

## THE DECLINE OF BUDDHISM IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

### I

The question posed in the title of this article requires us to indicate exactly what we mean by medieval India. Does there exist in general an Indian Middle Ages? Or rather are the Middle Ages a purely European category, and the extension of it to include India involve extrapolations that are devoid of sense?

From the point of view of universal history, one could point out that a number of waves of Moslem conquests broke over India between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries. The Arabs, Turks and Afghans who seized the Moslem principalities established there regimes similar to those of the Middle Ages. These regimes introduced India to feudalism in the same way that the British laws integrated it further into the world capitalist system.

Islam was established solidly only on the borders of India. It gave birth to a distinct nation that detached itself from the Indian community, but one must not overestimate its influence on the rest of the subcontinent. It did not become important until rather late: at the epoch of the establishment in the north of *bhakti* and *sikhism*.<sup>\*</sup> What passed before it in the center and

<sup>\*</sup> *Bhakti*: adoration of God; *sikhism*: Vishnuist Hindu sect.  
Translated by Susan Scott Cesaritti

south of India? And to what extent can the changes it produced be qualified as medieval?

Certain details of post-Buddhist India, chronologically parallel to the Christian and Moslem Middle Ages, are radically opposed to the Mediterranean Middle Ages. The serene faces which one sees in frescoes are characteristic of antiquity (a period which ended approximately toward the 7th century<sup>1</sup>). The stone lovers shamelessly clasped in each other's arms were sculpted later. Thus, on the plane of the plastic arts, the antiquity of India is nearer to us than the Christian Middle Ages, and the Indian Middle Ages closer than pagan antiquity.

Nevertheless, a closer examination permits us to see that India (like China) never knew an opposition between paganism (polytheism) and monotheism. The difference between *seskhvara* and *nirishvara*, rather, was a determining factor (these terms are practically impossible to translate into European languages; they correspond most closely to the opposition between cataphatic and apophatic theology). For this reason, signs which seem to bear the mark of paganism for a Mediterranean eye have a completely different meaning in India.

Then, one could point out that after the Aryan conquest, Indian history knew no further radical changes. There was neither a general crisis or decadence of society, from the lower peasant classes up to the religious dignitaries, nor the development of a new civilization on the ruins of the preceding one. "Antiquity" and "Middle Ages" were not separate eras, but rather a series of *mutations* of one into the other. The Indian Middle Ages are not a period which is distinctly detached from the preceding ones, but rather a set of new branches, sprouting from the old trunk next to the earlier ones: the mass of the old branches dominates the new and gives Indian civilization its character of changelessness.

The influence of Buddhism declines in India with the period of the "Middle Ages." With the exception of Bengal, Buddhism is in regression in the 7th century and soon disappears completely. The influence of Jainism diminishes. Tantrism, the purely Indian

<sup>1</sup> It seems that they influenced Christian religious painting through the intermediary of miniatures in Manichean books.

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doctrine of the ties between body and spirit, rises in the 5th century. It penetrates into the Buddhist community of Bengal and transforms it, then conquers Tibet. A new wave of *Bhakti*, characterized by the erotic overtones peculiar to the Indian Middle Ages, then echoes Tantrism and merges with it.

The epicenter of these different movements is found in the South. The initiators of lyrical *Bhakti* and Vedanta philosophy are in effect the Dravidians, descendants of a pre-Aryan population. One could speak of a sort of cultural reconquest on the part of the Dravidian South over the secular influence of the Aryan North. Vestiges of the archaic Shamanic cults have a new birth: the play of masculine and feminine, of sensual and hyper-sensual; the tendency towards ecstasy and trance; a victory of the popular and feminine forms of cult (dance, the round) over the intellectual and virile forms (contemplation and moral action). The image of Siva, at the same time dancing and immobile, man and woman, destroyer and protector, replaces the austere mien of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. Krishna, with his flute, with his beloved Radha and his rounds of milkmaids outshines the luminous, sweet, contemplative Buddha.

In India, as everywhere, the passage to the Middle Ages was shown externally by new forms of religious life. But what was there behind the change in symbols, behind the decline in love for Buddha and the growing love for Krishna or Siva? Why is it that a philosophy describing absolute unity in a positive fashion, like the identity of Atman and Brahma, seemed more perfect than that which described the absolute negatively as *sunyata* (something like a zero at the point of intersection of the coordinates)? We know very little about the socio-economic progress of India in the first millenium of our era. But even if information were much more plentiful and it were possible to construct a coherent model of the evolution of Indian "feudalism," that would not help us at all to understand why Buddhism, which distinguished medieval civilization in China and in all the Far East, disappeared in medieval India. Why is Buddhism in India a sign of antiquity and in China of the Middle Ages?

<sup>2</sup> Where, perhaps, evolution was simply slower. The population of Bengal was considered in antiquity as made up of barbarians.

Even less than China, India knew neither the migration of peoples nor a return to the barbaric state—what the English call the Dark Ages (6th to 10th centuries) as opposed to the Middle Ages (11th to 15th centuries)—nor any change in its ethnic substrata.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, what is masked in Mediterranean history by its political catastrophes appears here in the foreground: the interior rhythm of a civilization's development, its evolution within the framework of a certain ethnic unity.

The progress of human society is effected in two directions, which do not always agree: the progress of ends, with the perfecting of value systems, and the progress of means, with the development of the intellect, instruments of work, and the organization of society. There is, on the one hand, a continuity of the process of "sapientization" of man, of the spiritual development of the human being (or at least an increase in the *potentialities* of his spiritual development), and on the other hand, the development of social systems.

The two problems are linked, and they cannot be solved separately. The modification of the forms of historical collectivities affects moral problems, and if these latter are not resolved, the systems created by purely political, military, or administrative means will prove to be unstable. No society can exist without a minimum of solidarity among its members, without a feeling of responsibility of each one towards all. This is why the passage from the clan to the tribe, and from the tribe to the nation and to "universal" empires, was a difficult task: it was necessary to create each time not only new organizational frameworks, but also a new system of sacred images, of icons uniting men in a common cult, with common values and a common moral ideal. On the other hand, the systems of symbols in which the new spiritual level was "written" could not be actually assimilated without a certain general elevation of the *intellectual* level (bound to production, work, the social structure) and consequently without socio-political progress; spiritual progress achieved by isolated individuals will never become an efficient agent of the historical process.

<sup>3</sup> The tribes that invaded India were able to seize political power, but their manpower was not very imposing and they soon learned the language of the conquered people.

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Progress of means and progress of ends are two aspects of the same historical movement. In studying this movement in greater detail, one notes that each epoch, each civilization exaggerates one of the two aspects; each epoch bears a certain inclination, a turn which in the following epoch takes the opposite direction. And if the inclination is not modified, one can arrive at a total loss of equilibrium and the disappearance of an historical collectivity.

What we call the Middle Ages was an attempt at straightening the bent stick of antiquity; for this reason one cannot understand the Middle Ages without first having understood classical antiquity.

Today, it seems natural to us that an isolated individual study a problem (in books or by means of experiments and observations), divide it into strictly defined fragments (facts) and then reunite these facts within the framework of a model (theory). But a similar behavior did not exist except in very rudimentary form in primitive and archaic societies and never extended itself to the fundamental problems of existence. One could solve rationally any sort of private matter (for example, strike a bargain), but neither the concepts of world and man nor the foundations of the cosmic order were ever placed in question. Here one was dealing with sacred beliefs, referring to particular ecstatic moments and to the inspirational states of poets and sages. The Vedic hymns, composed by the *rishi*, were learned by heart. Since they were considered as a manifestation of divine wisdom, their authenticity was never placed in doubt, and one had to be content with commenting on them and interpreting them. In the other cults, tradition was formed and maintained in the same manner.

Nevertheless, individual thought developed progressively, along with an ability to submit tradition to a rational *analysis*. *Writing* played an important role in this process, first of all by aiding memory and successively by facilitating a comparative study of the different traditions, bringing their differences to light. Other factors as well favored this evolution, such as the birth of the first states where tribes of differing origins found themselves relegated to the interior of pluralist civilizations, the division of labor and the division of society into new groups, the weakening

of the ties of clan and tribe, an increase in the practical autonomy of the individual (or at least of the dominant individual). In this process, the religious and popular conscience (traditional wisdom) lost its monopoly.<sup>4</sup> One witnesses a parallel process: the slow assimilation of knowledge by oral transmission and apprenticeship, and its progressive and intuitive penetration into the whole of culture, according to the spirit of the tradition; one witnesses a rapid process of knowledge which works syllogistically. On the basis of postulates grounded in experience or habit, any gifted student can, with the assistance of *logic*, elaborate a coherent system of ideas. The individual escapes then from the constraining tradition to which, from classical antiquity, all world concepts and all moral systems had referred. The sage can recognize of his own free will the authority of the popular tradition (the "orthodox" schools of Indian philosophy, for example), but an anti-traditional concept of the world becomes equally possible.

The great monuments of civilization bear more and more the imprint of the personality (prophet or philosopher, scholar or poet) who conceived them and whose memory is conserved by posterity. The writer's style penetrates the texts, his name is inseparable from the title of the work. New forms of communication and expression make their appearance; they are deliberately emotional, addressing themselves to the heart (in poetry) or deliberately logical, addressing themselves only to reason. Finally philosophy is born—a new branch of culture, a personal form of a global concept of the world, the core where individual logical thought is concentrated—which replaces traditional symbols with new doctrines that are assimilated as well by the simple members of society as by chiefs of state and dictators. R. Bellah describes the process in these terms: "An overtly atheist or cynical attitude with regard to religion<sup>5</sup> is shown in certain schools of political thought such as the legists of ancient China, the disciples of the Artha school in India of the Greek Sophists... The theories and actions of political rationalists were sometimes favorable to the progress of education and to political reforms—at least for a brief delay. Nevertheless, in brutally eliminating the manifesta-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. and N. A. Frankfurt, *Before Philosophy*, Harmondsworth, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> As a system of symbols of civilization having an objective character, independently of man taken separately.

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tions of religious life, the systematic secularization and rationalization of political life led historical societies<sup>6</sup> to serious reverses...”.

Thus, the intellectual revolution of antiquity had diametrically opposed consequences. Intellectual mobility (the ability to create new systems) increased considerably (it should be enough to mention, in India, the Maurya empire and the Kushan and Gupta kingdoms). In this way the foundations were laid for a new cycle of human history; all later civilization goes back in one way or another to these “classical” sources. Nevertheless, the new systems could not completely fill the void created by the falling away of ancient tribal and popular traditions. Society lost its unique system of values; feelings of mutual understanding, solidarity and responsibility disappeared. By their growing immorality, governors and citizens placed the political systems in peril; this in the long run brought about a movement of reaction that can only remind us of the Romanticism of the High Middle Ages, an affective and intuitive attitude towards the world, a preoccupation with the unification of beliefs and the expectation of a “savior” able to propose a new moral law.

This scheme can, in a certain measure, be applied to medieval India, certain traits of which present similarities with the Middle Ages of Europe, the Near East and China. Placed in conditions independent of his will, the individual lost interest in projects for the reorganization of society and the state,<sup>7</sup> to the advantage of problems tied to the inner life.

In literature, social themes yielded their place to erotic themes (cf. the Bhagavadgita and the Gitagovinda). Less importance was attached to a rigorous scientific knowledge of facts and their relationships (characteristic of the Nyaya and Vaisheshika philosophical schools, the Jainist and part of the Buddhist traditions). The greatest accomplishments of Indian grammar, mathematics, logic, and the philosophy of nature gave way bit by bit at the same time that Bhakti and Vedanta spread. And this is

<sup>6</sup> This is what Bellah calls the civilizations that preceded capitalism. Cf. *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, edited by R. Bellah, London-New York, 1965, p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> In classical India, at the time of the building of the great empires, this interest did exist. We have the *Arthashastra* as testimony, a treatise on the economy and administration of the state.

not only due to the physical destruction of the centers of civilization by the Moslems. Their troubles did not keep Sankara and Ramanuja from meditating, but they thought in a different way from the men of antiquity.

## II

Respect for the archaic tradition, which sinks its roots in Vedic poetry and the first Upanishads, is reborn. Not only does the mythological tendency of philosophy become stronger, but the canon itself becomes attractive for thinkers who aspire to giving a rigorously conceptual, if one will abstract, vision of the world. Starting out from arbitrary premises, reason took predominance, in several centuries of intellectual experience, over paradox and the affirmation of the absurd as the most adequate form for describing reality.<sup>8</sup>

But, in so doing it undermined its own predominance and opened the way to a rebirth of traditional philosophy, founded on a millenary experience. Even such an original thinker as Sankara appears as a modest commentator of the Upanishads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhagavadgita. His intellect is freer within the framework of the canon than in the world of Buddhist paradoxes; the canon furnished him the necessary postulates and terms for the construction of a simple, clear system.<sup>9</sup>

The lyricism which emerges from Bhakti and Vedanta philosophy can be compared to Sophism and Christian mysticism.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, analogies which draw together certain facts leave others in the shade. In numerous aspects medieval India is radically distinct from other countries of that epoch. Everywhere the arrival of universal religions eliminates and absorbs the local cults, but in India one notes the opposite phenomenon: it is

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Prajnaparamita—literature in general, "Vimalakirtisutra," "Lankavatara-sutra," the school of the Madhyamika.

<sup>9</sup> Sankara, it is true, does not satisfy at all the exigencies of modern philology. He often, in effect, when studying the thought of an ancient author, finds there more than the latter had wished to put in. In the Middle Ages, there was not a strict boundary between philosophy and philology.

<sup>10</sup> Rodolf Otto has made a comparison between Sankara and Meister Eckhart. Parallels have also been proposed between Sankara and Al Gazali, between Shandidassa and Dante, etc.



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the local religion, Hinduism, which absorbs the universal religion of Buddhism. Another contrast: in Europe and in the Far East, for all of antiquity, nudity caused no embarrassment. It is only in the Middle Ages that it is carefully covered, and in certain regions, under the influence of Islam, sculpture ends up disappearing completely. In India, on the contrary, antiquity covers the human body in thick folds, and only later does the drapery enveloping statues become lighter and finally disappear. Hidden eroticism gives way to an eroticism on display. (10th and 11th century temples are decorated with the nude bodies of lovers embracing) which gives rise to violent attacks on the part of Puritans and finds no less passionate defenders.<sup>11</sup> It was said that the erotic sculptures of the temples tested the sincerity of the believer and his ability to see the sacred under any appearance whatsoever;<sup>12</sup> that erotic civilizations had ancient roots; there even exists a belief according to which a sculpture representing two lovers protects a temple against lightning, storm and other natural calamities.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, why did these beliefs arise? Why have archaic strata, which were less influential in classical antiquity, survived up to the Middle Ages?

One can find in other regions paradoxical traits analogous to those of medieval India. The Middle Ages were *everywhere* an epoch not only of the diffusion, but also of the popularization of universal religions; a dissolving into the substrata is the extreme case of adaptation to it. It is precisely in the Middle Ages that universal religions lose their cosmopolitan spirit and are transformed into a series of national and regional cults, while the new morality which they originally brought into the world

<sup>11</sup> Gandhi reacted as a man who had been under the influence of Victorian morality: with disgust. Radhakrishnan tried to pass in silence over the Tantric heritage. Inversely, Mulk Raj Anand writes: "Just as our human love is similar to the great love, the joy of physical contact is similar to the infinite joy of God in creating the world." The forgetting of self in the arms of one's beloved is compared to the trance of the yogi who discovers the deepest levels of his consciousness (cf. M. R. Anand, "On Kamakala," *Marg*, Calcutta, June 1957, vol. X, no. 3, p. 50).

<sup>12</sup> An odd rite survives in Tibetan monasteries. The lama who has reached the consciousness of the unity of the world enters the "Temple of Oscene Idols" and sitting there observes his sensations. If the specially organized erotic visions and dances arouse in him elementary impulses, he returns to his meditation. If not, he has become a master.

<sup>13</sup> U. Agarwal, "The Mithunas," *Oriental Art*, London, 1968, vol. XIV.

melts into the local customs and sometimes is totally swallowed up. One can add that the Middle Ages recognized everywhere, with greater intensity and acuteness than antiquity, the mutual attraction of man and woman.

Nonetheless, a question remains: why is it precisely in India that assimilation of the more recent cults into the archaic substrata and mystical eroticism took on such proportions?

It is important to note in this respect that in India, philosophy was born *within* the priestly tradition, and not outside it as in Greece and China. The unity of being was understood for the first time by the spirit immersed in the interpretation of ritual in terms linked with ritual (Atman, Brahma).<sup>14</sup> The thinkers of classical India (beginning with the 6th and 5th centuries before our era) often proved to be quite indifferent to specifically religious, ritual problems. But the problems associated with a deepening of the self through prayer continue to be for them of primary importance. And philosophical rationalism, characteristic of classical antiquity in all regions, takes on in India a nuance of ascetic rationalism (Jainism, Buddhism in part, the old Hindu systems of Sankhya and Yoga). There are equally other forms of a rational concept of the world, accented differently and oriented towards the mastery of the sensorially perceptible world. These are reflected in the Arthashastra, the Kamasutra<sup>15</sup> and other documents. But these forms are less important.

In India, the personality developed on the basis of the reinforcement and not the destruction (or at least serious crisis) of the clan ties. The social structure developed, beginning with the Varna system and going toward the Jati system, by binding the practical liberty of the person to the iron law of the Svadharma. For this reason, the advanced individual tended to perceive the overall social reality as desperate confusion (*sansara*) and

<sup>14</sup> In the most ancient period, the word "Brahma" designated at the same time the altar (particular the horizontal part), the priest and the chant linked with the plunge into ecstasy. "Atman" meant the vertical foot of the altar and inner spiritual armor. Sankara merely recalled the neolithic construction: "Atman is Brahma." I take this opportunity to thank V.N. Toporov for having explained this problem.

<sup>15</sup> The Kamasutra is a treatise whose theme corresponds to Ovid's *Art of Loving*. The ideas of the Kamasutra are close to Tantrism in a number of points (see below). One of the possible dates for the Kamasutra is the 5th century of our era.

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suffering (*dukkha*) and to search for salvation in asceticism, refusal of social activity, and pure meditation. The more social mobility is reduced, the more the individual is attracted by spiritual mobility and inner movement. This is a general law. And in India, where social mobility is minimal, the tendency towards the life of a hermit (later of the monk) proved to be very strong.

The movement began in the advanced upper classes of society, which physically had suffered less. The new was born imperceptibly from the old, from the traditional exercises of the Brahmans in contemplation. As it passed through the Kshatriya, who were too advanced to combat voluntarily, the movement became heretical and in the end universal. But in fact Buddha and Mahavira had not appealed to anyone except the man capable of thinking in a clear and logical manner, that is the learned (or very gifted) man, the proto-intellectual. Learning remained an aristocratic privilege, and thus all the ancient movements remained within the framework of a spiritual aristocracy. From this derives their moral elevation as well as their social narrowness. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, a feeling of individual conflict with society spread throughout the people. And the traditional religious system, with its archaic sources, knew how to respond to the call of the times. The Bhakti movement, which brought together upper and lower classes, could only insert itself into this system. And the archaic symbols became the foundation of this union.

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The tendency towards secularization is less great in Indian culture than in that of other regions. This culture conserves generally a hierarchical structure, with ascetic values at its summit. But this archaic amalgamation of religion and culture has its negative side. The principal religion of India, represented by its Brahmans, never becomes an "abstract" religion. Rather, it is, as in archaic and primitive collectivities, the meeting point of *all* the essential values of society, including those which have nothing to do with religion (in the European sense of the term). The four essential values of Hinduism are *kama* (sensual pleasure), *artha* (riches, power, prosperity), *dharma* (moral law, religious and social duty), *moksha* (inner liberty through mystical contemplation, renuncia-

tion). God and Mammon coexist here in peace, placed on different levels of the same pyramid. Accordingly, the author of the Kamasutra has no reason to contest the value of *moksha*. He affirms simply that the final goal of religion can be perfectly reached by the path of material prosperity, moderate enjoyment of the pleasures of the senses, and the honest accomplishment of one's civic duty. Religion illuminates society in its entirety and the whole man in all his orientations, and in this manner it does not distinguish itself in any way from culture but itself becomes a sacralized culture. The secularization of religion becomes the inverse aspect of the sacralization of society.

This characteristic of Hinduism as culture is linked with its active role in the functioning of the social mechanism. The integrity of the social system, in India, is guaranteed more by psychological sanctions (whose inevitability is assured by faith) in the event of violation of caste duty than by administrative measures.<sup>16</sup> The Indian administration, if one compares it to that of Rome or China, is the least efficient. On the other hand, religious authorities have here a considerable influence. All reform, to be effective, must be of a religious nature. This rule is confirmed even in modern times, in the activity of Ram Mohan Rai, Vivekananda, and Gandhi. It is all the more natural because the great reformers of ancient India were religious reformers. Certain of them (like Ram Mohan Rai and Gandhi) were by their origins social reformers, others (Ramakrishna and Vivekananda<sup>17</sup>) particularly gifted mystics, but they found themselves on the only terrain open to ideological initiative: the religious terrain. Only one man possessing a religious authority could count on an independent social authority. Solon or Confucius were inconceivable in ancient India. Thus, men and problems which elsewhere remained totally or partially outside of religion found themselves inevitably involved in its sphere.

This will perhaps permit one to understand better the univer-

<sup>16</sup> In this respect, as in many others, Indian civilization continues the traditions of primitive collectivities in which the man who has violated a taboo dies from a consciousness of the inevitability of his death.

<sup>17</sup> One might go so far as to make this distinction between the founders of Jainism and of Buddhism. The first of these, Mahavira, a pluralist and rationalist in his spiritual make-up, a Stoic by character, could become the propagandist of a new *faith* only under certain conditions.

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sally known fact that the attempts to create a "world" (regional) empire took place in India *after* Buddhism had already created the bases of a universal religion (and not before analogous religious changes as was the case in China and in the Mediterranean region), and that the energy of political transformations was much feebler than the religious zeal of the Buddhists and Jains. Thus the Maurya empire did not reach its natural frontiers (which were crossed by the emperors of Rome and China). The emperor Asoka, upset by the dozens of thousands of dead fallen after the conquest of the Kalinga, solemnly promised to send only monks beyond the borders of his state in the future, as propagandists of the new faith and new morality. It is to this state of things that the term "Buddhist India" corresponds, which encompasses more or less the period called antiquity in the Mediterranean basin.

But the extreme expression of the specific tendencies of "Buddhist" India was Jainism more than Buddhism. It is Jainism which permits an easy demonstration of the "exaggeration" of antiquity against which the Middle Ages rose up, an exaggeration against which the reaction grew from one century to the next, to become in the final analysis the opposite exaggeration.

Jainism is more or less unknown to the general public. It is often classed in the same category as Buddhism, like a secondary variety of the same species. In reality, Jainism is as different from Buddhism as Manicheism is from Christianity. And if ancient Buddhism is sometimes confused with Jainism (or a semi-Jainism) quite similar things happen with Christianity, in the history of its numerous heresies...

Before going on to the details in which one easily risks becoming entangled, let us note a *determining* difference: in Buddhism, a primary role is given to what *is not said*, to Buddha's "noble silence," to his refusal to answer the questions: do the gods exist or not? Is Buddha, who has attained Nirvana, immortal or not? Is the world eternal in time, or not? Is it infinite in space, or not? According to a legend, Buddha showed his followers a handful of leaves and asked them: "Is this much?—No, answered the disciples.

And how many leaves are in the forest?

Immeasurably more, was answered him.

In the same way, what I have not told you is immeasurably

more than what I have told you," taught the Buddha, giving his silence more meaning than his words.

In certain Buddhist texts, silence is understood as the equivalent of the word, and the essential word is considered in the same way as the word of God in the negative theology of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, in rationalizing the verbal texture, Buddhism conserves the importance of silence, the importance of the *rhythm* of the text which, generally, is lost in passing from mythological to philosophical thought. Thanks to this characteristic, Buddhism has proven to be the "third way" not only between unbridled sensuality and mortification of the flesh—as it is called in the sermon of Bénarès—but also between the poetical and scientific concepts of the world. In its origin, Buddhism observes rigorously Wittgenstein's rule: "Say nothing except what can be said" clearly and without ambiguity; "that of which one cannot speak, one must pass over in silence."<sup>19</sup> The Buddhist texts furnished a logical syntax to ancient Indian science, they opened the path to the spread of psychology, gnoseology, logic and mathematics.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the accent is placed on what is not said, and the importance of silence renders poetic the basic texts of Buddhism. Despite the Sutra's apparent aridity, Buddhism caused an important wave to be born in the literature and art of India, and it created the

<sup>18</sup> "On the first Buddhist bas-reliefs, Buddha was never represented, and the whole scene happened around an empty space where, one supposed, the Buddha should have been (for example, the scene of the last temptation, the scene of the adoration, etc.)" (Y. L. Smirnov, *Mahabharata*, Ashabad, tome VII, Part II, p. 101).

<sup>19</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922, p. 187. For Wittgenstein, this silence has a meaning similar to that of the Buddhist Sutras: "The perception of the world as an organic whole is a mystical perception." "There is indeed, the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical." "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these proposition; then he sees the world rightly." (*Ibid.*, p. 189).

<sup>20</sup> The Jainist texts seem to have had less influence in this area. They are less paradoxical and penetrate less into the analysis of paradoxical situations. They radically separate objects from each other and are nearer to schoolboy logic than to that of basic scientific research. In any case, the greatest discovery of Indian mathematics, the zero, is tied to Buddhist symbolism and could probably have not been born in another context.

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particular world of the Jataka, the statues of Gandhara and the wall paintings of Ajanta.

The fundamental moral idea of Buddhism, the idea of love/compassion, is born from a feeling of the unity of being, expressed by the "noble silence." This idea is poetic. One "sings" it.<sup>21</sup> Inversely, the fundamental moral idea of Jainism, justice, calls forth a much more intellectual echo. It presupposes men separated from each other (like all the objects in the world), then linked to each other once again by a reasonable relationship, a relationship of equality. Man realizes that he is an atom among atoms and recognizes that the others are not worse than he. In this framework, Jainism is irreproachable, and it formed numerous generations of honest and reliable men. But the virtues of good sense do not lead to the sentiment of unity in which the differences between the moral and the beautiful, the ethical and the aesthetic, are cancelled. The Jainist idea is preached and demonstrated, but not sung. Jainism's aesthetic universe is poor. The Jains adapted the traditional Hindu forms of art and literature to their ideological needs rather than creating any authentically new ones.

Thus, the Buddhist text, read with an understanding of the importance of what has not been said, brings out a totally different world concept from that of the Jains. But if one reads the same text paying attention only to what is said, the difference between Buddhism and Jainism disappears. Buddhism can be seen as a stale Jainism delineated in an unclear way. This is just how the Jains understood it (reproaching Buddha with having robbed Mahavira and adapted his austere doctrine to the needs of feeble men). It is how the heretics understood Buddhism, beginning with the legendary Devadatta, who reproached Buddha with having renounced the rigorous rules of asceticism. It is how Buddhism was understood by European scholars of the 19th century. These are significant and in a certain sense inevitable misunderstandings, but they are nonetheless misunderstandings.

What concretely brings together Buddhism and Jainism is the epoch in which they saw the light of day, the language, the

<sup>21</sup> We wish to mention the aphorism of E. Ludwig: "A young girl can sing of her lost love, but the miser cannot sing of the loss of his money."

milieux to which they addressed themselves, and finally what both doctrines rejected. Buddhism and Jainism agree on that from which they wanted to liberate themselves, but they diverge totally in their concept of spiritual liberty.

Gotama, called Tathagata and Buddha, and Vardhamana, called Mahavira and Jina<sup>22</sup> are equally unsatisfied with the way in which the Upanishads go around the principal theme by defining it with vague words having more than one meaning. Both make an effort to think in a clear and rigorous manner. But there result two completely different concepts of reality. The Atman of the Upanishads (the union of the individual immortal soul and the image of absolute unity) divided in a certain sense into two parts. Buddhism only admitted the second, absolute unity, what can be indicated but not named, except negatively: "Hermits, there is a realm which is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air, nor sphere of infinite space, nor sphere of what is, nor sphere of perception or of non-perception, nor this world, nor the other, nor sun, nor moon. There is, oh hermits! what I call not come, not go, not disappear, not appear. It is without fulcrum, without beginning, without foundation: it is there that the end of suffering is found. It is difficult to see this not-me, it is not easy to understand the truth. He who knows has overcome thirst, nothing remains for him who contemplates..."<sup>23</sup>

The One is described by Buddhism as the non-object, the not-me. To understand it is to overcome the illusion of the "me," of the soul. What man considers as his soul is in reality composed of many conglomerates of variable and unstable material and spiritual particles which crumble into dust at the first touch. The particles themselves are not material; they are rather splinters of void. The essence of these particles (dharma) is nothingness, the void, and the essence of me, of the soul, is also nothingness and void. The depth of the soul and of the spirit is formed not as an object, but as an opening, a crack between objects, through

<sup>22</sup> Tathata means the indescribable unity of being; Tathagata means indescribably unique; Buddha means radiant or illuminated; mahavira means "great hero", and Jina means "victor". In ancient documents Gotama was often called Jina, and Vardhamana Buddha. Later these terms became rigorously specialized.

<sup>23</sup> Extract from the Udana. Quoted in the book by H. von Glasenapp, *Der Buddhismus, eine atheistische Religion*, Munich, 1966, p. 241-242.



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which appears something indescribable, which delivers from suffering—the indivisible all—what, in other systems is called Tao, the One, the Logos, or God.

Inversely, for the Mahavira, reality is represented by the individual immortal soul. The world is composed of an infinite quantity of individualities, as independent from one another as the atoms of Democritus. If the vision of the Buddhist world reminds one of an Impressionist painting in which the whole is composed of daubs which have no value if taken separately, the Jainist world concept is composed of elements each one having precise contours. The Jainist universe contains secrets (known to the victor) but it carries no eternal unknowable mystery. The world composed of visible parts can be known once and for all, and the victor (Jina) knows it. In basing oneself on the unshakeable foundation of knowledge, nothing remains but to repress the gross flesh which prevents one from reaching the state of *kevalin*.<sup>24</sup> An iron will becomes the principal means of salvation and its principal path—an un pitying asceticism: to prevent the birth of thoughts about the pleasure of the senses by orienting the spirit towards contemplation, the study of sacred texts, conversations with the master, etc.; prevent wicked conversation by taking a vow of silence; prevent bringing involuntary harm to any living creature (a gnat, for example) by remaining in an immobile position: lying down, seated or standing. There is no feat in the field of asceticism which has not been accomplished by Jainist saints.

Such behavior is totally foreign to Buddhism, which has no goal that can be approached by an effort of the will. To understand Nirvana as a goal is a profanation of Buddhism. The object of Buddhist thought is always intellectually indefinable. Clear thought takes us toward it but stops at the threshold. Beyond that threshold there is a spiritual leap toward something that cannot be described in words, like music. Here it is not a matter

<sup>24</sup> The beatitude of liberation. The personality does not dissolve into the One, as in the models of Nirvana and Moksha, but simply breaks its ties with the world while remaining an undecomposable atom. The meaning of this state, "Kevelajana, is defined in the Atsharangesutra as omniscience giving the individual an understanding of all objects and a knowledge of all conditions in the universe of gods, man and demons." (B. C. Law, "The essence of Jain religion and philosophy," *Arian path*, Bombay, 1968, vol. XXXIX, no. 7, p. 311.)

of repressing the senses (to the advantage of the Jainist intellect, involved and directed) but only of bringing to light the natural collaboration between the senses and thought. Thus, Buddhist philosophy is closely tied to its ethic, to the "noble third way", to the refusal of ascetic gymnastics.

The "third way" is much more difficult to understand than the clearly defined principles of Jainism. This is why, when Buddhism came down to the lower classes, it stopped being Buddhism and became either semi-Jainism or a simple veneration of Buddha. Meanwhile, Jainism, as soon as it found the environment which psychologically best suited it, established itself solidly. Jains could live in small communities in hostile surroundings, without a highly cultivated elite, but conserving the bases of Mahavira's doctrine and not mixing them with anything else. Buddhism is not adapted to a similar life. For this reason it is fragile and feeble when it is persecuted. When the Moslem conquerors of Bengal had suppressed the scholar monks (between the 12th and 13th centuries) the "wheel of dharma" collapsed.

A sliding of the third path toward one or the other of its extremities is in the nature itself of Buddhism. Ancient Buddhism slid toward Jainism, medieval Buddhism toward Hinduism. The verses of the Dhammapada, perceived by a non-musical ear, do not sound like music and do not express the silence of Buddha; they teach simply that "the serious is the way to immortality. Levity is the road to death. Serious people never die. Frivolous people are like dead bodies."<sup>25</sup> This called forth protest, but there is equally room within Buddhism for tendencies of protest against arid seriousness. Thus, the movement toward the Middle Ages developed at the same time both inside and outside Buddhism and transformed it, by forcing it to lose its gravity and to become more picturesque, popular, joyful, and enchanted.

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The secret of the Upanishads, revealed to the public, remained a secret. The disciples of the new doctrine simply replaced the

<sup>25</sup> "Dhammapada," translated by V.N. Toporov, Moscow, 1960, p. 62. The term "serious" is used by most translators. It refers to something quite similar to the difference in perception between a Mass and an organ concert. For most listeners, serious music is boring music.

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svadharma of the caste with the dharma of the monk. The effective liberty of the spirit was replaced by the *path* towards liberty, by a law leading to liberty. But, like all laws, Jainist law and Buddhist law (which in the consciousness of the masses was brought close to the former) were a restriction of existing liberty and a repression of it. This brought forth a new discontent, a regret for the lost force of spontaneous, natural human feeling. This protest inevitably grew, even among the monks who had renounced the world. But discontent among laypeople was even greater.

The life of lay sympathizers of Buddhism (or of Jainism) had changed too little. If the Brahman had before been the number one spiritual personage, now it was the monk. Sympathizers could "obtain an indulgence" by giving him alms and hope in exchange for a better lot in their next birth. But *all* the religions of India offer the same thing to believers. Buddhism here has no superiority over the others. On the contrary, certain ancient characteristics, such as the picturesqueness of the holiday, were taken away from the people. They continued to suffer the rigidity of the caste system, poverty, humiliations, arbitrariness, sickness, old age and death. But, beyond all these ills, the feast become more insipid. The former cult systems had at least balanced the tyranny of the law of the castes with the ampleness of the feasts. The principal currents of antiquity unanimously disparaged feast days, considering the "way" as an *action* having salvation as its goal, an action which must be taken seriously, without expending one's forces in songs and dances. The tyranny of the law did not diminish when there was an attempt to reform it, but rather increased.

The hostile tendency towards feast days is equally perceptible in ancient Brahmanism,<sup>26</sup> which was indifferent to the feelings of the believers and transformed ritual into a simple professional act. But, because of respect towards tradition, Brahmanism had conserved something of the primitive picturesqueness of the religious ceremony. The new intellectualist doctrines were in this respect unpitying. They rejected from the beginning the element of popular festival.

<sup>26</sup> A ritualistic form of the religion, based formally on the Veda, but which betrayed the spirit of the most ancient ecstatic hymns.

Jainism has conserved its austerity up until today. The day of their greatest holiday, *Pariushanas*, the Jains fast, remember their sins and ask each other pardon. This is very noble, but a bit boring, and it does not satisfy completely the need of the majority of people for a release in a festival atmosphere. Not only on the Jainist earth, but also in their heaven, everything is very serious. They lack not only a picturesque exterior, the sensually perceptible joys of the game, but also the possibility of an inner feast.

Buddhist seriousness (as opposed to Jainist seriousness) has a musical side. But it is musicality in a minor key, which is not accessible to all. For the people, this music is good only for funerals. In China, a Buddhist monk who comes to a wedding risks being beaten (a monk, at a wedding, is considered an ill omen). It is more or less the same in Japan: weddings are celebrated with the priest of the local Shinto religion, and the Buddhist bonze is invited to funerals. In Ceylon, where Buddhism is the only religion of the advanced society, the people have kept their ancient beliefs and address themselves in numerous situations to sorcerers and shamans. Only in Tibet has Buddhism transformed itself into a complete system that satisfies all man's needs. But the unique character of this example shows that the tendency toward such an achievement was not in any case very strong.

It is necessary to take account of all this when one asks why Buddhism disappeared in India. Buddhism *tolerates* a popular feast, rite or game *at its side* more willingly than it includes it in its structure. And in this area, Hinduism gradually won out over it. The religion of the Brahmans learned better than Buddhism to associate spiritual depths (accessible only to the elite) with the picturesqueness and emotional richness of popular rites.

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It is necessary to take one more circumstance into account. The notion of *false* god, of *false* faith does not exist in India. A foreign or ancient faith is an insufficient faith, which is not completely effective, or does not give a *total* liberation. But to a certain extent it is considered authentic. For this reason religious

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changes take place on the grounds of the same folkloric and mythological base: they displace or push into second place certain elements by creating new ones, but they do not suppress these elements nor do they relegate to hell the entire mass of former inhabitants of heaven. This facilitates at the same time the diffusion of new beliefs and the renewal of old ones.

Christianity, which put the Hebrew prophet Elijah in the place of thundering Jupiter (Zeus, Thor, Perun), did not resist the temptation to adapt itself to the Christianized peoples' form of conscience. But barbaric representations of the sacred could only triumph *de facto*. The *interpretation* of the symbols of religion became perhaps even coarser than in India; but the New Testament symbols themselves remained unchanged.

In India, the process was different. Buddhism developed within the framework of traditional mythology and was forced to convert not only men, but also the gods, to the new faith. According to one of the legends, Buddha climbed to the Brahman heaven and illuminated the inhabitants of the heavens with his sermon. Since that moment, the deities became morally perfect. Hinduism, in its turn, recognized Gotama the Buddha as one of the ten principal incarnations of Vishnu. Thus the Hindu version was born alongside the Buddhist version of the universal mythology which encompasses all existing systems. Buddhists included in their cult the day of illumination of Buddha. In this game of whoever loses wins, the average man loses completely the possibility of knowing where one religion ends and the other begins.

Why did Hinduism know better how to profit from this situation than, for example, Buddhism's Chinese rival, Taoism (which also had very complex relationships with Buddhism)? In penetrating into Southeast Asia and the Far East, Buddhism mixed in everywhere with the most diverse beliefs and it seems that it was able to merge completely with them. But the philosophy coming from India made it possible to educate an elite in the Buddhist spirit. As far as the mythology is concerned, a foreigner to local traditions, it gave to the overall religious structure an original appearance, specifically Buddhist. In other words, outside India Buddhism seems like the representative of a pan-Indian cultural fund, and this fund helped it play the role of universal religion

(more or less in the same way that the Old Testament contributed to the diffusion of Christianity). In India, Buddhism was perceived above all as a deviation from tradition; in a battle extending over a number of years post-Buddhist Hinduism won its right to priority over the pan-Indian heritage (including the Buddhist heritage which, by that moment, had had time to become a part of tradition).

This is particularly easy to demonstrate with the fate of philosophy. In the countries which did not possess a philosophical tradition of their own, Buddhist philosophy, which had filled an empty place, as a general rule held on to it very solidly.<sup>27</sup> The "Bon" priests of Tibet or the "Shinto" priests of Japan had nothing to oppose it. The intellectual elite, which knew no other philosophy, gave itself over wholeheartedly to Buddhism and remained faithful to it. On the contrary, where the local civilization had independent philosophical traditions, the situation of Buddhism was less stable. Confucianism, which had assimilated Buddhist philosophy, knew well how to make Buddhism retreat, in China as in Japan and Korea. In these countries, Buddhism held on to only a minority of the elite with an aptitude for mysticism, as well as the sentimental attachment of the masses for Buddhist statues.

On the other hand, Hinduism had at the same time a rich mythology which seduced the imagination and a philosophical arm equal to that of Buddhism. The treasures of the Upanishads were a public possession. For a certain time, Buddhism overshadowed it by creating better interpretations—for its epoch—of ancient wisdom. But this superiority was never absolute and it disappeared in time.

The Upanishads propose two equal forms of description of the absolute: firstly, by the negation of the *objects* of knowledge. This "phenomenological reduction" is already found in the most ancient of the Upanishads, the "Brihadaranyaka."<sup>28</sup> The supreme image is depicted here "as a tongue of fire, a white lotus,

<sup>27</sup> Indonesia was the only exception. But it is not known clearly if Buddhist philosophy was assimilated into Indonesia or merely the exterior forms of the cult. In other cases, Buddhism was uprooted in the Moslem manner: the Buddhists' heads were cut off.

<sup>28</sup> And in the closely related "Isha", as well as in the "Katha-Upanishad."

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a sudden flash of lightning. In truth, the glory of him who knows this is similar to a sudden flash of lightning. And here is the lesson: it is not that! It is not that! For there exists no other designation than 'It is not that'.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the absolutely concrete is described through affirmation of the part of psychism which causes the idea or the image of the absolute to be born: "This fragile substance is the foundation of all that exists. It is the real, it is Atman, and you are it—Shvetaketu!"<sup>30</sup>

Buddhism developed logically the "negative theology" of the Brihadaranyaka, Isha and Katha, which at that time had not yet been assimilated by the properly philosophical, logically disciplined thought of Hinduism. Sankhya philosophy studied only the problem of the liberation of the personality from the illusions linked with assimilation of the concrete world, but it did not study itself as a separate phenomenon, atom among atoms, thing among things. The goal of Sankhya philosophy was the state of "kevalin" (the same as in Jainism, that is the liberation of the individual from complicated personal relationships). The feeling of total fusion of the individual being with all of Life, which the Upanishads acknowledged, had not yet been named. Buddhism gave it its first name: Nirvana. Negative description of the absolute unity of the spirit<sup>31</sup> has become since then a specific indication of Buddhism. But there was still the line of the "Chandogya" (and the major part of the Upanishads adhered to it), the lines of the positive description of absolute unity. This tradition was progressively developed and led to its philosophical perfection by the Vedanta school, which invented the positive synonym of Nirvana ("moksha"—liberation). This synonym was not linked to Buddhist associations, and it became the symbol of specifically Brahmanic wisdom, the banner of the Hindu elite of the Middle Ages, around which the adversaries of Buddhism united.

The negative description of the absolute could be formulated in a more rigorous fashion on the purely technical plane. But it did not satisfy everybody. Just like apophatic theology, it was the language of the pure mystic, addressed to pure mystics.

<sup>29</sup> *Brihadaranyaka*, translated by A. Y. Syrkin, Moscow, 1964, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> *Chandogya*, translated by A. Y. Syrkin, Moscow, 1965, p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> "Nirvana" is a negative term. It means literally: cooling, suffocation, chill.

“Euclidean” reason, oriented towards objects and their relationships, itself preferred in reasoning about the absolute an approximate equality to the most precise inequality.<sup>32</sup> In discussing the difficult problem of the absolute whole, a philosophy which seeks to be understood by a large public must find the balance between precise negative descriptions and vague positive descriptions. This balance was reached in the Vedanta system.

Vedanta made it possible to describe the supreme state of the mystic in a less paradoxical fashion than Buddhist thought. With Vedanta, the idea of the soul is not discarded but deepened, while still keeping its negative description (“the language of Atman is silence”) as an auxiliary process; this saves it from a too simple interpretation of the positive symbols. “Atman” and “Brahma” took on their precise meaning<sup>33</sup> of subjective and objective aspects of the absolute or partial identity of man with the surrounding world. A rigorous logical relationship was established between them, following the position occupied by Vedanta philosophy. The most vital discussions took place within Vedanta philosophy.

The formation of Vedanta (more or less starting at the beginning of our era) is chronologically parallel to the process of elimination of Buddhism and seems to have played an important role in this process. Sankara (8th-9th century) was considered—in part wrongly—as the conqueror of the Buddhist philosophers. In the 8th century, in southern India (Sankara’s fatherland), Buddhism hardly existed any more.<sup>34</sup> But what is attributed without sufficient reason to one great thinker was in reality the

<sup>32</sup> By saying that a tiger is not a camel, we have expressed ourselves very precisely, but without content. By saying that a tiger somewhat resembles a cat, we are not completely precise, but we have just the same said more about the tiger than in the first case. This preference can be related to metaphysics as well, even if it does not seem quite justified.

<sup>33</sup> And not the meaning they took in the synonymous contexts of the Upanishads, where one freely took the place of the other, as well as the intermediary term “Purusha.” All these technical facilities of description could not have a determining significance for realized mystics, but the popularity of the philosophy is not their work. Of the two mystical doctrines, the one that wins out is the one that first finds adepts capable of assimilating its language.

<sup>34</sup> One could say rather that the environment in which Sankara grew up had been involved before his birth in an anti-Buddhist current, and from his childhood the future philosopher unconsciously absorbed the symbolism of a renewed Hinduism.



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work of a school to which he belonged. This school took from Buddhism its elite and furnished an expression of the ideal in Hindu form which for several centuries Buddhism considered as its own. And no one did this with more flair than Sankara. His construction, in perfectly orthodox form, was second in depth neither to Nagarjuna nor to the other great Buddhist philosophers. It did not convince Bengal (where Buddhism was solidly rooted) but without doubt it gave the coup de grâce to the epigones of Buddhism, which in the other regions of India was already moribund.

Then, Sankara was criticized from orthodox Hindu positions. He was reproached with having remained half Buddhist. When Buddhism had definitely lost its influence, Sankara's positions had the effect of an inadmissible concession to the adversary. But Sankara's point of view kept its influence, principally in Sivaist circles.

The grounds of discussion in Vedanta (between Sankara and Ramanuja of the 11th century and Madhava of the 13th century) consist in knowing to what extent Atman is identical with Brahma. If "Atman is Brahma" (Sankara), the man who has attained the supreme state of Jivanmukta (liberated in his lifetime) finds himself at the level of the One in its abstract purity.<sup>35</sup> This point of view is perfectly orthodox. It derives rigorously from the "Shvetashvatara-Upanishad": structure is illusion. But between the Upanishads (before our era) and Sankara lies the Buddhist doctrine of the void, the sunyavada, which emptied everything that had a name of its authenticity and transformed it into the shadow of something unnameable. Without the nihilist system brilliantly elaborated by Nagarjuna, Sankara's doctrine

<sup>35</sup> When Sankara was answered that this was impossible, he retorted, according to the legend: "I have proved it: logical arguments have no value here." At the basis of Sankara's philosophy one finds the *experience* of being as a state of total liberty, unlimited Me, identity of Me and the world. But this state in itself was experienced in India (and not only in India) numerous times. One is dealing here also with the *appreciation* of his experience as the *only* authentic reality. The most ancient school of Hindu philosophy, the Sankhya, considered the world in a dual way: as a pure intuition of unity, a **pure** spirit (Purusha) and as an objective structure (Prakriti). From the Sankhya point of view, the two aspects of the vision of the world, Purusha and Prakriti, are real. From Sankara's point of view, only Purusha is real (understood as a synonym for Atman).

would probably never have seen the light of day. The master of Sankara's master was Buddhist, and one can see Buddhist influence in the fact that the Advaita-Vedanta recognized the gods only as objects of meditation. Sankara composed poetic hymns to Siva, Shakti, Surya, and Vishnu. But in as much as he was a philosopher, he interpreted them as a Buddhist. The Jivanmukta attained a deeper reality than the existence of the gods; he looked at them from above, or from the depth towards the surface. Such is the position of the Advaita-Vedanta (absolute non-duality).

We must say here that the Indian terms "ishvara," "seshvara," and "nirishvara" correspond only in a very approximate way to the European words "God," "theist," and "atheist." Sankara's system is nirishvara; it does without the creator, the demiurge, the savior, but this does not mean that it is atheist. Brahma is a symbol which corresponds to a certain extent to the God of European theologians. It is God in himself, beyond any relationship with the world. It is God who has not yet said, "Let there be light!" It is the divinity of Eckhart, which is more profound than the creator god. Thus, the Advaita is not atheist, but rather metatheist. The difference between it and other Vedanta schools never leaves the framework of theology.<sup>36</sup>

The majority of philosophers who lived after Sankara were Bhakti, adepts of a god having a definite personal form, a creator and a savior. The Advaita point of view did not satisfy them. Within the system of limited non-duality (Vishishtadvaita) created by Ramanuja, man could merge himself into the One, not directly with Nirguna-Brahma, but with a god having a concrete appearance, as the color blue merges with a blue flower. In this identity, the god could remain himself without man (the flower remains a flower, even after it has lost its blue color), but man cannot remain himself without the god.

Madhva went even further, denying totally the identity between man and god. He decreed that there are four differences: between God and the soul, God and matter, the soul and matter, souls taken separately and particles taken separately. Madhva,

<sup>36</sup> Cf. F. Tokarz, "'Theistic' and 'Atheistic' Indian Systems," *Folia Orientalis*, Krakow, 1968, tome IX, p. 131-150.

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just like Ramanuja and the late Vedanta, is Bhakti (an adept of Vaya, son of Vishnu). This links him with other thinkers of the Middle Ages, but because of its ontology, 'Advaita-vedanta caused rather the rebirth of the ancient traditions of Nyaya and Vaisheshika rationalism.<sup>37</sup>

The philosophy of Vedanta, in all its varieties, permitted the interpretation of existing cults in their highest acceptance and rendered them accessible to the elite. Thus, it gave the intellectual elite a place in the framework of religion in which the concrete forms found easily the road of the human heart and took root solidly among the people.

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The success of a religion is always tied to the satisfaction it gives to certain needs of the masses. Hinduism satisfied better than Buddhism the average man's need for a release in a festive atmosphere. The mere contemplation of the Hindu heaven (the Hindu pantheon) engendered a feeling of inner holiday and was transformed easily from rite into popular feast, accessible to every peasant. The Hindu gods at play created the world and easily become themselves symbols of play. But there were other reasons that favored the success of Hinduism.

Buddhist ethics ignored the historically concrete organization of society. It addressed itself only to those on whom this society weighed; it did not organize society, but only those who fled from it. It led the learned people into monasteries. From there—at a safe distance—they illuminated a world which it was impossible to change, giving an example of human relationships based on compassion, equality, the common search for wisdom and the common solution of all problems.<sup>38</sup> But the others, those who were not able to renounce family ties (and caste ties which were linked with the former), were considered as spectators of the monastic feast and Buddhism addressed them

<sup>37</sup> Vedanta means literally achievement of the Veda. From the etymological point of view, *all* orthodox Hindu philosophy, beginning with Samkhya and Yoga, is Vedanta.

<sup>38</sup> Contemporary publicists of Ceylon and Burma see in the Buddhist monasteries the first models of Asiatic democracy.

only to beg for charity. In the Buddhist system, laymen occupy a place comparable to that of catechumens in the first Christian communities. They are not Buddhists properly speaking, but sympathizers with Buddhism.

Hinduism opposed to this the moral of the "Bhagavadgita," issuing directly from society such as it was. It proclaimed through the mouth of God himself that man has no right to refuse to participate in the universal ill. "If I did not act, says the Bhagavat (the Lord), all men would follow my path and this whole universe would disappear." The liberty of man resides solely in the *manner* in which he acts: "Without hopes, restraining one's thoughts, renouncing all property, acting only with one's body—this is how one will not fall into sin." "Without ill will, equal in success and in failure, he does not belong, even when acting." "He whose spirit is intact will not kill, even if he is killed."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in remaining just what it was, the Svadharma of caste obtained in the "Gita" a new sanction, more elevated, reinforced by the example of Vishnu and confirmed by the feats of his avatar Krishna. One could ask if each svadharma is effectively compatible with disinterest and inner peace; one can suppose that a man who has spilled blood will not come back so easily to the contemplation of the good. One can say that Buddhism, which prohibited "unworthy" forms of behavior, understands better the reciprocal link between the exterior and the interior, between action and psychology, than the Bhagavadgita. But if man is *obliged* to occupy himself with matters which burden his conscience, the rigor of Buddhism will only bring him unrest, while the Bhagavadgita ethnic gives him at least a certain hope of living at peace with himself.

Things were more or less the same in the political domain, in the conflict between Buddhist indifference toward ethical patterns of life and the Hindu attachment to such forms. If the protection of the Kushan favored the spread of Buddhism, the decadence of the "universal" empire and the consolidation of the regions of northern India under the scepter of the local Gupta

<sup>39</sup> *Bhagavadgita*, translated by B. L. Smirnov, Ashhabad, 1956, chap. IV and following.

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dynasty were tied to the anti-Buddhist reaction. One can draw a parallel with events in China, when the Mongol Yuan dynasty (which sustained Buddhism) was replaced by the local Ming dynasty. Facts of this kind were not enough to make Buddhism disappear (in China, it did not disappear). But it created a situation which facilitated the work of the forces eliminating Buddhism.

Finally, we must not forget that the Brahmans were collectively interested in the dispersion of Buddhism. The experience of Ceylon shows that the complete victory of Buddhism means the pacific liquidation of their class as a social strata. The Brahman class in Ceylon leads a hidden life under the form of preference given to relatives (principally nephews) when monks choose their disciples and heirs. But the Brahmans as such did not exist in Ceylon. This is why Hinduism's fight against Buddhism was a battle between two elites: the hereditary ecclesiastical hierarchy and the "plebeian" sangha. In this fight, Brahmanism won out. All the immense spiritual energy of Buddhism was dedicated in India to reforming Hinduism, to transmitting certain of its traits, to pushing its development—and to merging with it.