evident already in some nuances and new points in the following statements:

[8] 1931: "I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies.... We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.

"I do however believe in varna which is based on hereditary occupations. Varnas are four to mark four universal occupations - imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce, and performing service [to other humans] through physical labor. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the law of varna.*3

"[Yet] according to my definition of varna there is no varna in operation at present in Hinduism. The so-called Brahmins have ceased to impart knowledge. They take to various other occupations. This is more or less true of the other varnas." (C, XLVI, 302)

[9] 1932: "My own opinion is that the varna system has just now broken down. There is no true Brahmin or true Kshatriya or Vaishya. We are all Shudras, i.e. one varna. If this position is accepted, then the thing becomes easy. If this does not satisfy our vanity, then we are all Brahmins. Removal of untouchability does mean root-and-branch destruction of the idea of superiority and inferiority." (C, LI, 199f)

[10] 1932: "No matter what was the position in ancient times, no one can nowadays go through life claiming to belong to a high class. Society will not willingly admit any such claim to superiority, but only under duress. The world is now wide awake....

"When it is suggested that everyone should practice his father's profession, the suggestion is coupled with the condition that the practitioner of every profession will earn only a living wage and no more.... The lawyer or doctor ought by practicing his profession to earn only a living wage. And such was actually the case formerly....

"Boys [between 9 and 16 years of age] should be taught their parents' avocation in such a way that they will by their own choice obtain their livelihood by practicing the hereditary craft. This does not

apply to the girls.... [From] 16 to 25..., every young person should have an education according to his or her wishes and circumstances." (C, L, 233)

Ambedkar did not welcome such arguments:

[11] 1933, Ambedkar: "There will be outcastes as long as there are castes, and nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system."

Gandhi: "Dr. Ambedkar is bitter. He has every reason to feel so.... [Yet] I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from varnashrama, to be an 'odious and vicious dogma'. It has its limitations and defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and if [untouchability] is a by-product of the system, it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop." (T, III, 192f).

Gandhi admitted that his ideal of a varna system with everyone enjoying equal economic and social status probably had no historical warrant:

[12] 1934, Interviewer: "Do you not think that in ancient India there was much difference in economic status and social privileges between the four varnas?"

Gandhi: "That may be historically true. But misapplication or an imperfect understanding of the law must not lead to the ignoring of the law itself. By constant striving we have to enrich the inheritance left to us." (C, LIX, 319).

The contrast between Gandhi's and Ambedkar's views was heightened by their respective relations to the new Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, dedicated to promoting a casteless Hinduism. Gandhi told its secretary:

[13] 1932: "If eradication of castes means the abolition of varna I do not approve of it. But I am with you if your aim is to end the innumerable caste distinctions." (C, LI, 264)

Yet Ambedkar and the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal between them apparently caused the tone of Gandhi's statements to change somewhat more. In 1935 Gandhi said:

[14] 1935: "Caste Has To Go. Varnashrama of the shastras is today nonexistent in practice. The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.

"...Prohibition there is [in varnashrama] of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing practice is therefore doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about interdining and intermarriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation....

"The most effective, quickest and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and, where necessary, take the consequences of social boycott. The change will be gradual and imperceptible." (C, LXII, 121f) In 1936 the Mandal invited Ambedkar to preside at their annual convention. However, upon seeing the typescript of his proposed presidential address, in which he not only outlined a comprehensive program of Hindu reform including the selection of priests by state examinations rather than by heredity, but also implied that he would probably leave Hinduism altogether, they asked him to modify the text. He refused; they cancelled the convention; and his speech was published independently. Here is a brief excerpt:

[15] 1936, Ambedkar: "The mass of people [in India have] tolerated the social evils to which they have been subjected... [because they] have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched system of chaturvarnya. They could not bear arms and without arms they could not rebel.*4 ...They could receive no education, [so] they could not think out or know the way to their salvation.... Not knowing the way of escape and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate...." (A, I, 63)

Gandhi invited Ambedkar to express his views in Harijan. Ambedkar declined but Gandhi called attention to them anyway, and commented:

[16] 1936: "Dr. Ambedkar... has quoted chapter and verse in proof of his... indictment. ...No Hindu who prizes his faith above life itself can afford to underrate the importance of this indictment.... [Yet there

are] flaws in [it]....

"Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know.... Varna [has] nothing to do with castes. The law of varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling.... The essence of Hinduism is contained [however] in its enunciation of the one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of ahimsa as the law of the human family. "I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many besides Dr. Ambedkar. That does not affect my position. In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out [1] texts of doubtful authenticity and value and [2] the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith.... Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail [to be found worthy of acceptance]." (C, LXIII, 135 and 153f)

Ambedkar responded with a virtuoso display of academic and barrister-like disputation. It is almost a pity merely to print the following long extracts; they ought rather to be delivered by a powerful actor in a dramatic setting:

[17] 1936, Ambedkar: "The first point made by the Mahatma is that the texts cited by me are not authentic. I confess I am no authority on the matter. But... the texts cited by me are all taken from the writings of... a recognized authority on the Sanskrit language and on the Hindu shastras.... The masses... are too illiterate to know the contents of the shastras. They have believed what they have been told, and what they have been told is that the shastras do enjoin as a religious duty the observance of caste and untouchability.

"...The saints... did not preach that all men were equal. They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God*5 - a very different and a very innocuous proposition which nobody can find difficult to preach or dangerous to believe in.... [Moreover,] the masses have been taught that a saint might break caste but the common man must not....

"That religion should be judged not by its worst specimens but by its best is true enough, but does it dispose of the matter? I say it does not. The question still remains - why the worst number so many and the best so few. To my mind there are two conceivable answers to this question: (1) that the worst by reason of some original perversity of theirs are morally uneducable and are therefore incapable of making the remotest approach to the religious ideal; or (2) that the religious ideal is a wholly wrong ideal which has given a wrong moral twist to the lives of the many, and that the best have become best in spite of the wrong ideal - in fact by giving to the wrong a twist, a turn in the right direction. Of these two explanations I am not prepared to accept the first.... To my mind the second is the only logical and reasonable explanation unless the Mahatma has a third alternative to explain why the worst are so many and the best so few. If the second is the only explanation then obviously the argument of the Mahatma that a religion should be judged by its best followers carries us nowhere except to pity the lot of the many who have gone wrong because they have been made to worship wrong ideals.

"...The Mahatma seems to me to suggest... that Hindu society can be made tolerable and even happy without any fundamental change in its structure if all the high-caste Hindus can be persuaded to follow a high standard of morality in their dealing with the low-caste Hindus. I am totally opposed to this kind of ideology. I can respect those of the caste Hindus who try to realize a high social ideal in their life. Without such men India would be an uglier and a less happy place to live in than it is. But nonetheless anyone who relies on an attempt to turn... caste Hindus into better men by improving their personal character is in my judgement wasting his energy and hugging an illusion. Can personal character make the maker of armaments a good man, i.e. a man who will sell shells that will not burst*6 and gas that will not poison? If it cannot, how can you expect personal character to make a man loaded with a consciousness of caste a good man, i.e. a man who would treat his fellows as his... kinsmen and equals? As a matter of fact, a Hindu does treat all those who are not of his caste as though they were aliens, who could be discriminated against with impunity and against whom any fraud or trick may be practiced without shame. This is to say that there can be a better or a worse Hindu, but a good Hindu there cannot be. This is not because there is anything wrong with his personal character. In fact what is wrong is the entire basis of his relationship to his fellows....

"...Does the Mahatma practice what he preaches? One does not like to make personal reference in an argument which is general in its application. But when one preaches a doctrine and holds it as a dogma, there is a curiosity to know how far he practices what he preaches.... The Mahatma is a Bania by birth. His ancestors had abandoned trading in favor of ministership which is a calling of the Brahmins. In his own life, before he became a mahatma, when occasion came for him to choose his career he preferred law to scales. On abandoning law he became half saint and half politician. He has never touched trading which is his ancestral calling. His youngest son... has married a Brahmin's daughter and has chosen to serve a newspaper magnate. The Mahatma is not known to have

condemned him for not following his ancestral calling. It may be wrong and uncharitable to judge an ideal by its worst specimens. But surely the Mahatma as a specimen has no better and if even he fails to realize the ideal then the ideal must be an impossible ideal quite opposed to the practical instincts of man....

"Why does the Mahatma cling to the theory of everyone following his or her ancestral calling? He gives his reasons nowhere [nowadays; but]... years ago, writing on caste versus class in his *Young India*, he argued [Reading 2] that the caste system was better than the class system on the ground that caste was the best possible adjustment of social stability. If that be the reason why the Mahatma clings to the theory of everyone following his or her ancestral calling, he is clinging to a false view of social life.... Stability is wanted, but not at the cost of change when change is imperative.... Adjustment is wanted, but not at the sacrifice of social justice. Can it be said that the adjustment of social relationship on the basis of caste, i.e. on the basis of each to his hereditary calling, avoids those two evils? I am convinced that it does not. Far from being the best possible adjustment, I have no doubt that it is of the worst possible kind inasmuch as it offends against both the canons of social adjustment - namely fluidity and equity.

"...I must admit that the vedic theory of varna as interpreted by Swami Dayanand and some others is a sensible and an inoffensive thing. It did not admit birth as a determining factor in fixing the place of an individual in society. It only recognized worth. The Mahatma's view of varna... makes nonsense of the vedic varna [and] makes it into an abominable thing. [Vedic] varna and caste are two very different concepts. Varna is based on the principle of each according to his worth, while caste is based on the principle of each according to his birth. The two are as distinct as chalk from cheese.... If the Mahatma believes as he does in everyone following his or her ancestral calling, then most certainly he is advocating the caste system and in calling it the varna system he is... causing confusion....

"Does he regard [his concept of hereditary] varna as the essence of Hinduism? One cannot as yet give any categorical answer. Readers of his article on 'Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment' will answer 'No'. In that article he does not say that the dogma of varna is an essential part of the creed of Hinduism. Far from making varna the essence of Hinduism, he says [Reading 16], 'The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as truth and its bold acceptance of ahimsa as the law of the human family.' But readers of his [other] article... will say 'Yes.' In that article he says [Reading 43], '...I do not know how a person who rejects caste, i.e. varna, can call himself a Hindu.' Why this prevarication? Why does the Mahatma hedge? Whom does he want to please? Has the saint failed to sense the truth? Or does the politician stand in the way of the saint? The real reason why the Mahatma is suffering from this confusion is probably to be traced to two sources. The first is the temperament of the Mahatma. He has almost in everything the simplicity of the child with the child's capacity for self-deception. Like a child he can believe in anything he wants to believe. We must therefore wait till such time as it pleases the Mahatma to abandon his faith in [hereditary] varna as it has pleased him to abandon his faith in caste. The second course of confusion is the double role which the Mahatma wants to play - of a mahatma and a politician. As a mahatma he may be trying to spiritualize politics. Whether he has succeeded in it or not, politics have certainly commercialized him. A politician must know that society cannot bear the whole truth; if he is speaking the whole truth, it is bad for his politics. The reason why the Mahatma is always supporting caste and varna is because he is afraid that if he opposes them he will lose his place in politics. Whatever may be the source of this confusion, the Mahatma must be told that he is deceiving himself and also deceiving the people by preaching caste under the name of varna.

"The Mahatma says that the standards I have applied to test Hindus and Hinduism are too severe.... [However,] my quarrel with Hindus and Hinduism is not over the imperfections of their social conduct. It is much more fundamental. It is over their ideals." (A, I, 87-92)

The immediate effect upon Gandhi of this brilliant and aggressive argument does not seem to have been decisive. Late in 1936 he argued at length in *Harijan* (C, LXIV, 86ff) that his ideal Bhangi would do sanitation work and thus "possibly even excel" a Brahmin in rendering service.

Meanwhile, a younger opponent of caste and varna, Gora, who had been disowned by his own (Brahmin) caste in 1928, and a few years later was dismissed from his job as a college biology teacher for saying that the idea of divine creatures was untrue, began to walk to villages on weekends and during school vacations, speaking out against superstitions, caste and economic inequality. In due time he became a full-time social worker and published freely the views he had been expounding all along, among them:

[18] 1949, Gora: "This thorn-bush [caste] is in our path. It is useless to argue about who put it there, why, and when; the whole thing is against the interest of the people and we must simply remove it." (S, 17/iv)

Gandhi heard about Gora's social work in the early 1940s and invited him to Sevagram when they were released from detention in 1944. He found him courteous, free of fanaticism, and hard-working. Gandhi's view of caste now moved closer to that which Gora shared with Ambedkar. One day after writing a letter (C, LXXX, 221) to a Harijan disciple of Gora's, Gandhi completed a lengthy preface to a new edition of a little book of his from the 1920s, *Varnavyavastha*, which had extolled his ideal varna system. In the new preface, entitled "Key to My Writings," he argued that everyone was now in the same, service-performing varna:

[19] 1945: "I do not have the time to read this book again. I do not even wish to. I have many other things to do.

"In my opinion a man daily moves either forward or backward. He never stands still. The whole world is moving and there is no exception....

"Where are the four varnas of the Gita today?... There prevails only one varna today, that is, of 'Shudras', or, you may call it, 'Ati-Shudras'.... If I can bring round the Hindu society to my view, all our internal quarrels will come to an end....

"A man should consider himself not the owner of his property but its trustee... for the service of society. He will accept only that much for himself as he has earned with his [physical] labor. If that happens, no one will be poor and no one rich. In such a system, all religions will naturally be held equal. Therefore all quarrels arising [today] out of religion, caste and economic differences will be ended.

"This is the swaraj of my dreams. I yearn for that. I want to live for the attainment of it. I am devoting every breath of my life to that effort.

"The reader is therefore requested to discard anything in this book which may appear to him incompatible with my views given above." (C, LXXX, 222ff)

Reading 9 (1932) includes an all-in-one-caste idea, and Gandhi mentioned it several times during the Harijan-uplift tour.*7 The change discussed below in his attitude toward intermarriage meant that he now took the idea far more seriously. It had initially come to him from considering an argument which he had heard soon after returning from South Africa to India:

[20] 1927: "I remember in 1915 the Chairman at the Social Conference in Nellore suggesting that formerly all were Brahmins, and that now too all should be recognized as such and that the other varnas should be abolished. It appeared to me then, as it appears to me now, as a wierd suggestion. It is the so-called superior that has to descend from his heights, if the reform is to be peaceful." (C, XXXV, 262f)

A clear statement of Gandhi's latter-day view of caste - namely, that his cherished ideal of varna must be given up altogether in order to eradicate untouchability - is in the following remark to Gora's prospective son-in-law, who had been born an "untouchable":

[21] 1946: "You should become like Ambedkar. You should work for the removal of untouchability and caste. Untouchability must go at any cost."

An American visitor described Gandhi's view now as follows:

[22] 1946 (as reported): "He said he was trying to create a classless and casteless India. He yearned for the day when there would be only one caste and Brahmins would marry Harijans. 'I am a social revolutionist,' he asserted. 'Violence is bred by inequality, non-violence by equality.'" (F, 425)

As to when that day - a classless and altogether casteless India - might come, his own hope would be to see it dawn within fifty years:

[23] 1946: [Q.] "In your recent correspondence... you have said that caste ought to go root and branch if untouchability is to be completely eradicated.*8 Then, why do you not make anti-untouchability work part of a wider crusade against the caste system itself? If you dig out the root, the branches will wither

by themselves."

[A.] "It is one thing for me to hold certain views and quite another to make my views acceptable in their entirety to society at large. My mind, I hope, is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have therefore to exercise the utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly.... I am wholly in agreement with you in principle. If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view." (C, LXXXV, 24)

He said that to have abolished "all distinctions of class and caste" (in the Indian National Army) was Subhas Chandra Bose's "greatest and lasting act".*9

Yet with all this, and notwithstanding his realization that "when all became casteless..., monopoly of occupations would go" (C, LXXXVI, 484), he might still sometimes - with hedging expressions like "more or less" and "generally" - say that a person who because of an abnormal talent has mastered an occupation other than "the one he is born in" should nevertheless earn his living by "his hereditary occupation" and not by the new one:

[24] 1947 (as reported): "[The] vocational organization of society, held Gandhi, may be vertical and competitive, or horizontal and cooperative. Under the former, remuneration is ...on the basis of the law of supply and demand; in the latter all occupations... are paid equal wages... [and] a person will choose an occupation, not because of the personal prospects it offers, but because he has a special skill or aptitude for it. And since skills and aptitudes generally follow the line of heredity more or less, the average person in the normal course would, if there were no inequalities of remuneration to lure him away from it, tend to follow the occupation he is born in.... Would that mean that one would be debarred from changing his hereditary occupation, if he felt a special urge? 'No,' said Gandhiji, 'not so long as one does not depend on it [the new occupation] for one's living'. Such cases will naturally be few. Thus Buddha was [by heredity] a ruling prince, Socrates a sculptor, St. Paul a tent-maker. Yet Buddha became the Enlightened One, Socrates the prince of philosophers and St. Paul an apostle; but none of them regarded their calling as a means of livelihood." (P, I, 541f)

Had Ambedkar commented on this, he would surely have mentioned the lack of evidence that the Buddha earned his keep exclusively by being a king, St. Paul by making tents and Socrates by sculpting - or that any society pays equal wages to all. Gandhi admitted this latter point:

[25] 1947: "Indian society may never reach the goal [equal wages for all] but it is the duty of every Indian to set his sail towards that goal and no other if India is to be a happy land." (C, LXXXVII, 10)

* * *

A good summary of Gandhi's attitude, until his last years, toward intermarriage is in the following remarks of 1919:

[26] 1919: "Interdining [and] intermarrying, I hold, are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy.... But as time goes forward and new necessities and occasions arise, the custom regarding... interdining and intermarrying will require cautious modifications or rearrangements." (C, XIX, 83f)

In his ashram, interdining with "untouchables" was a corollary to their acceptance in 1915 as members. But for a long time Gandhi took a different stance in regard to Hindu practice at large, and in this regard he was in the early 1920s outspoken against interdining, and intermarriage:

[27] 1921: "Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh so that the spirit may be set free.... Prohibition against interdining and intermarriage is essential to a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of varna." (C, XXI, 247)

[28] 1925, Correspondent: "I was surprised to read in a recent article [your] repudiation of intermarriage between touchables and untouchables...."

Gandhi: "I have repeatedly expressed my view of caste and intermarriage.... I cannot picture to myself a time when all mankind will have one religion. As a rule there will, therefore, be the religious bar; people will marry in their own religion.... The caste restriction is an extension of the same principle. It is a social convenience.... I am opposed to untouchability because it limits the field of service. [But] marriage is not an act of service." (C, XXVI, 285)

By 1928, however, he clearly preferred people to marry across subcaste lines within the same varna. He attended reluctantly the wedding in that year of his son Ramadas and Nirmala, whom he found personally acceptable but who was of the same subcaste; and this was the last such wedding he attended.*10 Three marriages which he later blessed between people in different subcastes of his own varna were those of Rukshmani and Banarasilal (1929), Madalasa and Srimannarayan (1937), and Sharda and Gorhandas (1939). *11 None of these were love matches, and this was, for him, a positive feature. In the late 1920s his son Devdas and a Brahmin girl fell in love; they had to wait for five years before marrying.*12 And when in 1947 Gandhi's nephew Kanu wanted to marry a Brahmin girl, Abha, with whom Gandhi was well acquainted and of whom he approved, he asked them first to live apart for a year (which they did).

His views in the early 1930s were as follows:

[29] 1931: "When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of varna resulted in... unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to intermarriage and interdining. The law of varna has nothing to do with these restrictions. People of different varnas may intermarry and interdine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interest of chastity and hygiene. But a Brahmin who marries a Shudra girl or vice versa commits no offence against the law of varna." (C, XLVI, 302)

[30] 1932: "The ashram will not help to arrange a marriage between members of the same subcaste, and everyone is encouraged to seek his mate outside his own subcaste." (C, L, 213)

He had in 1929 advised a 22-year-old man not in the ashram to insist to his parents that he would marry outside the subcaste, or else marry a widow, rather than accept against his conscience a match with a nine- or ten-year-old girl within the subcaste:

[31] 1929: [Q.] My parents want me to be married this very year.... Child-marriage is the rule [and] in my case... girls of nine or ten years of age only are available [within our sub-caste].... I am... 22 years of age. My parents will not hear of my marrying a widow or outside my caste. What am I to do in the circumstances?'

[A.] "...It has been my experience that when a grown-up boy or girl takes up a just and right position and adheres to it with absolute firmness,... the parents, when once they realize that the resolution of their children is absolutely unalterable,... get reconciled to it. ...My advice... is to refuse to be a party to the... sin of marrying a child-girl.... Consider it a virtue to marry [instead] outside [your] sub-caste or to marry a widow, subject to the necessary limitations." (C, XXXVIII, 431f)

In those days, even more extreme examples of taking a child-bride for the sake of marrying in one's caste were at issue:

[32] 1936, Correspondent: "I draw your attention with great shame to the article 'Surfeit of child-marriages.'... These weddings took place in our... Chaturvedi caste. It is the misfortune of our caste that girls of 2, 2 and 3 years of age are given in marriage.... It must be pointed out that we, the Chaturvedi community, consider ourselves the highest Brahmins. We consider it a sin to eat food cooked even by other Brahmins."

Gandhi: "What else can the marriages... be called than monstrous?... When scriptures are quoted in their favor, the difficulties multiply. However, satyagraha can become a sure means of overcoming all kinds of tyranny." (C, XLII, 439)

The general religious climate was such that when Gandhi was planning in 1932 his Harijan-uplift campaign, he took great care to assure people that he would not campaign for intermarriage or interdining:

[33] 1932: "I should never dream of making this reform [interdining and intermarriage], however desirable in itself it may be, part of an all-India reform [against untouchability] which has been long overdue. Untouchability, in the form we all know it, is a canker eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. Dining and marriage restrictions [merely] stunt Hindu society. I think the distinction is fundamental." (T, III, 180f)

[34] 1932: "I am glad to find that temples in your part of the country are being opened to Harijans. The removal of untouchability does not necessarily include interdining and intermarriage, but it is open to anyone to dine or marry among Harijans. In other words, Harijans should have the same status as the rest of the Hindus in all matters. (C, LI, 237)

[35] 1932: "Mixing up the two problems would jeopardize the success of both. For this reason intermarriage and interdining with untouchables are not an integral feature of removal of untouchability; but their practice is not against religion either." (C, LI, 264)*13

Ten years later he would say: [36] 1942: "When I said that removal of untouchability did not include the removal of restrictions on interdining and intermarriage, I had the general Hindu public in mind, not the Congress workers or Congressmen. These have to abolish untouchability from every part of their life." (C, LXXV, 207)

Meanwhile someone in 1933 had remarked that the tone of Gandhi's statements on interdining and intermarriage had changed quite perceptibly since the early 1920s:

[37] 1933: "A correspondent who is a diligent student of my writings finds it difficult to reconcile my recent writings about intercaste dining and intercaste marriage and [my] corresponding writings of some years ago.... [Yet] the mode of life in the ashram in 1921 was absolutely the same as it is now. Therefore my practice has undergone no change. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh [and therefore good]. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 [see Reading 26] today. Instead of 'prohibition', I should... say, 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul.'" (C, LV, 61)

Now the Jat-Pak-Todek Mandal and Ambedkar led him further. In the second of the following passages, he went so far as virtually to apply to the taboos against interdining and intermarriage an idea which he had for years been applying to untouchability: that Hinduism must shed the evil or else be abandoned:

[38] 1935: "It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of varnashrama was observed [with regard to hereditary occupation], there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own varna." (C, LII, 121)

[39] 1936, Correspondent (from the Mandal): "For all practical purposes, in Hindu society caste and varna are... the same thing, for the function of both of them is... the same, i.e. to restrict intercaste marriages and interdining.... When you advocate your ideal of [varna] they find justification for clinging to caste.... To seek the help of the shastras for the removal of untouchability and caste is simply to wash mud with mud."

Gandhi: "If caste and varna are convertible terms and if varna is an integral part of the shastras which define Hinduism, I do not know how a person who rejects caste i.e. varna can call himself a Hindu. "[Yet] if the shastras support caste as we know it today in all its hideousness, I may not call myself or remain a Hindu, since I have no scruples about interdining or intermarriage." (C, LIII, 225f)

Ambedkar saw that intermarriage would be the structural antidote to the religiously administered social poison that was causing that "hideous" degradation and alienation in modern India:

[40] 1936, Ambedkar: "The real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling... becomes paramount, the separatist feeling - the feeling of being aliens - created by caste will not vanish....

"...The Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman... [but] because they are deeply religious [and] their religion... has inculcated this notion of caste." (A, I, 67f)

It seems to me that this point should be recalled when considering the significance of the reservation system. That was a strong, steroid-like medicine, that is, with harmful side-effects and wanting to be withdrawn gradually when the organism has won the upper hand over the poison - against which intermarriage must be the long-range prophylaxis.

In 1937 Gandhi hinted at the possibility of advocating inter-varna marriages, in the course of discussing with some members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh a proposal that they "give a place to Harijans in their homes, receive Harijans in the same way as they would receive others, seek opportunities to eat with them... [and] bring up some Harijan children:"

[41] 1937, Vallabhbhai Patel: "This proposal justifies the fear of the sanataniists.... From removal of untouchability you want to proceed step by step to intermarriage." (Laughter)

Gandhi: "For ordinary people, removal of untouchability is enough. But, for you, mere touch is not enough. You must continue to proceed further...."

"The Hindu masses still follow quite a few restrictive practices in the matter of inter-dining and intermarriage. [And] even I have followed certain restrictions in this [latter] regard. That is why I have not spoken to the masses about these.

"But if I suggest to you that you should go to the extent of inter-dining and intermarrying with Harijans I would not be violating truth.... You have really not much control in the matter of intermarriage. You should certainly not bring compulsion on your children in this matter. Inter-dining is a different matter. If your mother says that it is irreligion, you must tell her that you would take the food cooked by her as well as by an untouchable, and it would not matter that you were forsaken by her on that account." (C, LXV, 134f)

In 1940 he publicly approved of a high-caste Hindu lad who married a Harijan girl after overcoming the reluctance of their parents:*14

[42] 1940, Correspondent: "Shri Radhamadhab Mitra married a Harijan girl on 4th March last, strictly according to Hindu rites with Brahmin priests, and the ceremony was attended by about one thousand people of all castes and communities. Radhamadhab is aged about 25. When he was a student he organized a Harijan boys' football team. During your epic fast for Harijans, Radhamadhab with some of his friends lived in a Harijan village, and during that period he and his friends promised to marry Harijan girls. His friends forgot their promise but Radhamadhab carried it out. When the proposal for marriage with a Harijan girl was first made, all the relatives and friends used all sorts of pressure to dissuade Radhamadhab from his resolve. When he first consulted me, I depicted a very dark future before him.... There was opposition from the bride's relatives who were afraid of oppression from higher castes and also of divine punishment. But ultimately they agreed. ..." "We tried our utmost to secure the attendance of as many high-class people as possible, and thank God we could get what we wanted.... Just imagine several hundred of high-caste people sitting together with an equal number of Harijans... and receiving betel from the father of the bride."

Gandhi: "I congratulate Shri Radhamadhab on his courage in breaking through the rock of caste superstition. I hope his example will be copied by other young men. May the union prove happy. I would advise Shri Radhamadhab to arrange for proper education of his wife, who, I understand, has not received any scholastic training." (H, 22/vi, 173)

In 1940 there took place in Gandhi's immediate circle, and with his approval, an inter-varna marriage between G. Ramachandran, a Shudra woman, and Dr. Saundaram, a Brahmin, and also one between and a Harijan woman (Indumeti) and a high-caste Hindu (Dr. A. G. Tendulkar, President of the Goa Congress).*15 These were love-matches, as was also perhaps that of Radhamadhab and his bride (since they braved opposition from her family as well as his); so Gandhi's approval may have been tinged with a wistful longing - hinted at in Reading 41 - for his cherished ideal of marriage due less to personal attraction than to dedication and discipline. How could those values be combined with the new values of intercaste marriage?

Notwithstanding this problem, by mid-1945 he felt that at some future time it would become very important for caste-Hindus generally to marry Harijans:

[43] 1945: "If... castes and sub-castes as we know them disappear - as they should - we should [then] unhesitatingly accord the highest importance to marriages between Ati-Shudras and caste-Hindus." (C, LXXX, 77)

- and he would tell even non-members of the ashram that he could bless no weddings between members of the same subcaste:

[44] 1945: "If the marriage is in the same community do not ask for my blessings, however deserving the girl may be. I send my blessings if she is from another community." (C, LXXX, 99)

Meanwhile, Gora and his wife in their social work with Harijans were often asked, in the early 1940s, "Although you are helping us and saying 'We are all human', would you really have your children marry people like us?" Their response was positive*16 and when they came out of prison in 1944 they began to consider who, among the young Harijan men who had joined in their work, might be a suitable match for their eldest child, then 16. Within a few months they had a young man in mind and asked their daughter if she was inclined to become engaged and would be willing to marry him. She concurred; they consulted him; he was astonished but accepted the idea. Gora wrote about it to Gandhi, who replied:

Gandhi determined, through a series of personal meetings, that it was not a love match but was motivated by dedication to social justice, and that there was no trace of compulsion or reluctance in either family.*17

Gora wrote to Gandhi:

Gandhi replied:

[47] 1946: "Though there is a resemblance between your thought and practice and mine superficially, I must own that yours is far superior to mine." (G, 52; C, LXXXIII, 390) (As far as I know, he never praised anyone else quite so strongly and succinctly.) He vowed thereafter to attend only weddings between Harijans and members of a varna, and a hint of this was published at the time, albeit not in Harijan:

[48] 1946: [Q.] "Does the Congress program for the abolition of untouchability include interdining and intermarriage with Harijans?"

[A.] "So far as I know the Congress mind today, there is no opposition to dining with Harijans. But speaking for myself, I have said that we have all to become Harijans today or we will not be able to purge ourselves completely of the taint of untouchability. I, therefore, tell all boys and girls who want to marry that they cannot be married at Sevagram Ashram unless one of the parties is a Harijan. I am convinced that there is no real difficulty in this. All that is needed is a change of outlook." (The Hindustan Standard, 5/i)

The following exchange appeared in Harijan:

[49] 1946, Correspondent: "Educated [Harijan] girls can be counted on the fingers of one hand. If they marry caste Hindus they will, as a rule, be cut off from their own society and ...not be able to work for the uplift of their Harijan sisters from within. If Harijan girls are to marry caste Hindus it should be on condition that the couple will devote their lives to the service of the Harijans.*18 Otherwise, educated Harijan girls should be encouraged to marry educated youths of their own community."

Gandhi: "It is certainly desirable that caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such [an] inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands." (H, 7/vii, 212f)

Gandhi's search for truth had thus led him to champion, in regard to marriage, the logical concomitant of the all-in-one-caste idea, contrary to his teaching of the 1920s and early '30s that prohibition or at least self-imposed restriction against intermarriage was essential to a rapid evolution of the soul.

Gandhi's view of inter-religious marriage also changed over the years, though to a lesser extent.

In the 1920s he prevented his son Manilal from marrying a Moslem girl (and found a Hindu wife for him*19):

[50] 1926: "You are of course a free man; so I cannot force you to do anything. But I write to you as a friend. "What you desire is contrary to dharma If you stick to Hinduism and Fatima follows Islam, it will be like putting two swords in one sheath.... What should be your children's faith? ...It is adharmic if Fatima agrees to conversion just for marrying you.... "Nor is it in the interests of our society to form this relationship. Your marriage will have a powerful impact on the Hindu-Moslem question. Intercommunal marriages are no solution to this problem. You cannot forget, nor will society forget, that you are my son. "If you enter into this relationship, you may not be able to render any service. I fear you may no longer be the right person to run Indian Opinion [which Manilal had been editing ever since Gandhi had left South Africa]. "It will be impossible for you, I think, after this to come and settle in India. "I cannot ask Ba's permission.... Her life will be embittered for ever. "In proposing this marriage you have thought only of momentary pleasure.... I want you to get out of your infatuation.... May God show you the right path." (C, XXX, 229f) In the early 1930s his view began to soften:

[51] 1931: "[As for] marriage outside one's religion... so long as each [partner] is free to observe his or her religion, I can see no moral objection to such unions. But I do not believe that these unions can bring peace. They may follow peace. I can see nothing but disaster following any attempt to advocate Hindu-Moslem [marital] unions so long as the relations between the two [religions] remain strained. That such unions may be happy in exceptional circumstances can be no reason for their general advocacy." (C, XLVI, 303)

[52] 1932: "If anybody asks my opinion, I would say that marriage between persons following different faiths was a risky experiment.... I do not advocate marriages between persons of different faiths as I advocate inter-caste marriages because I desire the disappearance of sub-castes. I would not agitate against such marriages either. This is an issue on which every man and woman should think and decide for himself or herself. There cannot be a uniform law for all." (C, XLIX, 478)

In 1996 the only surviving member of his family from the next generation did not recall his having ever attended an inter-religious marriage.*20 However, Gandhi ventured in 1945 to suggest, though not yet in print, that inter-religious marriages might entail "no difficulty":

[53] 1945: "Where parents are wise, there should be no difficulty even between persons of different religions. Do we not look upon all religions as equal? ...The offspring may choose either religion. The couple of our conception will give the children liberal education in that regard. In my view this should be quite easy." (C, LXXX, 77f)

And then, toward the end of his life, he argued that the marriage laws of the Republic of India should provide for non-religious weddings in order to "clear the way for inter-religious marriages":

[54] 1947: [Q.] "You advocate intercaste marriages. Do you also favor marriage between Indians professing different religions?... If so, what form should the marriage ceremony take?" [A.] "Although he [Gandhi] had not always held that view, he had long come to the conclusion that inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. Marriage in his view was a sacred institution. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the religion of the other. There was no room in this for conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony could be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. But this could come about only when the communities had shed mutual enmity and cultivated equal regard for all religions of the world." [Q.] "Was not the institution of civil marriage a negation of religion and did it not tend to laxity in faith?" [A.] "He did not believe in civil marriages, but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much-needed reform to clear the way for inter-religious marriages." (L, I, 558; C, LXXXVII, 11f)

Although I am from the West, this story does not tell me that Indians should copy Westerners.*21 Instead, the salient meaning of the story is that even though Gandhi was often slow to change:

[50] 1931, Romain Rolland: "He is a patient man, tenacious in his ideas; when he believes they are right, he needs repeated and decisive experiments before he will give them up." (R, 535)

-nonetheless he was still willing, in his last years, to learn from experience and from honest people, such as Ambedkar and Gora, who because of their own devotion to truth disagreed with him in one way or another (Ambedkar in his politics, Gora in his evaluation of the idea of inherited karma; of course the disagreement must have the non-violent character which is a hallmark of any genuine search for truth). As long as Gandhi lived, he would, I believe, have continued to grow in this way, such was his epoch-making devotion to moral truth in our social relations, like that of a research scientist to natural truth as something to be pursued incessantly and in collaboration with other members of the discipline. So, those responding to Gandhi's call to be fellow seekers:

[51] 1940: "Let Gandhism be destroyed if it stands for error.... You are no followers, but fellow students, fellow pilgrims, fellow seekers, fellow workers." (H, 2/iii, 23).

-should look back to him as he did to Mohammed, the Buddha and Jesus when he said:

[52] 1934: "In the teachings of each prophet... there was a permanent portion and there was another... suited to the needs and requirements of the times." (C, LIX, 319)

FOOTNOTES:

*1. H, 1/v/1937, 93 (C, LXV, 89).

*2. G, 44.

*3. Other societies had traditional occupations and social regulations without limiting categorically a young man's vocational choice. In Confucian China he would enter government service by doing well in written examinations with the candidates' identities concealed from the evaluators. In Medieval and Renaissance Europe he could be apprenticed to someone in a different occupation from that of his father if it suited him better.

*4. A traditionalist could reply that India might thus indeed lose wars but at least would not stop tending her crops for the sake of military mobilization.

*5. See the first paragraph of Reading 8.

*6. A rare instance of this during World War II is depicted in the "Oscar"-award-winning film (1993), "Schindler's List."

*7. See for example T, III, 196.

*8. "Caste must go if we want to root out untouchability." (C, LXXXI, 24f)

*9. C, LXXXVI, 383f; see also LXXXVII, 372; LXXXIX, 459 and XC, 484f.

*10. Interview with Nirmala Gandhi (January 1996).

*11. D, 77. Interview with Madalasa Narayan (January 1997). C, LXVIII, 391.

*12. C, XXXV, 339f; D, 102.

*13. See also C, LI, 176, 188, 199, 206, 231, 241, 248, 264 and 269.

*14. From a letter he had received, Gandhi published excerpts, which are here further abbreviated.

*15. C, LXXV, 447 and LXXVII, 396.

*16. Their concept of morality was to do what you say and say what you do (G, 45). [45] 1946: "I have your letter. I like it.... I am prepared to get the marriage performed in the Sevagram Ashram.... [Since] Manorama is 17 years old.... I suggest that she should wait for two years." (G, 47; C, LXXXI, 432f)

*17. To see if Manorama was under duress he had her interviewed by a Telugu-speaking, Brahmin, who told her (in order to test her) that it was a poor idea as there would be many difficulties and Arjun Rao was penniless. But she was unequivocal: "We are working for social equality and the eradication of untouchability." [46] 1946, Gora: "Side by side with the mixing up [of people born into different castes], an attempt also might be made to discourage the use of labels of caste and creed which raise imaginary barriers between man and man. Not only should the practice of untouchability go, but the Harijan should not be allowed to continue a Harijan.... Similarly the Hindu and Moslem differences might be solved by discarding the labels. Such an attempt will no longer keep the form of communal harmony, but it would lead to the growth of one humanity.... Though a powerful personality like Gandiji might harmonize communities for a while, when the personal influence weakened, the communities would clash again. So a permanent solution of communal differences is the growth of [the] one-humanity outlook rather than communal harmony." (G, 51; C, LXXXIII, 440f)

*18. Roughly speaking it may be said that the two kinds of marriage described here between Harijan-born girls and Brahmin-born boys are illustrated by (1) the marriage in 1933 of Gandhi's adopted daughter, Lakshmi, and Maruti (see C, LIII, 288f, 325, 358 and 438), and (2) the one in 1960 of the Telugu poet Joshua's daughter, Hemalata, and Gora's eldest son, Lavanam.

*20. Nirmala Gandhi, interview, 23/1/1996. In South Africa in 1905, however, Gandhi had sponsored the civil marriage of Millie Graham, a Christian, and H. S. L. Polak, a Jew. According to Gandhi they had a common religion of ethics. (See E, Part IV, Ch. 22, and P, 11-14.)

*19. C, XXXIII, 55f, 73f, 78, 83f, 103f, 130ff, 145f, and 148.

*21. Western family-life and class-structure are no ideal models. The common American, cream-first curd-later style of courtship, for example, arouses unrealistic expectations in the marriage - which is a pity, because contentment in the long run is often due less to one's actual conditions than to whether they measure up to one's initial hopes.

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- F Louis Fisher, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi (New York, 1950)
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