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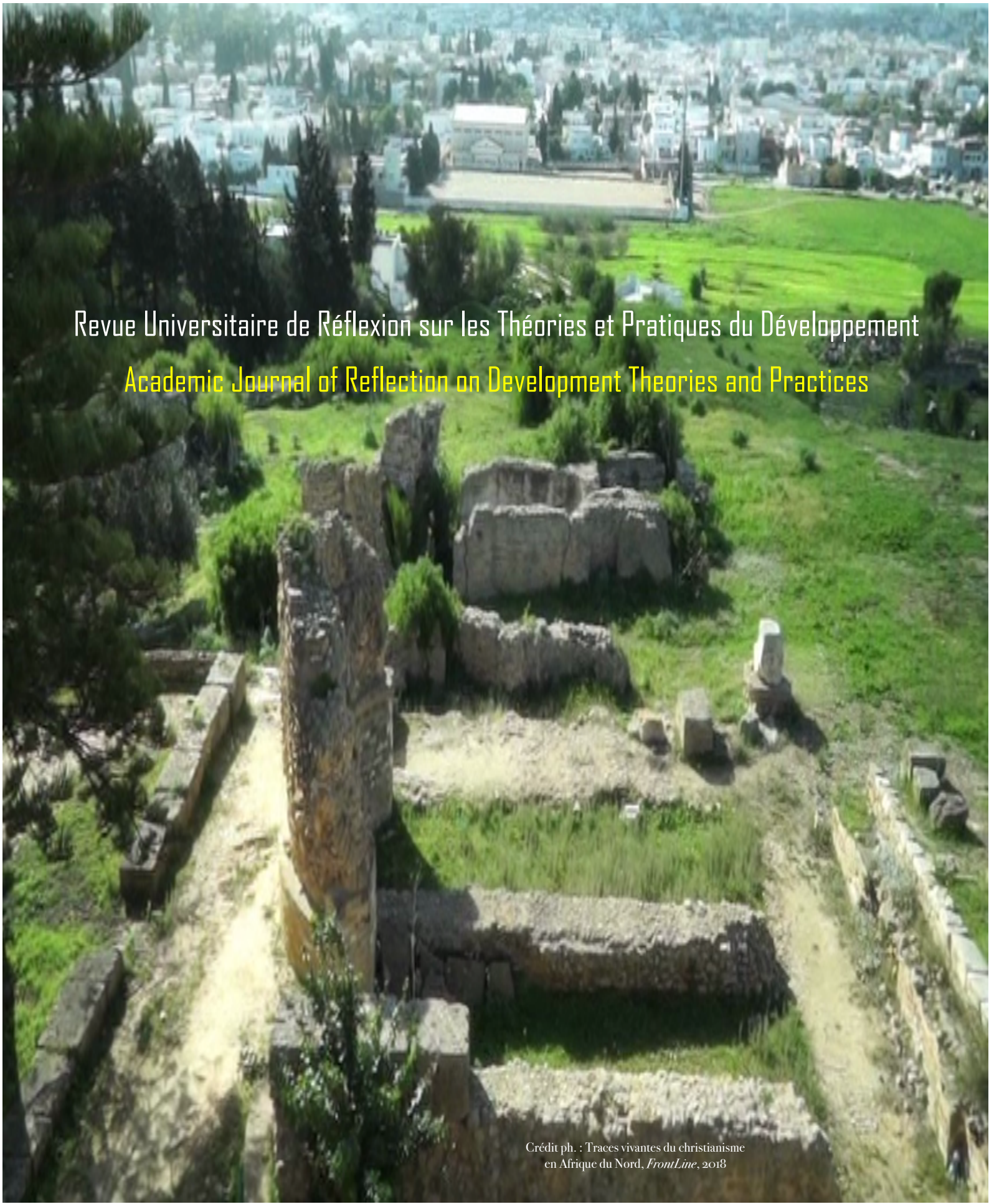

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Intégralité est une revue académique de l'Institut Universitaire de Développement International (IUDI), université chrétienne connue aussi sous le nom de University of International Development (UID). L'IUDI est affilié à l'Université de Maroua et à plusieurs universités africaines, européennes et américaines. Il est dédié à la formation à distance en Afrique francophone dans des filières stratégiques pour le développement intégral et durable. S'inscrivant dans la vision et le cadre des services de l'IUDI, ***Intégralité*** est une revue scientifique axée sur le développement holistique. Cette revue promeut la réflexion chrétienne et universitaire au sujet du développement et des pratiques qui s'y rapportent. Elle place Dieu au centre et non à la périphérie des questions de développement afin d'impulser une dynamique de transformation positive de toutes les sphères de la vie sociale.

La création de la revue ***Intégralité*** intervient à un moment où les politiques publiques africaines de développement sont largement contestées et où la société africaine dans son ensemble s'interroge elle-même et reconsidère son approche de développement intégral sur un continent en mouvement dans un monde lui-même en mutation permanente.

À travers cette revue, l'IUDI veut doter les communautés africaines d'un outil de promotion et de l'expérience d'un développement durable qui ne fait pas abstraction de la spiritualité. Intégralité se propose de partager les principes, les valeurs et les idéaux interdisciplinaires sous-tendant un développement plus humain et plus social parce que plus spirituel. Elle favorise le débat d'idées et la recherche pluridisciplinaire autour des questions de développement. La pierre angulaire de votre revue est une théologie biblique qui interprète le monde et la vie dans un souci d'équilibre entre la raison et la foi, en toute lucidité, honnêteté intellectuelle et fidélité aux vérités scripturaires historiques. Le développement holistique demande, en réalité, non pas une réflexion embastillée et alambiquée, mais une approche globale des problématiques sociétales ou transversales.

Comme revue universitaire d'orientation chrétienne, elle ouvre des pistes de services pertinents pour aujourd'hui et donne à voir les actes que des chrétiens africains posent, dans le concret de la vie, en faveur du développement des individus et des sociétés sur un continent africain paradoxalement riche et pauvre simultanément. Votre revue se trouve donc au carrefour des sciences, notamment les « sciences sacrées », notamment la théologie et les sciences de religions, et les sciences humaines et sociales.

Le but d'**Intégralité** est de contribuer à ce que les intellectuels chrétiens et chrétiennes d'Afrique ou de la diaspora s'engagent mieux en faveur du développement global de la Société et à l'essor des individus et des familles. Elle souligne à grand trait les possibilités développementales en contexte africain. Elle jette une vive lumière sur les besoins des populations africaines et de leur environnement, avec les structures d'aliénation spirituelle et socioéconomique contre lesquelles elles se battent aujourd'hui à l'étroit et le rôle que l'Église est appelée à jouer pour l'aider à s'en sortir.

Cette revue œuvre pour que les leaders et les intellectuels, sans discrimination aucune, ainsi que les acteurs ou actrices de toutes catégories sociales et où qu'ils soient, mènent, avec l'audace de la foi et dans l'amour, des actions de coopération économique et culturelle qui concourent au développement holistique qu'appellent de leurs vœux les pays africains et ceux d'autres régions du monde qui en ont cruellement besoin. L'IUDI considère que l'amélioration de la condition de vie des populations est voulue de Dieu, que la Bible et la vision chrétienne doivent être au centre des idées et des pratiques qui y concourent, et que les chrétiens, aux côtés des adeptes d'autres religions, peuvent apporter une contribution irremplaçable. Telle est d'ailleurs la conviction de l'équipe de rédaction, et le principe fondateur de votre revue !

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CONTENU

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ETHICS OF HINDUISM IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to compare Hindu ethics and Christian ethics. It is not the goal of this article to explore Hindu theology, which is highly complex. Instead, the focus is on the ethical teachings based on the three major sacred books of Hinduism: the Vedas, the Upanishad, and the Bhagavad Gita in the light of the ethical teachings of the Bible. This article will further examine Hindu ethics related to society and family in the light of Christianity as contained explicitly in the Bible. One particular emphasis also points out how the teachings of Jesus shifted the foundations of ethical teaching in the Bible from external action to internal heart attitudes and motivations.

Keywords: Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Mahavarathas, Dharma, Dharmasastras, Dharmasutras, Yamas, Niyamas, Maya, Karma, Artha, Moksha, Caste, Brahmin, Ksatriya, Vaisya, Sudra

Introduction

Hinduism is one of the major ancient religions of the world, dating back to around 1500 B.C. It originated in the cultural milieu of India and began as a polytheistic, ritualistic, and pantheistic religion. This study does not include Hinduism's historical growth and worldview. It focuses only on its ethical and moral teachings in the light of Christianity.

Some religious and philosophical scholars have concluded that there is no ethical and moral teaching in Hinduism because they say there are no basic rules of conduct like the Ten Commandments. However, although there is no specific parallel to the Ten Commandments, Hinduism does have an ethical teaching based on the *Vedas* (the most sacred and ancient book of the Hindu religion), which establishes standards of morality that govern the life and conduct of the Hindu people. Ward J. Fellows wrote: "The whole of

Hindu religion is concerned with conduct because it is more a way of life than a doctrine about the divine or a system of ritual" (Fellows 1979, 114).

Hindu ethical teachings are mainly contained in religious literature: the *Vedas*, considered revealed truth. The interpretation of philosophical texts and wisdom literature in the Vedas is known as the Upanishads, which is incorporated as one part of the *Vedas*. Some ethical concepts are also included in another book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the Hindu Scriptures, which is part of the Hindu epics named the *Mahabharata*.

The primary purpose of this article is to compare Hindu ethics with Christian ethics, showing the similarities and differences between these two ethical systems. For Christian ethics, I will focus mainly on the ethical teachings of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and examine how Jesus saw the ethical teachings of the Jewish Law and how He reinterpreted the Law and its application, which is quite different from the way the Jewish religion views and applies the Old Testament law. The methodology employed is the Synthetic Method, which will be explained in detail.

This article explores Hindu ethics from the perspective of the Synthetic Method, specifically examining the following:

- Ethical teachings of the Hindu sacred books: (*Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita*).
- Hindu ethics in the four goals of life.
- Aspects of Hindu ethics in society and family.

This article does not deal with present reform movements within Hinduism but mainly describes classical Hinduism, which continues to be a significant force in Hindu life and conduct today.

Hindu Ethics from the Perspective of the Synthetic Method

The word synthetic is derived from the word synthesis, which means the composition or combination of parts or elements to form a whole. Synthesis is one method for the careful study of Hindu ethics.

Hinduism is a conglomeration of cultures and traditions, and the teachings in the Hindu sacred books (Dharma Sastras) have been practiced in India since ancient times. To scrutinize Hindu ethics in this section, I am applying the Synthetic Method to bring together all those practices and traditions. First, applying the Synthetic Method to the careful study of Hindu ethics raises two fundamental questions:

1) How does Hinduism define 'Human' and 'Human Nature'?

2) How does Hinduism view the Human relationship to the world?

How does Hinduism Define 'Human' and 'Human nature'?

Hinduism sees all human beings as part of the Absolute Being (Brahman), the ultimate reality. Hinduism assumes a spiritual soul exists in humans, which can attain spiritual union with the Absolute (i.e., *Brahman*). A great Hindu philosopher Swami Bhaskarannanda, pointed out:

> The foundation of Hindu ethics is the Vedic (the teachings of Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas), which teaches that God (Brahman) and the indwelling Self of man are one and the same. Behind the psychophysical man is the divine Self. (Bhaskarannanda 1994, 97)

I disagree with Bhaskarannanda that if the Hindu god (*Brahman*), the ultimate reality and the indwelling Self of humans, is one, if this were true, then this god must be behind every temptation to immoral acts received by human beings. The Christian teaching is entirely antithetical to this notion. The Bible says:

> When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone, but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

Hinduism explicitly holds that human beings possess the capacity for moral behavior. It emphasizes moral values such as truthfulness, generosity, and disinterested action. About human nature, Kalpana Srivastava stated:

> Indian thinkers placed enough emphasis on consciousness as the primary reality. This also led to the conjecture that, first and foremost, we are conscious selves, one with Brahman. The proof in psychology was a subjective experience. The Indian tradition has approached the problem by focusing on the quality, purity, and concentration of the antahkarana (mind, intellect, and body), the inner instrument of knowledge used by the person with experience. According to Indian conception, human nature is not the accidental offshoot of an unconscious nature but has its root, like every other thing, in the being of an absolute self. (Srivastava 2010, 1)

In Christianity, human nature is sinful. For a Christian, human life aims to attain a loving and intimate personal relationship with God and, after death, through the resurrection of the body, to enjoy that

relationship as a re-created, complete, and distinct human being with God and Jesus Christ in heaven. Christianity teaches that all humans have free will and that all humans have this free will that God gave them. This free will means the freedom to make individual choices and decisions. Without this free will, humans could not be described as moral beings, as they could not make the conscious choices to lead a moral.

How does Hinduism View human relationships with the world?

The idea of a hierarchy of living beings, with humans being the highest or noblest in the universe, is foreign to Hindu thought. This is in opposition to the teachings of the Bible, which states: "Then God said, 'let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Genesis 1:26). Thus, God created humans with an elevated status uniquely made "in His image," and placed humans in a position of dominance over all other creatures. This contrasts with Hindu teachings.

The Bible further describes how humans disobeyed God's command and fell into sin, which Christians refer to as original sin. This sin disrupted the relationship between humans and God, which brought about the consequences described in Genesis 3:14-19.

In contrast, Hinduism does not have the conception of original sin. Instead, humans are said to be ignorant of right and wrong. However, in Hinduism, ignorance is not to be compared with original sin, as though it were a kind of original moral failing. It is seen as much more a kind of metaphysical principle for which no one is morally responsible. R. Antoine pointed out: "Whatever man does in the universe out of attachment for his self is bad. Whatever he does out of detachment from his self is good" (Antoine 1968, 111).

This idea of detachment is in opposition to Christianity's ethical teachings. Christianity emphasizes the self, particularly "individual sin," and accountability before God.

Hinduism emphasizes the idea of corporate identity—an identity related to one's place as an integral, interrelated, and inseparable part of humanity.

Hindu Ethics in the Sacred Books (*Dharma Sastras*)

The word "Sastras" (Sanskrit) is a more general term that means holy law books or treatises related to any religion. The Hindu *Dharma Sastras* are the holy law books containing Hindu religious duties and moral laws. About Hindu *Dharma Sastras* W. J. Johnson stated:

> Dharmasastra ('treatise on the Law,' 'Law code,' 'science of dharma'). In the widest sense, the term designates not just the literature treated below but also the Dharmasutras ('aphorisms on the Law') and the later commentaries and digest. However, it most usually applies as the collective name given to a voluminous category of verse literature dealing with Brahmanical dharma... Dharmasastra addresses such topics as acaras ('rules of conduct')-the orthodox, and therefore 'correct,' performance of social and ritual duties (including samskaras-life –cycle rituals) ... (Johnson 2009, 104-105).

In this section, I discuss the ethical teachings of Hinduism's three major sacred books, which they call the *Dharma Sastras* (Sanskrit), literally translated into English as "religious books." The three major sacred books are the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

I aim to compare the ethical teachings of these three Hindu sacred books with the ethical teachings of the Christian Bible, the only sacred book of Christianity.

In the Vedas

Before sharing the ethical teachings of the *Ved*as, I shall first discuss the meaning and etymology of the word Vedas and provide basic information about this most ancient Hindu scripture. No definite date can be ascribed to the composition of the *Vedas*, but most scholars accept the period of about 1500-1200 B.C. The *Vedas* have four parts: *Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda,* and Atharvaveda. These are all written in Sanskrit.

The word *Veda* in Sanskrit means perception or knowledge. Dean C. Halverson pointed out: "The earliest of the Hindu scriptures are the Vedas. *Veda* means 'knowledge,' and it has the same root as the English word 'wisdom' and the Greek oida ('to know')" (Halverson 1996, 91). Vedic literature is very ancient, as Bhaskarananda pointed out: "According to the estimate of many scholars, the Vedic texts must be at least 4000 years old" (Bhaskarananda 2002, 14).

Hindu morality is not only a set of principles; it is primarily a code of practical conduct defined mainly by the mores within the Hindu society derived from the Vedas. Cromwell H. Crawford wrote: "Under the

rubric of eternal, universal law, Hindu ethics combines continuity with dynamic diversity" (Crawford 1974, 1). In the *Vedas*, practical behavior in relationships closely correlates to the mores in Hindu society.

There are twenty ethical guidelines or codes of conduct in the *Vedas*. A few of these are comparable to the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament (Exodus 20: 2-17). These are called Yamas (Sanskrit meaning restraints, moral disciplines, or moral vows) and Niyamas (Sanskrit meaning positive duties or observances). Some are "do-s" (do these), some are "don'ts" (avoid these), and some are admonitions of character traits. These are the codes of practical conduct in Hindu ethics.

Yamas and their complement *Niyamas* represent a series of rules for right living or ethical conduct. These are restraints and admonitions (restraints imply things to avoid doing) for proper conduct as given in the *Vedas* and the *Yoga Sutra* (a collection of the eight steps in practicing Yoga.) The Sanskrit meaning of *Sutra* is "threads," suggesting weaving the stages or steps involved in the practice of Yoga into a single fabric. Two of these steps are the Yamas and Niyamas.

In this section, I will provide a detailed list of *Yamas* and *Niyamas* based on the teachings of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. Some of these are comparable to the Old Testament laws, especially the Ten Commandments. I shall discuss his comparison later in some detail. I shall also discuss how Christian ethics, based on the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, compares to Hindu ethical teachings and elaborate on the similarities and differences.

In my study of the *Vedas* and *Yoga Sutra*, I found Ten *Yamas* and *Niyamas*. I believe five of the ten *Yamas* are prominent or most important. This agrees with what Ved Bhatia wrote in his article "Vedic Ethics and Values":

> ...five Yamas of ancient Hindu ethics: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth or avoid telling lies), Asteya (avoid stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy if unmarried and avoid cheating on one's partner if married and sexual purity), and Aparigraha (avoid possessiveness) (Bhatia 2018, 2).

Subhamoy Das also wrote in his article "Learning Religions" providing the following list of Ten Yamas (restraints or proper conduct) and Ten Niyamas (observances and practices):

The 10 Yamas—Restraints or Proper Conducts

1. Non-violence or non-injury (avoid injuring others)

2. Truthfulness (avoid telling lies)

3. Non-stealing (avoid stealing)

4. Celibacy or sexual purity

5. Non-possessiveness (avoid possessiveness)

6. Steadfastness

7. Compassion

8. Honesty

9. Moderate Diet

10. Purity

The 10 Niyamas—Observances or Practices

1. Modesty

2. Contentment

3. Charity

4. Faith

5. Worship

6. Scriptural Listening

7. Cognition

8. Sacred Vows

9. Incantation

10. Austerity (Das 2019, 1).

Some scholars compare the list of *Yamas* and *Niyamas* with the Ten Commandments. I see some of these as "do-s" and "don'ts" (admonitions and prohibitions or injunctions), which are comparable to some of the Ten Commandments ("you shall ..." and "you shall not...") and the Laws written in the Old Testament.

These items on the lists are incredibly vague. They are also highly general and so broad that they can apply to thousands of things. For example, in "worship," the question arises: whom or what should we worship? Worship could apply to the Hindu practice of polytheism (worship of many gods and goddesses). It could even mean the worship of evil.

This stands in stark contrast to the very first of the Ten Commandments, which states: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3), as well as the second commandment, which states: "You shall not make yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." (Exodus 20:4-5). We can only compare a few on this list with the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are unique.

In the Upanishads

The Upanishads (part of the *Vedas*) are considered the supreme truth of the *Vedas*. Sometimes, the Upanishads are called "Vedanta," meaning "the end of the Vedas." The Upanishads say the highest ideal for man's ethical endeavor is self-knowledge. Cromwell S. Crawford stated:

> The Upanishads postulate that the ethical ideal of realizing one's unity with Brahman (the ultimate reality in the universe) is the highest goal for which man can strive ... the summum bonum is sacrificial rectitude. In the Upanishads evil arises out of the mistaken notion that reality is finite. In the Upanishads, metaphysical error translates into evil on the moral level. Finiteness breeds desire. Ignorantly (a person) imagining that he is separate from others, man sees others as rivals in the fight for individual survival. All the evils which alienate man from man and man from nature are due to the false consciousness of individuality. Such men are prisoners of suffering, sickness, and death because they ignorantly desire what is sensuous and finite (Crawford 1974, 36-39).

The *Upanishads* emphasize three human attributes: self-control, generosity, and compassion. This suggests a concern for personal ethics and attributes or character traits that can strengthen a person's correct behavior toward others. It also suggests a concern for social ethics as it concerns attitudes and behavior toward others. I think almost all ethical behavior involves behavior toward others in some way.

To critically analyze these three attributes of humans emphasized in the *Upanishads*, I agree with Dr. Ernest B. Beevers. During my interview with him, he went on to say:

> Self-control suggests that someone should not be given to impulsive behavior; they should not give in to undesirable urges, like lust or greed, which can motivate motives for immoral behavior. However, I can also imagine a thief being self-controlled. He resists the temptation or urge to steal too much to avoid being caught. He is immoral but self-controlled.

Generosity suggests a person is not greedy, possessive, or acquisitive. He is glad to share what he has with others. However, a thief might be generous with other thieves who help him steal (immoral acts). Robin Hood was famous for stealing and giving to the poor. He was considered by many to be a hero. But he was not generous with those from whom he stole.

Compassionate means a person who loves and cares for others. I believe Jesus implied that love (for God and others) fulfills the law (Matthew 22:36-40). And, of course, the law relates to morality or codes of conduct. (Beevers, "personal communications," September 29, 2023).

The actual moral influence of the Upanishads on society is social ethics. A society cannot be moral unless individual members are moral. Jesus emphasized individual morality, which can be achieved through transforming one's heart. Dr. Beevers pointed out:

> While it is true that the Ten Commandments are essential to the ethics of both Judaism and Christianity, it is interesting to note the comments of Jesus when asked by the Jews which commandment is the greatest. He did not refer to any of the Ten Commandments; instead, He chose commands outside the basic ten – from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 and said (Matthew 22:36-ff) that the great command is to "love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and added, "...love your neighbor as yourself." He said, "All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." Thus, I believe Jesus fundamentally shifted the primary focus from outward behavior to the underlying motivational impetus for obeying the laws of God. This constitutes a major fundamental shift of emphasis that differentiates the ethical foundations of Christianity from those of Judaism (Beevers, "personal communications," September 29, 2023).

In the Bhagavad Gita

I introduce the most popular Hindu sacred book in this section: the Bhagavad Gita. I will provide the basic information and historical background of this book. This book also contains philosophical and devotional material, such as discussing the four ″goals of life,″ which I will present later in this article.

However, my main emphasis is on the ethics of war mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and I compare the ideas there with Christian ethics as applied in the modern-day context.

As previously stated, the Bhagavad Gita is the most popular Hindu sacred book and is part of one of the Hindu mythical epics known as the *Mahabharata*. It is poetic literature, and it is a very familiar Hindu scripture. There is vigorous debate among scholars over the date of composition of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Joshua J. Mark pointed out: "The date of composition is thought to be closely associated with that of the epic (the *Mahabharata*) 5th-3rd century BCE, "but not all scholars agree that the work was originally included in *Mahavaratha* text and so date it later to 2nd century BCE" (Mark 2020, 1).

The composition of the Bhagavad Gita is ancient. The Bhagavad Gita is presented as a collection of conversations between Krishna and Arjuna during the battle of Kurukshaettra (the name of a place where a battle took place between two groups of princely cousins) between the Kauravas and the Pandavas (see explanation in next paragraph). The context and background of the Bhagavad Gita was the story of this fictional battle.

Ward J. Fellows describes the story presented in the Bhagavad Gita:

> The occasion of the Gita section is the start of the great battle, when the two armies face each other. Leader of the Pandavas is Arjuna; his charioteer is Krishna. What happened first was that Arjuna was so overcome with grief at the thought of the war between kinsmen that he told Krishna he could not fight. But Krishna chides him to follow his dharma (duty) as a warrior and set the battle in array...Arjuna is reminded of the meaningless of death and life in the face of the eternity of the spirit: ...In the ensuing dialogue, Krishna enlightens Arjuna about action: act without "attachment" to the action; you are responsible for the action but not the result. Devotion to Krishna is enjoined, but the Gita harmonizes the three ways: work, devotion, and knowledge (Fellows 1979, 90).

The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna focuses on war; however, the *Gita* principle would also apply when any social obligation arises. People should give priority to the interests of society without thinking about their interests. In that situation, we should not even think about the consequences.

The *Gita*'s ethical teaching is that attachments influence human behavior. Attachment can be an emotional connection to people, possessions, and ideas. The influence of some people can bring about an attachment. For example, if a person becomes preoccupied with an ideology founded by another, the founder can become an idol, object of worship, or extreme adoration, which would describe an attachment.

The *Bhagavad Gita* cautions that these are obstacles to spiritual growth. The Gita further teaches that attachments are an illusion or a deception and can prevent one from attaining true happiness. Attachment can be good or bad as the term is used in Hinduism. An attachment to money can motivate greed, which is not good (according to Christian ethics). An attachment to one's family can mean love, loyalty, faithfulness, and dependability, which are good – at least up to a point.

The term "maya" (Sanskrit) is used in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is more like the term "magical" rather than "wonderful power," which would be more fitting for the Christian concept of God. How, then, can a person be sure that his supreme surrender to *Krishna* (one of the incarnations of *Vishnu*, one of the major gods in Hinduism) is not the final trick of the divine magician? Maya means illusion. The devil also can create maya (an illusion). So, what is the difference between the devil and God, between what the devil can do and what god can do? Indeed, from the Christian perspective, there is a significant difference between maya and God's tremendous power. Christians can tell the story of how the true God worked through Moses and Aaron in Egypt in front of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:8-13), an example that shows God's power is not maya (illusion).

The Bible also teaches against certain temptations or wrong desires, such as lust or covetousness, which are considered sinful. This can be compared to the *Gita*'s concept of attachments. When we are tempted by Satan to give in to specific wrongful desires, this will affect our relationship with God. But those who genuinely follow Jesus Christ can overcome such temptations with the help of God's Spirit. Christ also dealt with temptations but overcame them (Luke 4:1-13).

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there are two forms of discipline: "*pravrtti*" (Sanskrit), which means an active life, and "*nivrtti*" (Sanskrit), which means tranquility or calmness. According to the Gita, an active life means leading a life with purity, strength, discipline, honesty, kindness, and integrity. I also think that an active life, actively lived for Christ is good from the Christian point of view. But a busy active life pursuing wealth or acquisition can be seen as not good, since this displaces the focus from God.

Jesus also taught about peace – a kind of tranquility –but His peace had a different meaning: Jesus said in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; the peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Not as the world gives. What kind of peace is that? What did Jesus mean when he said, "my peace"? He was continually harassed, chased, and targeted by those who sought to kill Him or arrest Him, by those who eventually would crucify Him. What kind of peace is that? Not freedom from trouble, strife, and conflict, but peace amid all that – a kind of inner peace, inner tranquility. His followers would face all kinds of strife, struggle, and conflict. To follow Christ is to be constantly at war with Satan and evil. But during that kind of struggle, there can be inner tranquility.

Another teaching of Jesus emphasizes this kind of peace or inner tranquility in John 16:33: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart;

I have overcome the world." I think this Christian view of peace as inner tranquility compares favorably with the emphasis of the *Gita*.

Jesus also taught about peace in the more traditional sense, viewed as the avoidance of conflict in Matthew 10:34 ff:

> Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Those who follow Christ will inevitably conflict with those who oppose Him and refuse to follow Him. These are enemies even when they are part of one's family.

So, to be a Christian in the world means to oppose the forces of evil, which means constant warfare, but there is a kind of inner peace and tranquility amid that struggle.

The biblical teaching is that we cannot achieve these virtues through our efforts; we can have them by God's grace only by following Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, and the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

According to the *Gita*, we must deny our interests in social obligations, a form of self-denial. Some people argue that the *Gita*'s teaching about self-denial is like that of the Bible. However, there is a considerable difference when we consider the total context of the teaching.

We must remember the context of the Gita teaching on self-denial was war. Krishna was challenging Arjuna to fight against evil and to defend without thinking about personal interests.

In the biblical context, it will be essential to clarify what Jesus meant by His teaching to deny oneself and follow Him, and in this way, we can see the contrast between the Gita and the Bible on the topic of self-denial. Jesus emphasized self-denial in his teachings to his disciples: "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus was asking His disciples to give priority to Him and His will only.

Jesus Himself demonstrated self-denial in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed concerning His imminent crucifixion, submitting to the will of the Father, "...not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

In Christian theology, self-denial means turning away from the ways of the old self (focused on selfish desires and interests) and continually putting on our new self in Christ, which the Apostle Paul further explained in Colossians 3:1-10. This continual turning away from sin refers to our selfish desires that go against the will of God and should be (metaphorically) put to death, as the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified (symbolically put to death) the flesh with its passions and desires."

This ongoing emphasis on self-denial does not mean that we should deny ourselves in all respects. We deny ourselves (our desires and impulses displeasing to God), however painful it might be, to gain a greater good.

We are called to self-denial so that God can discipline us and give us a greater share of His holiness (Hebrews 12: 5-11).

There are some misunderstandings about the meaning of self-denial. Self-denial does not mean that we cannot enjoy ourselves. Jesus Himself enjoyed food, drink, and feasts and was wrongly criticized by others (Matthew 11:18-19). Nor does self-denial mean following a long list of man-made "do-s and don'ts," nor does it mean that if there is one thing that we desire, something good and wholesome, that will be the one thing that God will call us to give up. On the contrary, God looks to give to us our heart's desire (Psalm 20:4; 37:4). What self-denial does mean is that if we desire something that advances our spiritual maturity, we may have this desire of our heart, but we are still to deny our way of acquiring them and trust the Lord to do it His way (Proverbs 16:7; Isiah 55:8).

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul also tells us in Romans 8:18 that whatever we might have to suffer here on earth, as we deny ourselves in the present, will be far outweighed by the eternal glory that rewards us in the afterlife.

In this section, I discuss the ethics of war contained in the Bhagavad Gita and compare them to the New Testament's teaching of Christian ethics as they relate to the context of war. I also explain and apply the Christian "Just War Theory" concept to the modern-day context.

The *Bhagavad Gita* records a long conversation between Krishna and Arjuna held on to the battlefield of Kurukshaettra before the actual war began. So, the context of the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* was war.

If we analyze the ethics of war in the *Bhagavad Gita*, we find that the Gita supports the idea of a defensive war in response to an offensive attack by an enemy.

During his conversation, Krishna urged Arjuna that as a warrior and the leader of the army of *Pandavas* he should perform his duty (*dharma*) by fighting a righteous defensive war, even though it may have painful consequences and go against some of his relatives who participated in the attack. It was a righteous war because it was initiated by his opponent *Kauravas*. To defend his people, Arjuna had to fight. Krishna further urged Arjuna that walking away from a righteous defensive war would harm his people, and he would abandon his duty (*dharma*). The Gita is, thus, a text about Arjuna's transformation from indecision and inaction to responsible and justified defensive action.

The New Testament does not support war; instead, it emphasizes negotiation and seeking every possible way to avoid war. War brings loss of life and bloodshed. It destroys enormous property. Non-violence is more consistent with Christian morals (Matthew 5:9, 38-48; 1 Timothy 3:3).

For the first three centuries, Christians disagreed with the Greco-Roman world regarding war participation and army joining. Many early church fathers were against Christians joining the army. Hippolytus, a Roman church leader, and Tertullian, one of the early church fathers in the second century, were prominent examples.

Kenneth Scott Latourette pointed out:

> Tertullian argued against Christians being members of the Roman armies on the grounds that this brought one under a master other than Christ, that it entailed taking the sword, and that, even when the army was used for police purposes in peacetime, it made necessary the infliction of punishment, when all revenge was forbidden to the Christian. He said that in disarming Peter (Luke 22: 47-51), Christ ungirded every soldier. Another consideration that weighed against service in the armies was the strong possibility that, as a soldier, the Christian would be required to take part in idolatrous rites. Some Christians would permit service in the legions in times or areas of peace when the function of the army was that of the police but frowned upon it in war (Latourette 1997, 243).

In my opinion, by disarming Peter (John 18:10-11), Jesus was teaching Peter that he was going against the will of God. Jesus came to this world according to His Father's will to sacrifice his life for sinners, which Peter did not yet understand. On many occasions, Jesus explained His mission to His disciples. They did not always understand or remember His teaching and had different motives for following Jesus. Like other Jews, they were awaiting a military Messiah who would free them by force from Roman rule.

Before Constantine, the Old Testament text most frequently quoted by the Church Fathers was Isaiah 2:4, a messianic prophecy that says when the Messiah comes, swords and spears will be turned into plows and pruning hooks, and the study of war will be abandoned. The early Christians believed that Isaiah's prophecy spoke of Jesus and that with His death, burial, and resurrection the peaceable kingdom Christians anticipated would be inaugurated.

William D. Barrick stated in his article "The Christian and War": "The violence of military conflict creates a natural tension with the normally peaceful nature of Christian living. One must not forget the significance of non-violence in Christian character and behavior" (Barrick 2000, 216).

There are always costs and casualties on both sides of any war. While teaching about the cost of discipleship, Jesus illustrated war. In Luke 14:31-32:

> Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with ten thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

In this passage, Jesus pointed out that war decisions involve considering the odds of winning. If the odds are unfavorable, the party likely to lose would try to negotiate a settlement. This could imply that if the odds were favorable, then go to war! The New Testament teaches that the desire for war, or any kind of fight, comes from within us; it originates in our minds first. This is clearer in James 4:1-2:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

However, a question arises in the modern-day context: How can we apply this biblical principle when war between countries is unavoidable? Christian theologians have struggled with this question since the founding of the Church.

According to church history, the "Just War" theory was developed in the fifth century by St. Augustine to answer this question. Martin L. Cook pointed out: "...most notably St. Augustine, a doctor of the church and bishop of Hippo in North Africa, first worked out the foundations of Christian just war thought" (Cook 2006, 2).

Just war is the last resort, as it is always preferable to resort to negotiations and diplomacy. Martin L. Cook further pointed out:

> For Augustine and the tradition that developed after him, Just War is an attempt to balance two competing principles. It attempts to maintain the Christian concern with non-violence and to honor the principle that taking human life is a grave moral evil. But it attempts to balance that concern with the recognition that the world is what it is, important moral principles and that protection of innocent human life require the willingness to use force and violence (Cook 2006, 3).

Since the fifth century, Christian scholars have addressed the principles and ethics of war. They taught that churches could approve of war and only when war meets specific criteria, given that war always means death and destruction. William D. Barrick listed the following criteria:

1. A just war is basically defensive in posture, not aggressive.

2. The intent must also be just –the objectives must be peace and protection of innocent lives.

3. War must be a matter of last resort when all attempts at reconciliation or peaceful resolution are exhausted.

4. A just war must be accompanied by a formal declaration by a properly constituted and authorized body.

5. The objectives must be limited. Unconditional surrender or total destruction is unjust means.

6. Military action must be proportionate both in the weaponry employed and the troops deployed.

7. Non-combatants must be protected and military operations must demonstrate the highest possible degree of discrimination.

8. Without a reasonable hope for success, no military action should be launched. (Barrick 2000, 219).

I agree with Barrick on the criteria he set to define the Just War theory. In my opinion, war can be avoided if any country strictly follows these criteria in the modern-day context.

Some argue that war in the Gita satisfies the criteria for Just War. I disagree with this idea, although at first glance, it may appear to fit the criteria for Just War. However, the ethical teaching of war in the Gita and the ethical teaching of the Just War theory from the Christian perspective are quite different.

The reason for this view is that, first of all, in the *Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna that the first concern one must have is to understand his duty (*dharma*). The next step is to wage a battle, if needed, for this duty (*dharma*). Krishna wants Arjuna to know that being a warrior, Arjuna can never have a greater purpose than participating in *dharmayuddha* (a righteous war or holy war). Careful analysis of the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna shows the promise that anybody who dies in a righteous war goes to heaven.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* 2:37 Krishna said to Arjuna, "Death means the attainment of heaven; victory means the enjoyment of the earth. Therefore, rise up, Arjuna, resolved to fight! Having made yourself alike in pain and pleasure..." (Easwaran1985, 65).

In my opinion, if we believe war, as taught in the *Bhagabad Gita*, is Just War, then we must also accept holy war in Islam (Jihad in Arabic) as Just War. Many people try to compare the Christian Crusades with Jihad (holy war in Islam). I think the Crusades are so different from the Muslim Jihad that they should not be compared in the same sentence. The Muslims initiated the attack, and the Pope agreed to join with fellow Christians (orthodox Christians in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire) in a defensive war. His mistake was adding the promise of heaven to those Christians who died in the war.

The Crusades were a series of religious wars initiated by the Roman Catholic Church in November 1095 A.D. At the Council of Clement in Southern France, Pope Urban II called on Western Christians to take up arms as a religious duty to aid the Byzantines (Eastern Orthodox Christians) in the Middle East and defend and recapture the Holy Land from a Muslim takeover.

Kenneth Scott Latourette stated:

> What is called the First Crusade began in 1096, the immediate outgrowth of an appeal by Pope Urban II in a stirring sermon at a synod at Clement, in France, in November of the preceding year. The congregation deeply moved, is said to have boomed out: "Deus vult" ("God wills it") and this was made a slogan of the enterprise. The Pope had been asked by the Eastern Emperor for aid against the Seljuk Turks. A predecessor had made a similar plea to Gregory VII, as a leader in reform in the Western Church and in seeking to enhance the power of the Church in the affairs of men. Urban called on the Christians of Western Europe to go to the succour of their Eastern brethren and also to free the holy places from the hands of the infidels. "Plenary indulgence", of which we are to hear more later, was promised to all who took part and eternal life to those who lost their physical lives in the enterprise. The cross was worn as a symbol by those who responded (Latourette 1997, 410).

The Crusades can be justified as a defensive war against a Muslim army that first attacked the Byzantine Empire (the Eastern part of the Roman Empire) and occupied the holy land. It was part of Islamic imperialism and to achieve their political motive. Christians and Christian churches in Palestine were in a difficult situation. Christian Church in the West (the Roman Catholic) wanted to stand by the Church in

the East, the Eastern Orthodox Church. No doubt it was a good reason and a defensive war. However, the way Pope Urban II motivated the Church in the West was wrong. It was a good motive, but the methodology was wrong. "Plenary Indulgence" and the promise of eternal life to those who took part and lost their physical lives were against the Bible. The Pope has no authority to give eternal life. Only Jesus and God the Father can give eternal life.

Radical Islamist groups today promise heaven to martyrs to promote Jihad. These groups are motivated by the words of their holy book, the Qur'an, which they interpret as declaring the will of Allah (the Arabic name for God) mandates fighting against non-Muslims and killing them.

They often quote the following Quranic verses:

- Fight those who fight you wherever you find them, and expel them from the place they had turned you out from. Do not fight them by the holy Mosque unless they fight you there. If they do, then slay them: Such is the requital for unbelievers (Surah 2:191).

- When the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters whenever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush (Surah 9:5).

The Arabic term *Surah* means chapter in English. The importance of jihad is rooted in the Qur'an command to "struggle or strive" (the literal meaning of the word jihad) to follow the path of Allah. In modern times in the Islamic world, many radical Islamist groups are motivated by their understanding of the Qur'an to fight with non-Islamic countries and to kill non-Muslims which they call kafir (the Arabic word for infidels). By killing non-Muslims, they think that they are following the will of Allah and see this as their mandated religious duty. They also believe if they die in a jihad, they will be martyred and will go directly to heaven. Islamist suicide bombers are committed to these beliefs.

The Just War theory cannot be applied to every war situation, even when it is a defensive war. All the criteria defining a Just War mentioned before need to be strictly followed.

Hindu Ethics in the Four Goals of Life

In this section, I discuss the goals of life for human beings according to Hinduism and how the ethical aspects of this teaching compare to biblical teachings.

In Hinduism, four traditional life aims or goals are called "*purusharta*." This Sanskrit word means the purpose of life for human beings, which is as follows:

Dharma (duty)

Artha (wealth)

Kama (love, desire or pleasure)

Moksha (liberation)

Each of these has a system of ethical norms as described in the paragraphs below.

Dharma

Dharma (Sanskrit word) implies movement, change, dynamic qualities, and the chief characteristics of the laws of Nature. The word dharma comes from the Sanskrit root "*dhri*," meaning to hold or maintain. Dharma is described in early Vedic texts as laws. Although the Sanskrit word Dharma is translated into common English as "religion," it does not have a synonym in the English language. The term '*Dharma*' is one of those Sanskrit words that defy all attempts at an exact rending in English or any other language. W. J. Johnson defines *dharma*:

> A polysemic term, the more precise meanings of which depend upon the context in which it is used. Less precise meanings range from 'truth' and 'order' (both cosmic and social) to 'law'(both universal and particular), 'teaching,' 'duty,' 'virtuous behavior,' and 'religion' (Johnson 2009, 102).

In traditional Indian society, the classical meaning of dharma is good ethical practice according to the prescriptions handed down from age to age by virtuous ancestors. Dharma can also be defined as an ethically sound life. However, Dharma is often understood as the meaning of duty, which in a broader sense can mean right, justice, moral behavior, good deeds, etc.

An expert of Hindu law in India, Professor Pandurang Varma Kane, pointed out:

> The best way I find to understand dharma is to think back to the three components of religion-beliefs, behaviors, and community. Dharma is the relationship between how your personal behaviors impact the community you are part of. Remember that community and behaviors are much more important to a Hindu than beliefs (Kane 2014, 1)

Ward J. Fellows also pointed out:

> It (dharma) connotes the general ideas of honesty, decency, respect, and care for others, responsibility, and duty which is incumbent upon all persons regardless of their position in society...so dharma provides a flexible standard of duty that applies to different people and different circumstances. It is a kind of early form of "situation ethics," in which one's individuality, career, and circumstances are factors in determining what is proper for each person in a given context (Fellows 1979, 115).

There are four levels of *Dharma* (duty) in Hindu ethics:

- Individual *Dharma*
- Family *Dharma*
- Society *Dharma*
- National *Dharma*

Individual *dharma* (duty) is the observance of moral and ethical principles sustained in an individual's mind and body. Following the rules of health and hygiene comes under the individual dharma.

Family *dharma* (duty) is maintaining mutual self-sacrifice and respect.

Society *dharma* (duty) emphasizes maintaining the codes of conduct in each member of the society. From a Hindu perspective, a person is born into a cosmic order that includes religious and social duties. Practice of nonviolence, non-stealing, truthfulness, refraining from speaking a truth which hurts, control of anger, control of the lower passions, practicing charity and kindness to all, refraining from backbiting, practicing hospitality constitute society dharma (duty).

National *dharma* (duty): If the nation disintegrates, society cannot survive. So, to maintain national dharma individuals must make self-sacrifices for their country in order to sustain its existence.

In my observation, everyone is responsible for performing all these *dharmas*. Swami Bhaskarananda pointed out: "All these dharmas are like so many concentric circles at the center of which is the individual, who is performing the dharmas. Self-sacrifice is the common denominator among all these dharmas" (Bhaskarananda 2002, 100).

In comparison with the Hindu ethics, Christianity also emphasizes individual responsibility. Everyone should perform all duties. However, the difference in Christianity is the emphasis that duty toward God is the priority. Individuals cannot perform their duty toward the family, society, and nation unless they first perform their duty toward God. Furthermore, the primary duty toward God is to maintain a personal relationship with Him and to worship Him.

A classic example of Judeo-Christian ethics is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1- 17). The first four Commandments are duties toward God, including worshipping Him only before performing duties towards family (parents) and society (neighbors).

In His teachings, Jesus also set duty toward God as the highest moral principle. In response to the question concerning the greatest commandment in the Jewish law, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment..." (Matthew 22:34-38).

Jesus went on to add a command that resembles the Hindu duty toward society: the second greatest command was to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

In His ethical teachings, Jesus placed more emphasis on the heart in contrast to action (Matthew 5:8-30), more on the inner heart's attitudes and desires than outward behavior. If an individual's heart is pure, then it automatically reflects on what a person does, their behavior, or actions. The idea of doing unethical and immoral acts results from the heart's desires or motivations. So, the transformation of an individual's heart is most important.

As regards Jewish dietary laws, Jesus also emphasized having a pure heart. All immoral thoughts come from the heart, and that is what defiles us, not the food that goes into the stomach. Uncleanness comes from attitudes and motives of the heart. The Scribes and Pharisees had some wrong attitudes and motives in their hearts despite their legalistic adherence to dietary ceremonial laws. Jesus taught:

> ...What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slanders, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person (Mark 7:20-23).

Jesus emphasized repentance (something that takes place in the heart). In teaching Nicodemus in John 3, He further introduced the new idea of the necessity of being born again to enter the kingdom of God (eternal life). He was referring to spiritual birth – something that takes place in the heart when a person decides to follow and serve Jesus. Even this teacher of the Law did not understand the concept of spiritual birth. (John 3:1-11). Jesus meant a transformed life in a heart-commitment of allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord. This emphasis on Christianity can only be possible when one has a close relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul also echoed this emphasis: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This committed relationship is not legalism but fulfills the behavioral goals of the legalistic principles.

In conclusion, the ethical teaching of the four levels of dharma in Hinduism is an outward expression without the inward change or real transformation of an individual's heart. Hindu ethical teaching emphasizes legalistic outward behavior in individual life, family, society, and nation, which can be performed without a true transformed heart, as emphasized in Christianity.

Artha

Another legitimate worldly concern is "*artha*." Originally, in Sanskrit, it did not simply mean money but referred to all material possessions. According to this second goal of life, people must have some money or a measure of wealth so that they can maintain their family and help those who depend upon them financially; however, this must be done within the limits of the moral law. Thus, this necessity for sustaining life has an ethical dimension. No one should acquire material possessions by immoral means.

There are some similarities between Hindu and Christian ethics regarding the way of acquiring money and possessions. Hindu ethics teaches the acquisition of money and material possessions while following the rules of morality. But Christianity goes beyond that. Jesus taught that one cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24), which implies giving a high priority to acquiring money. Thus, Christian ethics emphasizes how we regard money, and also how we manage money and spend money, which is called Stewardship.

The Bible often teaches attitudes and motivations that undergird human behavior, and this is never truer than about material possessions. The Scripture says "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). Money is a necessity for survival. Still, it should not be something that we love or serve. How we think of money is important. Concerning this point, Mark Allen Powell correctly stated:

When we are faithful stewards, we regard our money in God-pleasing ways. We should not allow money to become a primary source of joy or meaning in our lives (that would be loving it) nor should we allow money to exercise a controlling influence over our decisions (that would be serving it) (Powell 2007, 3).

Kama

The Sanskrit word *Kama* means the pursuit of love and pleasure. In contemporary Indian literature, Kama is often used to refer to sexual desire. However, *Kama* broadly refers to any sensory pleasure, emotional attraction, or aesthetic enjoyment, such as from the arts, dance, music, painting, sculpture, and nature. *Kama* can also refer to desire, wish, and longing.

In Hinduism, human sexuality has a spiritual dimension. Ward J Fellows stated: "Sexuality in Hindu religion is a symbol for the union of opposites in spiritual reality" (Fellows 1979, 119). In Hinduism, the concept of love can be spiritualized, as Fellows also wrote: "The full range of physical pleasure is recognized, while love is also spiritualized as devotion to god" (Fellows 1979, 119).

While the Bible does not provide a clear definition of sexuality, it does provide a robust framework for understanding it. From this framework, we can gather that sexuality is the basis of the desire for a male and a female to be united in a one-flesh union called marriage.

The New Testament only re-enforces romantic love and sexual relations within marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Concerning sexual desire, in my opinion, is clear in Jesus' teaching in Mathew 5:27-28 where He taught about adultery: "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So, according to biblical ethics, sexual desire outside of marriage is a sin. Trent A. Rogers and John K. Tarwater pointed out:

What God defines as good sexual acts are those that fulfill his unitive and procreative purposes for sex within the context of marriage...God calls Christians to deal with sexual desires, including good sexual desire, through either marital sexual expression or Spirit-enabled self-control (Rogers and Tarwater 2022, 559).

Moksha

The word *moksha* is derived from the Sanskrit word "*muc* "(to free); the term literally means freedom from samsara (transmigration of the soul). Thus, *moksha* means the final liberation of the soul. This concept is derived from samsara, which is associated with the belief in the cyclic rebirths or transmigrations of souls by repeated transmigrations, like an ever-rotating wheel. Although the wheel (a metaphor for repeated reincarnations) continues to rotate supposedly forever, all those on the wheel eventually will all get off and achieve moksha, which means being merged into Brahma (a Hindu god, the Supreme Being, ultimate reality).

Moksha depends upon the law of *karma* (deeds). The more a person performs good work, the more quickly he or she will achieve moksha. So, to achieve moksha easier and earlier, one needs to lead a sound ethical life and do good work. To achieve moksha, individuals must free themselves from material desires and develop an understanding of the soul and the Hindu perception of the universe. This is done through meditation and fulfilling one's *dharma* (duty). *Moksha* can best be described as the freedom of the soul to enter a state of divine bliss and merge with the Brahma.

According to Hinduism, a soul that is no longer reincarnated will enter a state of divine bliss and be merged into the Supreme Being Brahma. It is like a river merging into an ocean, the river representing the individual soul and the ocean representing Brahma. Every Hindu is taught to desire this state of bliss. It's only a matter of time before a given soul achieves moksha. The person who does good work and strictly follows dharma (duty) will take less time, while the person who does terrible things in life takes longer to get *moksha*. The evil person must be reincarnated more times, so it takes longer, but everyone eventually gets *moksha*; and if that is true, it seems to me there is not much incentive to be a good person. This concept is quite different from Christian teaching.

In Christianity, one does good works not to achieve salvation but to please God to become more like Christ and make the world better. Dean C. Halverson also pointed out this distinction:

> By way of contrast, the direction of the Hindu way to enlightenment is from humanity to God and it is based on one's own effort. The direction of the biblical way of salvation, on the other hand, is from God to humanity in that it is based on God's grace, and it is a gift to be received through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 John 4:10) (Halverson 1996, 91).

Hindu Ethics Related to Society and Family in the Light of the Bible

Although the law of *karma* makes human life a very individual affair, the *dharma sutras* (code of duties) are emphatic about every Hindu's social duties (mores). Those *dharma sutras* and all the literature deriving from them are not concerned with theoretical ethics but with practical codes of behavior. As such, they have played an important role in shaping Hindu life and society.

In this section, I discuss some customs and traditions prevalent in Hindu society and in Hindu families and the ethical aspects of these in comparison with Christian ethics.

Ethics in Hindu Society

In Hindu society, there are many systems that represent the ethical organization of the social life of the Hindus, such as the caste system and marriage traditions, established customs, and rituals.

Ethics of the Caste System in Hindu Society

The Caste system is a social stratification in Hindu society. Today the term "caste" is used to describe stratified societal groups based on hereditary groups in South Asia and throughout the world where Hindus currently live. There are four major castes in Hindu society: Brahmin (the priestly caste), *Ksatriya* (the warrior caste), *Vaisya* (the business caste), and *Sudra* (the lower and untouchable caste). Among the educated people in Hindu society, especially in the Western world, this social stratification (caste) is not intensely practiced in contrast to India and other countries in South Asia. Ward J. Fellows pointed out:

> Caste is the ancient religiously based system of social stratification in India. It is theoretically based on karma, because karma determines one's level of birth; one is born into certain caste, the same as one's parents, depending on one's previous karma (Fellows 1979, 115).

I agree with Fellows when he writes that the caste system is a religion-based system. He also points out that it is a social-based system as well. However, those who believe that the caste system is solely religion-based often try to justify this claim by quoting from the Hindu scriptures, mainly the *Rigveda* (part of the Vedas, the oldest of the sacred books of Hinduism). For instance, they quote: "Purusa (another word for Brahma, the Supreme Being), who has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, investing the earth in all directions..." (Rigveda 10:90). Their interpretation of this passage includes the following description of the *Purusa*: *Brahmin* (the priestly caste) originated from His face (the face of the Hindu god, Supreme Being). His arms were made into the *Ksatriya* (warrior caste), his thighs became the *Vaisya* (business caste), and from his feet, the *Sudra* (the lower caste) was born. This reflects their claim that the caste system is solely religion-based, implying that the origin of the castes is directly from the creator *Purusa* (Brahma).

Concerning the origin of the caste system, I disagree with this claim and the traditional interpretation of the verse of the *Rigveda*. If Brahma is the creator of the world, how could his body parts comprise the human societal construct seen in the caste system? If Brahma is the creator of the world, then how could he differentiate between human and divine in his own identity?

It seems that the caste system was introduced into Hindu society by humans who wanted to elevate themselves above the lower castes to establish the supremacy of the Brahmin caste (the highest caste within the general category, the priests). Logically, a good ethical creator would not have created such an unethical system.

I was born and grew up into a Hindu family that belonged to the high caste called *Ksatriya* (the second group warrior caste), one cast below the highest Brahmin caste. As I matured, I found I could not tolerate the caste system because of the unjust social discrimination, although I was born into a higher caste. The way lower caste people are treated by those in higher castes seemed quite unjust to me. They are treated as slaves and looked down on and denigrated. I protested and spoke out against this unethical system, but nobody listened to me.

Through reading the Bible, I learned that in Christ, there is no discrimination. I became a follower of Christ. Then, because of my Christian faith, I was disowned by my parents, family, and society. I was considered an outcast and was treated even lower than the lowest caste (*Sudra*) in that Hindu society.

There is one long-held theory about the origin of the caste system, which I believe is correct. According to this theory, Aryans from central Asia invaded some parts of India, mainly the northern part, in the sixteenth

century B.C., and they introduced the caste system as a means of organizing and controlling the local population (of course comprised of the lower castes). The color (*Varna*) of the skin was one of the main factors used to discriminate the various castes. Ward J. Fellows stated, "The tern varna points to the probable origin of caste in the color patterns of Vedic times, the Aryans being lighter-skinned than indigenous Dravidians, or Dasyus (aboriginal people in India) as they were contemptuously termed" (Fellows 1979, 116). The caste system is a very complex social construct that is difficult to define. The best we can do is to try to describe characteristics that may be said to apply to all castes and to point out the characteristics that distinguish the different castes. A caste is a closed social group theoretically based on heredity: every person belongs to the caste in which he/she is born.

This is how the caste system works in Hindu society. In Hindu society, each caste is an independent organization, with an appointed head and a council comprised of several persons. The council has the power to impose penalties on the caste members. From the point of view of an individual member of a caste, the system provides a fixed social identity from birth until death, from which neither wealth nor poverty, neither success nor disaster can remove a person unless this person violates the standards of behavior laid down by his/her caste. In that case, the council can excommunicate an individual.

In most cases, the person who is excommunicated must pay a penalty to be reinstated. If the person fails to pay the prescribed penalty, he/she will remain ostracized, which naturally brings shame to the whole family. Since no person can change his or her caste, if unable to be reinstated, that person must remain ostracized, which means social abandonment.

The Sanskrit word for caste (the four classes) is "*Varna*" (a word meaning color), which seems to indicate that the racial distinction (based initially on skin color and later heritage) among the four classes played an important part in the development and endurance of the system. Criticisms have been raised even among Hindus that the caste system in society is blatantly unethical. But there seems to be no way to get rid of it. Somehow, it continually remains an established cultural practice.

The customs related to marriage are particularly affected by the caste system. Because the upper three classes are the oppressors of the lowest class Sudra, there are many effects evident in Hindu society. Eating is forbidden between one caste and another.

Historically, over time, forbidden inter-caste marriage took place, and this gave rise to the creation of new societal classes, which eventually became the numerous sub-castes, more than 2500, in medieval India.

The caste system is entirely unethical because it creates inequality in society and makes one person "superior" to another person. According to the Bible, humans were created by God in His image (Genesis 1: 26-28). So why should humans create distinctions like the caste system does? Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation, fought against the caste system throughout his whole life. Yet, the caste system still exists in India, and even to this day, at times, it still causes violence between castes.

In the light of Christian ethics, there is no compromise with a caste system. The message of the Gospel emphatically states that: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). There is no distinction; Christ gave His life for all sinners – irrespective of heritage or birth or status in society. People may create an upper class and lower class in a society, but God loves all people in the world, and if any person of any class or societal position believes in Christ, the one and only Son, they can receive eternal life. Whoever comes to Him gets eternal life. But we are all sinners. The Bible further stated: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

A renowned Indian scholar Madasamy Thirumalai stated:

> To treat people as subhuman is not acceptable according to the Word of God (the Bible). The Bible says that we are all created in His image (Genesis 1:26; 5:1, 3; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; Colossians 3:10; James 3:90. If we are all created as such, what justification do we have for discriminating against people based on birth. (Thirumalai 2002, 50)

We can compare the caste system with racism in the United States. We can compare the superiority complex often found in the Brahmin caste with white supremacy in the United States. Because the Brahmin caste is the highest in the caste system, this is often considered to be associated with a superiority complex among this priestly class in India.

We can also see that some kind of social stratification and discrimination exists in every culture throughout the world. But Christ can transform an individual's heart so that person can see through the eyes of God, which can help to change society, so more people become intolerant of discrimination. Christ and His teachings can remove injustice and social stratification within a society.

Ethics of Marriage in Hindu Society

In this section, I discuss the ethics of marriage and its practice in Hindu society. In Hindu society, marriage has three primary purposes: the promotion of religion, progeny, and sexual pleasure, which they call "*rati*"

(Sanskrit word). This idea is quite different from the Christian idea of marriage. In Christianity, the first purpose of marriage is companionship. Even in the account of Creation, God did not create man and woman for their sexual pleasure only but for their intimate companionship. Procreation and sexual pleasure were one of the purposes (Gen. 2:18-24). God instructed them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, which humans have done extraordinarily well!

In traditional Hindu society, most marriages are arranged by the parents, which is unlike the practice of dating among young people before marriage in the Western world. Hindu parents are the ones who select the partners. Ethically, it is good in one sense because in this process, partners have little or no opportunity to mix freely before marriage, so sexual immorality can usually be avoided. In other words, it is unethical because partners have no opportunity to know each other, so they can have difficulty adjusting to each other after marriage, and this can create problems for both marriage partners.

In Hindu society, intermarriage across castes is forbidden. Of course, this is a consequence of the caste system. The most important custom in Hindu marriage is the "dowry" the groom's side requires and receives from the bride's family. Dowry refers to durable goods, cash, and real and movable property that the bride's family gives to the groom. Sometimes the demands from the groom's family are too high, and the bride's family cannot afford or is unwilling to pay. If the groom is highly educated and comes from an aristocratic family, the groom may demand more from the bride's family. Sometimes, poor fathers cannot arrange a wedding for their daughters because of the expense of the demanded dowry. In this case, poor fathers often make promises to their son-in-law's family, but they may never be able to fulfill them. As a result, married girls may be mentally and physically tortured not only by their husbands but also by their in-laws. In some worst-case scenarios, married girls commit suicide because of this kind of persecution. This situation is common in many South Asian countries. The Indian government has tried to abolish this system and even passed a law in the Indian parliament (The Dowry Prohibition Act enacted on July 1, 1961). However, despite this law, it is still quite common in Indian society.

In Hindu society, daughters don't inherit any of their father's property or estate. Instead, with marriage, the bride may receive gifts, especially Jewelry, from her parents, which is intended to offer her as much financial security as her family can afford. But many times, married girls are cheated by their husbands, who steal the jewelry or want to have a share, which, of course, is cruel and unjust.

I see the dowry system as a social evil. The average young man in Hindu society will not dare to refuse the proffered dowry from the bride's family during their wedding because of the pressure of their parents. But

in modern times, Hindu society has a few exceptional cases. One incident occurred in 1985 when scores of young men in tiny Keerampara village [fifty-five kilometers (34.18 miles) from the port city of Cochin in Kerala (one of the Indian Southern States)] publicly took an oath that they would not accept the dowry. This "rebellion" merited an official visit by the then President of India, Zail Singh. News of this was published in "Asia Week" (a news magazine) on March 8, 1985:

In a country riddled by a dowry system which has given rise to hideous cases of 'dowry deaths' and 'bride burnings' –where avaricious in-laws murder brides who fail to produce substantial offerings-the mere refusal to take dowry is big news. So when scores of young men in Kerala publicly swore they would not accept dowry, the occasion merited a presidential visit. ("Asia Week", March 8, 1985).

Certainly, this was a courageous action on the part of both the President and the young men because the dowry system is an ingrained tradition practiced from generation to generation.

Ethics of Polygamy in Hindu Society

Polygamy is not common in Hindu society. A. L. Basham pointed out: "Polygamy, in ordinary circumstances, was not encouraged by the earlier legal literature" (Basham 1954, 173). In ancient India, kings and chiefs were themselves almost invariably polygamous, but from an ethical perspective, Hindu scriptures do not support polygamy. In practice, the husband can take another wife with the consent of the first if she is barren. Sometimes polygamy is also practiced if the first wife cannot produce a male child, then the husband can marry a second wife again with her permission for the sake of the inheritance of property.

Polygamy was practiced among Patriarchs in the Old Testament and even practiced in later years both among Jews and pagans. However, the teachings of the New Testament are clearly against this practice. The Gospel writer Matthew recorded the statement of Jesus: "...at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Matthew 19:4-5). Although not an explicit prohibition of polygamy, the implication suggests one wife. Since the only humans on earth were one man and one woman, there was no other alternative. Soon thereafter, there was significant polygamy. Jesus quoted earlier scriptures

(Genesis 2:24), noting that a man and a wife become one flesh. Most Christian Theologians agree that in Matthew 19:4-5, Jesus explicitly taught that man should have only one wife.

The implication of the teachings of the Apostle Paul indicates that he did not support polygamy. However, this practice was still prevalent in some places among the new converts from Gentile backgrounds during Paul's time. One example was the church in Corinth. Paul wrote to this church: "But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his wife, and each woman with her husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2-3). This wording of this passage implies monogamy.

Three passages in the Apostle Paul's letters also specifically stated that church leaders should be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6). Although these passages are one of the qualifications for the church leaders, this teaching implies application to every believer. Some people may argue that polygamy is allowed, but not for church leaders. I strongly disagree with this opinion. As a believer, if a man wants to marry, he should have one wife, and a woman should have one husband unless one of the spouses dies.

Ethics of Divorce in Hindu Society

Divorce is not a common practice in Hindu society. But the law books vary in the case of an adulterous wife. Suppose a wife willfully engages in a sexual relationship with a man outside of marriage, or a husband has the same illicit relationship with a woman outside of marriage. Ordinarily, a divorce would not be allowed. A. L Basham pointed out:

> Though the religions law books leave no room for divorce, the 'Arthashastra' (an ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, political science, economic policy and military strategy) shows that it (i.e. divorce) was possible in early times, at least in marriages not solemnized by religious rites (Basham 1954, 173).

Concerning divorce, Hindu ethical teaching is close to Christian teaching. Jesus taught, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:5). I believe this applies to both spouses.

Ethics in the Hindu Family

Traditionally, in Hindu culture, the family is the unit of the social system rather than the individual. A deep sense of solidarity exists in the Hindu family because of the joint family system. A. L. Basham stated:

The Indian family was, and usually still is, a joint one—that is to say a close link was maintained between brothers, uncles, cousins and nephews, who often lived under one roof or group of roofs, and who owned the immovable property of the line in common (Basham 1954, 155).

There is a traditional religious ceremonial rite commemorating the ancestors called *Sradha* (Sanskrit word). This ceremony serves to bind the family together. *Sradha* in Hindu families is usually performed by the adult offspring in honor of deceased family members. This way, the living and the dead are linked together. This religious practice is relatively standard. In my opinion, there are no ethical considerations behind the idea that the dead and the living are somehow linked together by this ceremony. However, this ritual and ceremonial rite commemorating and honoring ancestors can be seen as a good practice, although there is some danger in evolving into ancestor worship.

Ancestor worship is rebuked in the Bible (Ezekiel 43:7-9; Isiah 65:1-4. I agree with Madasamy Thirumalai when he wrote:

> How do we as Christians respond to ancestor worship? At the outset, I would like to point out that ancestor worship is not based solely on respect and deference for dead family members. The Bible commanded us to honor and obey the wisdom of our parents and elders. However, going beyond showing respect and obedience to worshipping them is against the word of God (Thirumalai 2002, 128).

In Christianity, there is also much emphasis on the family. In the beginning, God took the initiative and instituted the family (Genesis 2:18-24). There were close family ties in a patriarchal society (typical of the Old Testament). In my opinion, the societal structure that God established was patriarchal. Adam was made first, and Eve was created because God saw it was not good for Adam to be alone. This implies a patriarchal structure.

Jesus, the incarnated God, was born of a woman into a family and raised in a family. In Galatians 4:4, the Apostle Paul said, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law," Also, when on the cross, Jesus designated John to look after his mother, which suggests a responsible care for her as His earthly mother.

The Christian view holds the family as the foundational institution of society God ordained and constituted by marriage. Children born to or adopted by the parents are integrated into the family relationships. As Christians, we also become part of the "family of God" (the Church) when we accept and proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Savior. In one sense, we have biological families, such as fathers, mothers, and siblings. In

another sense, as people belonging to Jesus, we have been adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:16-17). Christians adopted into a Christian family are part of a two-fold family (adopted and God's family).

There are some similarities between Christian family ideals and Hindu family ideals. Both teach specific ethical values and duties toward other family members, societal mores, and folkways. But Christian ethics extend to include responsibilities toward fellow Christians who are part of God's family. Those who belong to Jesus are members of God's family. Members of God's family must maintain proper relationships and accountabilities with each other.

The Role of Women in the Hindu Family

The *Vedas* hold women (married women living with their husbands) in high esteem and address them as *Dharma Patni* (in Sanskrit), one who promotes and preserves proper conduct. Traditionally, in Hindu families, married women's role has been described as supporting family life, including performing an essential role in the family's religious activities. However, the status of women's authority and the rights within the family circle almost always hold a minor status. In traditional and conservative Hindu families, the wife has no individuality or independent authority. She must abide by the decisions of her husband. In the early days, women's freedom was generally much restricted in the Hindu family. A married woman's duty was to serve and attend to her husband, which is characteristically a servant's role.

The property rights of women in the Hindu family are also limited. When she is unmarried, she is under the guidance and authority of her parents; when she is married, she is bound by her husband's authority; and if she becomes a widow, she is under the care and authority of her adult children. If a widow has no children or has minor children and if her husband has property and assets, often the other family members deprive her of the assets and property of her husband, which is unjust and ethically wrong. In this case, a woman may suffer greatly.

The role of Hindu women and their rights within the family constellation have changed greatly over time due to many factors, including globalization and the impact of Western culture. In many modern Hindu communities, society accepts the idea that men and women have equal rights. So, a Hindu woman can choose to pursue a career and be the primary breadwinner for the household.

Christianity teaches that the husband and wife should both submit to each other. "Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do the Lord...

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:21-25). In Christianity, submission is reciprocal.

Attitudes toward Widows in the Hindu Family

In ancient times, widows were considered unimportant to everyone except their own children. Their presence in any public function would bring gloom for everybody. In modern Hindu society, the presence of widows in public functions is now allowed; however, the old prejudices against their presence in Hindu family functions are still generally practiced in India, especially in rural areas.

This is against Christian ethical ideals. Christianity teaches respect and care for widows: "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need" (1 Timothy 5:3).

In medieval times, teenage girls were often married to older men. The husband could be a widower, or this could be his second marriage after a divorce. In some cases, this could be polygamy, where the husband could have more than one wife. Girls had no choice in such decisions because marriages were arranged by their parents and according to their choice. In such cases, often poverty of the bride's family was the primary motivation as this could be a significant financial benefit to the bride's family. This motivation was ethically wrong for the young bride's parents, motivated by greed. This might also be wrong for the groom, motivated by his ego to have a beautiful young wife or so he could father more offspring. In those days Hindu ethics did not even condemn this practice.

After the death of husbands, many wives were compelled to be cremated on the funeral pyre along with their deceased husbands. This was a ruthless and unethical practice. Under British rule in India, this custom was made legally and officially null and void, assisted by the influence of some Hindu reformers and Christian missionaries.

In medieval times, young widows were not allowed to remarry, a rule strictly applied in Hindu society. However, in modern Hindu society, widows, especially those who are young, can marry to avoid the temptation of sexual immorality. This emphasis is very similar to the admonition of St. Paul in 1Timothy 5:14-15: "So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have already turned away to follow Satan".

There is an essential distinction between Hindu and Christian ethics regarding motivations and attitudes. In the Old Testament, some passages emphasize the heart's attitudes and motivations. For example, in the

Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17), the 5th commandment was to "honor your father and mother..." I believe it is possible to honor your parents with your words: "Yes, Father..." and "Yes, Mother..." while at the same time not obeying what they tell you to do. So, one might be very respectful with words but not with actions. The 10th Commandment says we are not to covet, and I see this as a commandment related to a heart attitude. If we do not covet, then we are not motivated to steal.

Isaiah also revealed God's concern for the heart – and not just the actions: "The Lord says: These people come near to me near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me..." (Isaiah 29:13). This clearly distinguishes between what one says and what one does and emphasizes God's concern for the heart attitudes and motivations. In actual practice, the Jewish religious leaders, like the Scribes and Pharisees, emphasized external behavior much more than the heart attitudes.

Jesus also pointed out this distinction. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21). The Gospel writer Luke also recorded that Jesus said, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:45-46). Jesus differentiated between what a person says and what he does, motivated by his heart and attitude.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized the importance of the heart, as in Matthew 5: "...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven..." "You have heard it said to the men of old 'you shall not kill...' but I say ..." not to be angry with your brother; not to insult your brother; not to call your brother a fool..." He did the same with the question of adultery and said, "but I say..." not to lust after a woman. Thus, He shifted the focus from the action to the heart attitude that motivates the action.

Furthermore, when Jesus was challenged with the question about the greatest commandment, He did not refer to the Ten Commandments, which would be expected, but instead chose other Scripture that said, "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength..." (Mark 12:30). Love comes from the heart and energizes behavior. According to Matthew, when Jesus pointed to this as the greatest commandment, He added that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself, and then He said, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." In other words, love fulfills all the commands in the law by motivating good behavior.

Hindu ethics is more like the teachings of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees, which emphasized external behavior, whereas Jesus—and Christianity—emphasize the internal heart attitudes that motivate good behavior. This is a crucial distinction.

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the ethical teachings of the Sacred Books of Hinduism in the light of Christianity. To do that, I examined the three most Sacred books of Hinduism: The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, and I compared the ethical teachings in these with those in the Bible. I also discussed Hindu ethics and the four Hindu life goals, considering related Christian teaching. Lastly, I debated Hindu ethics related to society and family in the light of Christian teaching related to these areas of interest.

Hinduism claims that all their moral values were contained in their old cultural traditions, provided these are correctly understood. The examination of Hindu ethics reveals that Hinduism possesses many sound ethical principles that are not very different from the morality found in most cultures in the world. For example, the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita lists ethical and moral teachings and virtues, including non-violence. Non-violence is a basic teaching of Hinduism. But in the Bhagavad Gita, we can see Krishna advocating violence by persuading Arjuna to engage in war by performing his duty as a Kshatriya (warrior caste). In contrast, Jesus Christ is the actual model of non-violence in Christianity.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches "action without attachment." However, it does not explain which type of action applies. It may involve some evil action, so if any person does the cruel act, he cannot avoid attachment. Hence, this emphasis is ambiguous and confusing. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna is also the essence of everything, whether it is good or bad.

In contrast, the Bible says God is holy, righteous, and sound and cannot be the essence of anything evil or wrong. We can see this at the beginning of the creation story (Genesis 1 and 2).

Even though there is no clear definition of sin in the Gita and the Upanishads, Christians can see many ethical teachings, like in the Bible. In witnessing to a Hindu person, as far as ethics is concerned, Christians should always emphasize the sinless and exemplary moral character of Jesus Christ and His uniqueness. It is the best and easiest way to approach Hindus because they have nothing to say against this. Nobody can

raise questions about the moral life of Jesus. The Christian God is the God who defines ethics, and He was incarnated into human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

The contribution of Jesus to Christian ethics is noteworthy enough to warrant special attention. It is foundational to Christian ethics compared to Jewish ethics (as practiced) and Hindu ethics. I see this as revolutionary – God looks on and cares about what is in our hearts—not just about our behavior (actions). Our actions may honor God while our hearts are far from Him. This shift was so revolutionary that Jesus implied that if our hearts were right, proper actions and behavior would follow our hearts, fulfilling both the law and the prophets! This is revolutionary, in my opinion.

The positive side of Hindu ethics, where common ground can be found, can provide a bridge between Christianity and Hinduism. When St. Paul wrote to the Philippians from a Roman prison, he said, "It does not matter! I am happy about it just so Christ is preached in every way possible, whether from wrong or right motives. I will continue to be happy" (Philippians 1:18). We can take a similar attitude and rejoice when actual ethical values are proclaimed. Some good is done, even though it is not done in the name of the Christian Gospel. Moral goodness is the best preparation for learning God's truth.

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