Religions and Development
Research Programme

Hinduism and International Development: Religions and Development Background Paper

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Religions and Development

Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan.

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

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Glossary

adharma	anti-dharma
ahimsa	non-violence
artha	one of the four aims of life: wealth/material prosperity
ashrama	stage in life
bakhti	devotion
brahmacharya	student of the vedas
caturvarga	four aims of life (*purusharthas*)
dana	giving
darshana	'orthodox' system of philosophy in Hinduism (*samkhya, yoga, nyaya, vaisheshika, purva mimamsa* and *vedanta*)
dharma	duty/role
gramdevata	local deity
grihastha	householder
jati	caste
kama	one of the four aims of life: enjoyment
karma	rebirth (into a particular caste) as a result of actions in a previous life
karma yoga	selfless action
kshatriya	warrior class
moksha	spiritual liberation
puja	act of devotion to a personal deity
punya	religious merit
rajadharma	role/duties of the King
rishi	seer
rita	cosmic order
sadhana	religious path
sadharana dharma	everyday or universal duty/role (also known as *sanatana dharma* (eternal *dharma*) and *samanya dharma* (equal *dharma*))
sadhu	male mendicant or holy man
sadhvi	female mendicant
samnyasin	renouncer, renunciate
samsara	cycle of reincarnation; future rebirths
sangh parivar	family of organizations that includes the RSS (Rashtriya Svayam-sevak Sangh), VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) and BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)
sati	custom in which a widow burns herself on her husband's funeral pyre
seva	service
shramana	renunciate
stridharma	a woman's duty/role (as wife and mother)
svadharma	one's own duty
shudra	servant class
upanayana	initiation ceremony for boys of the upper three classes
vaishya	merchant class
vanaprashtha	person living in the forest
varna	class
vedas	ancient Hindu texts

Preface

This is one of a series of six background papers prepared as part of the Religions and Development Research Programme. Each aims to provide an introduction and overview of the teachings of one of the major faith traditions with which the programme is dealing: Christianity, African traditional religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Their purpose is to summarize recent material produced by the relevant religious organizations and by some of the main academic interpreters to provide background material on the understandings of 'development' that arise out of the core beliefs and values of each faith tradition.

Each review seeks to identify concepts and teachings relevant to human development within the relevant faith tradition, with reference to its teachings/ethics and theology. It also considers the extent to which the understandings have evolved over time; identifies major differences in the understanding of concepts developed by different branches within a faith tradition; and discusses the extent to which views associated with particular religious organisations and their adherents arise from their religious beliefs or are influenced by the social and cultural context in which adherents live.

The writers were asked to concentrate on the key concepts underlying the notion of 'development': development (goals, obstacles and appropriate strategies), poverty (and its causes), wealth, inequality and well-being. They were also asked to consider issues of particular relevance to the various components in this research programme, although the extent to which they were able to do so varied:

a) Credit and debt
b) Gender roles and equality
c) Education (the role of education and access to educational opportunities)
d) Engagement in public life through politics, social movements, advocacy, community organization etc
e) Corruption/ethical behaviour in public life
f) Livelihood decisions e.g. building wealth, seeking improved wellbeing, begging.

The contemporary discourse of development post-dates most religious teaching, which is not historically or even today couched in terms of the conventional international development discourse. However, each religious tradition has ideas about 'right social ordering' and provides guidelines to individuals and societies about the values and ethics they should adopt in their pursuit of a life that is not just spiritually rewarding but also morally and socially responsible. Interpreting these teachings in a

relatively short paper in the light of the terminology of development is problematic and the interpretations and views put forward by the authors of these papers are necessarily partial and provisional.

Moreover, the nature and role of the intellectual tradition responsible for the interpretation of early writings varies between the faith traditions: in Christianity it is traditionally the role of 'theology', in Islam of 'jurisprudence', and in Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism of 'philosophy'. However, interpretation has never been confined to members of these intellectual traditions – scholars and teachers from other disciplines have contributed their own insights, as have creative artists and mystics. In addition, the interpretation of teachings may vary between the authorities responsible at the highest level and local teachers, between the official sources and everyday lived religion, over time, and between places, where it is interpreted through the lens of differing cultural traditions. Some of this variety is captured in the papers, but certainly not all. The authors themselves come from different backgrounds: not all are scholars from within the religious tradition they are surveying, and not all are adherents of the tradition about which they are writing. Each has his or her own interests and preoccupations. The accounts are also dependent on the available sources, which do not necessarily deal with all the issues that the authors were asked to consider. Although each of the papers adopts a basically similar approach, its coverage and detailed organization varies.

These papers were initially prepared for the use of the large international team of researchers engaged in the Religions and Development Research Programme. We hope, however, that they will be a useful resource for all those interested in the topic.

Carole Rakodi
Director, Religions and Development Research Programme.

Summary

This background paper is concerned with the intersection between Hinduism and international development. It provides an overview of existing studies, discusses the views of some of the main academic interpreters who have drawn attention to links between Hinduism and issues relevant to development, and refers to relevant religious organizations. The Hindu tradition is the major religious tradition in India: around 80 per cent of the Indian population are registered as Hindu. There are also around 2 million Hindus living in Pakistan (1.5 per cent of the population) and in the UK there are around 400,000 (1 per cent of the population).[1] Many of the latter send remittances to South Asia or support charities such as Hindu Aid.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section aims to clarify what is meant by the 'Hindu tradition'. This refers not only to gaining an understanding of what might be called key Hindu beliefs and practices, but also and in a more fundamental sense relates to the fact that the very concept of what is meant by 'Hinduism' is complicated and contested. It is important to draw a distinction between the lived and textual tradition, which also reflects the categories of so-called 'village', 'popular' or 'vernacular' Hinduism and 'Brahmanical' Hinduism. Whereas the former relates to what the majority of people actually do, the latter relates to a version of Hinduism that focuses on the Sanskrit texts (e.g. the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the epics) and the beliefs and practices of the priestly Brahmin caste. Studies of Hinduism that emerged during the British colonial period tended to view the Brahmanical religion as the authentic version of Hinduism and saw 'village Hinduism' as an aberration or corruption of the pure textual tradition. Therefore, linked to the consideration of the gap between lived religion and the textual tradition is the broader issue of the extent to which the very notion of Hinduism is a colonial construction. The section ends with a discussion of the origins and development of Hinduism and emphasizes the need to undertake both textual and ethnographic research.

In the second section, the relationship between Hinduism and some concepts and debates relevant to development (social ethics, including human rights and inequality; political systems; and attitudes towards economics, including notions of wellbeing, poverty and wealth) are explored. The final section contains a more focussed investigation into some important contemporary development issues and the ways that Hindus might approach them: credit and debt; gender roles and equality; the role of and access to education; engagement in the public sphere; and corruption/ethical behaviour in public life.

1 Introduction

1.1 The aims of this background paper

The aim of this study is to provide a background paper that is concerned with the intersection between Hinduism and international development. At the outset, it is important to emphasize that this is an introductory paper, written with the assumption that many of its readers are unfamiliar with the Hindu tradition. It aims to provide a *starting point* for thinking about the relationships between aspects of the Hindu tradition and development ideas and practices. It is not an in-depth critical study of the relationships between Hinduism and development, but rather an overview of existing studies. In the paper I will discuss the views of some of the main academic interpreters who have drawn attention to links between Hinduism and issues relevant to development and will also refer to relevant religious organizations.

The Hindu tradition is the major religious tradition in India: around 80 per cent of the Indian population are registered as Hindu. There are also around 2 million Hindus living in Pakistan (1.5 per cent of the population) and in the UK there are around 400,000 (1 per cent of the population).[2] Many of the latter send remittances to South Asia or support charities such as Hindu Aid.

Firstly, I will look at the relationship between Hinduism and some concepts and debates broadly relevant to development (social ethics, including human rights and inequality; political systems; and attitudes towards economics, including notions of wellbeing, poverty and wealth). Secondly, I will provide a more focussed investigation into some important contemporary development issues and the ways that Hindus might approach them: credit and debt; gender roles and equality; the role of and access to education; engagement in the public sphere; and corruption/ethical behaviour in public life.

Before embarking on this discussion of Hinduism and development, it is important to clarify what is meant by the ‘Hindu tradition’. This refers not only to gaining an understanding of what might be called key Hindu beliefs and practices, but also and in a more fundamental sense relates to the fact that the very concept of what is meant by ‘Hinduism’ is complicated and contested.

1.2 A distinction between ‘lived’ and ‘textual’ religion

In beginning to think through the links between Hinduism and international development, it is important to reflect on the gulf that may exist between ‘lived religion’ or ‘popular religion’ and the ideal version of

the tradition that can be ‘extracted’ from religious texts. While people often do not exactly follow or match up to the ideals of the traditions that they profess to follow, it is also the case that texts may not reflect how people actually live out their religion. For example, texts can serve strategic political interests that become entrenched for different reasons at particular times. Moreover, texts are open to multiple and even conflicting interpretations. It is important to avoid the trap of making claims that, if a particular view can find support in the texts, it must be ‘the’ Hindu approach on any particular topic. Religious traditions are not homogenous and local cultural variations in religious belief and practice have an impact on the diverse ways that they are played out in different locations. The difficulty of extracting Hindu views on development (or any other topic) from religious texts points towards the value of empirical or ethnographic research that captures the various ways in which people approach their religious traditions in practice. This is not to say that ‘texts’ tell us nothing about how people practise religion, but that they cannot be taken as a straightforward reflection or indication of the nature of religious activity and its relations to the social world.

More specifically, this gulf between the lived and the textual tradition reflects a distinction between so-called ‘village’, ‘popular’ or ‘vernacular’ Hinduism and ‘Brahmanical’ Hinduism. Whereas the former relates to what the majority of people actually do, the latter relates to a version of Hinduism that focuses upon the Sanskrit texts (e.g. the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the epics) and the beliefs and practices of the priestly Brahmin caste. As will be discussed below, studies of Hinduism that emerged during the British colonial period tended to view the Brahmanical religion as the authentic version of Hinduism and saw ‘village Hinduism’ as an aberration or corruption of the pure textual tradition. Therefore, linked to this consideration of the gap between lived religion and the textual tradition, is the broader issue of the extent to which the very notion of Hinduism is a colonial construction.

1.3 Hinduism and the world religion debate: the notion of Hinduism as a colonial construction

Unlike the other ‘world religions’, Hinduism has no founder, nor can it be said to have originated at a particular time. In fact the words ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Hindu’ have only been in use for a couple of hundred years and imply a unity that is difficult to find once one starts surveying the teachings, beliefs and practices of so-called ‘Hindus’. Scholars have argued that prior to the late 1700s there was no such thing as a religion called ‘Hinduism’. As Klostermaier suggests, the idea of a Hindu or Hinduism is not

indigenous to India: 'the very name *Hinduism* owes its origin to chance; foreigners in the West extending the name of the province of Sindh to the whole country lying across the Indus River and simply calling all its inhabitants *Hindus* and their religion *Hinduism*' (1994, p.30-31). Similarly, for Cantwell Smith,

> the term 'Hinduism' is, in my judgment, a particularly false conceptualisation, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of Hindus...the classical Hindus were inhibited by no lack of sophistication or self-consciousness. They thought about what we call religious questions profusely and with critical analysis...they could not think of Hinduism because that is the name we give to a totality whatever it might be that they thought, or did, or thought worth doing (1964, p.61).

Thus, according to this argument, the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are categories superimposed by outsiders (e.g. British colonialists, Christian missionaries and western 'orientalist' scholars). Their widespread usage can be traced back to the eighteenth century, during which they emerged as a colonial response to the need to classify the religious beliefs and practices of the majority of the Indian population as a 'religion'. Moreover, the colonial orientalist scholars, missionaries and administrators typically classified as 'Hinduism' those beliefs and practices that were associated with the priestly Brahmin caste (e.g. the elite Sanskrit tradition) rather than the colloquial village or popular 'religion' in which most people actually engaged. They were far less concerned with the pragmatic religion of village Hinduism (or indeed indigenous Buddhism) than they were with exegesis of the written texts and the isolation of foundational teachings directed towards the salvation of the individual. Popular religion was generally regarded as an aberration, a corruption of an authentic religious tradition that reflected a golden age of human civilization (e.g. the religion of the Aryan authors of the Vedas, the most ancient 'Hindu' texts) or the original intention of the founder (e.g. the Buddha).[3]

Scholars have not only drawn attention to the ways in which a monolithic unity was forced upon the totality of what 'Hindus' across India did and believed in, but also that this reflected a blending of a Judaeo-Christian model of what a religion should be with a Brahmanical (upper caste) version of that tradition (Thapar, 1989). This new form of organized Hinduism:

> …seeks historicity for the incarnations of its deities, encourages the idea of a centrally sacred book, claims monotheism as significant to the worship of deity, acknowledges the authority of the ecclesiastical organization of certain sects as prevailing over all and has supported large-scale missionary work and conversion. These changes allow it to transcend caste identities and reach out to larger numbers (Thapar, 1989, p. 228).

In telling this story about the 'invention of Hinduism' it is important to also recognize the contribution of indigenous thinkers and movements. For example, the Brahmo Samaj, formed in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy, defined Hinduism by referring back to the 'golden age' of the elite Sanskrit traditions, to identify a religion which knew of one true god, *Brahman*, and had foundational texts, the *Upanishads*. Christians had presented a critique of the idolatry and polytheism of the religious practices associated with Hinduism, and it was Roy's intention to "rehabilitate the Hindu identity scoffed at by the Europeans" (Jaffrelot, 1993, p.518), albeit following the rational logic and Christian model of the western colonists. Moreover, as Killingley notes, Ram Mohan Roy was (probably) the first Hindu to use the term Hinduism in the early nineteenth century (1993, p. 62-3).

There have also been critiques of the position that Hinduism is an invention. Lorenzen, for instance, argues that, although the term Hinduism may not have been used until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, a "Hindu religion …was firmly established long before 1800" (1999, p. 631). It is not my intention to pursue this debate any further but instead to sum up what it can offer to our discussion. Firstly, it draws attention to the ways in which western interests have shaped how we understand Hinduism today; secondly, this construction of religious boundaries has fed into and also shaped the emergence of distinct religio-cultural identities in South Asia, where they are actually more fluid; and, finally, calling Hinduism a 'world religion' implies a unity that is not reflected in this tradition as it is within some other so-called world religious traditions. Nevertheless, reduction of the diversity of religious and social practices into the category of Hinduism has also been part of the project of the modern Hindu Right, which has extended the religious boundaries established during the colonial era to frame the communal divisions that blight India today.[4]

While King asks: "is there really a single ancient religion designated by the catch-all term 'Hinduism' or is the term merely a fairly recent social construction of Western origin?" (1999, p. 146), it is also the case that today, many 'will be sure of their identity as 'Hindu', in contrast to being Christian, Muslim or Buddhist. Nevertheless, the kind of Hindu a person is will vary a great deal and differences between Hindus can be as great as differences between Hindus and Buddhists or Christians (Flood, 1996, p. 5). Bearing the foregoing discussion in mind, is it even possible to talk about the 'origins' of Hinduism, or any sort of unity that can be called 'Hindu' teachings, beliefs and practices? This question poses a challenge for contemporary Hindu scholarship.

1.4 The challenge for contemporary Hindu scholarship

In making the claim that Hinduism is an 'orientalist' invention or construction, the aim is not to imply that a new religion as such was formed in the eighteenth century, but instead to draw attention to the ways in which the colonial orientalist scholars, missionaries and administrators gave a name (Hinduism) to the totality of diverse practices found in India, that were followed by the majority of the population and that were not associated with other religions. As noted above, what they included in the category of 'Hinduism' was skewed towards the Brahmanical or Sanskrit version. As a result, a key challenge facing contemporary scholars of Hinduism is to avoid portrayals of Hindu belief and practice that replicate the Brahmanical and orientalist bias that dominates accounts of the tradition during the colonial, and even post-colonial, periods. It is necessary to begin discussions about the origins and development of the tradition with an assessment of the archaeological and textual evidence. However, the work of anthropologists and sociologists, who are typically more interested in what people do rather than what the texts say they should do, is also of significance (e.g. see Babb, 1975; Das, 1977; Fuller, 1984, 1992; Ghurye, 1955, 1961, 1964; Gold, 1988, 2002; Gold and Raheja, 1994; Khare, 1984; Marriott, 1955, 1990; Parry, 1979, 1994; Srinivas, 1960, 1962, 1966, 1976, 1987). This work captures non-Brahmanical perspectives and so-called 'village' or 'popular' Hinduism. Anthropologists and sociologists have also studied what Hindus do today and this work is useful in informing and complementing our interpretations of the archaeological and textual record. For instance, the dominant textual tradition (consisting of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas etc.) typically associated with Hinduism (largely as a result of the way in which the colonial interest in Hinduism developed) is written in Sanskrit and reflects a Brahmanical perspective. In order to gain a more representative picture of what Hinduism is, rather than just the Brahmanical perspective, it is important to also look at the lived tradition and to identify texts associated with other castes and languages.

1.5 The origins and development of 'Hinduism'

1.5.1 The Aryans and the Vedas

The earliest evidence that we have of religious belief and practice in the Indian subcontinent is that of the Indus Valley Civilisation (circa 2500BCE to 1500BCE) and the later Aryan culture, which developed during the second millennium BCE. The exact relationship between these two cultures and the ways in which they feed into the development of what we now call the Hindu tradition has been much debated. One view is that the Indus Valley Civilisation declined and eventually disappeared under

pressure from Aryan invaders entering South Asian from Central Europe. Scholars have been able to trace elements of what we now call Hinduism, in terms of some of its key practices and beliefs, back to those of the Aryan culture. However, there is another view that Aryan culture grew within India as a development of the Indus Valley civilization and, as such, 'Hinduism' is not the product of an outside invasion.[5] Whichever view one takes, Flood argues that "Hinduism might be regarded as the development over the next 2000 years of Aryan culture, interacting with non-Aryan or Dravidian and tribal cultures, though it is the Aryan culture which has provided the 'master narrative', absorbing and controlling other discourses" (1996, p. 23).

Despite archaeological remains in the Indus Valley (in particular, at two key sites in what is now Pakistan: Mohenjo Daro and Harrappa), very little is known of Aryan religious practices. Some stone seals depicting what looks like deities do suggest links with later Hindu practices but on the whole such evidence is weak and speculative. By contrast, evidence for links between the Aryan culture and later Hinduism is far stronger. The Aryans were nomadic pastoralists (to be contrasted with the settled, highly sophisticated culture of the Indus Valley). Our knowledge of their social, political and economic structures as well as their religious practices comes from their texts called the Vedas, originally oral texts passed down the generations by *rishis (*seers). These four texts are evidence of a highly ritualistic culture that placed a great deal of importance on worshipping and placating its various deities, many of whom were linked to natural phenomena (Agni/fire, Vayu/wind, Surya/sun, Indra/thunderbolt etc.). The concept of *rita* (cosmic order) was of the utmost importance, and regular sacrifices to the deities (particularly an elaborate fire sacrifice to Agni) were considered necessary in order to maintain *rita*. These required both the participation of a priestly class and the reciprocal support of wealthy householders or merchants, who patronized the often-expensive ritual activities.

1.5.2 The Upanishads and the emergence of philosophy

As the Vedic period progressed, however, we find that the texts reveal an increasing emphasis upon speculative questions and a gradual shift from the performance of external sacrifice to internal reflection and contemplation. Texts called the Upanishads (otherwise known as Vedanta – 'end of Veda', composed between 1500 – 500 BCE) complete this process. Instead of performing external rituals to the deities, the emphasis shifts to contemplation of 'Brahman' (the supreme godhead) and questions are asked about its relationship to the individual. The Upanishads are concerned with

interpreting and elucidating the inner meaning of the Vedic sacrifice. Brahman came to be understood as the power of the ritual sacrifice, identical to the power underlying the cosmos and, indeed, identical to the individual 'self' or atman. It is within this shifting understanding of the nature of the 'absolute' and the individual that we can contextualize many of the concepts and institutions of later Hinduism. For instance, there are six distinct 'orthodox' systems of philosophy or *darshanas*: *samkhya, yoga, nyaya, vaisheshika; purva mimamsa* and *vedanta*. These schools of thought emerged from the speculative traditions that gained ascendancy within Upanishadic thinking. They attempt, in different ways, to deal with various questions surrounding the nature of the absolute and the individual and the relationship between them, and how to escape from *samsara* (future rebirths). *Vedanta*, for instance, is concerned with the 'end of the vedas' or the Upanishads. There are ten principal schools of *vedanta* (Klostermaier 1994).

The re-evaluation of the significance of ritual that occurred as the Vedic period progressed – "seeing its internalization within the individual as its highest meaning, and subordinating ritual action to ritual knowledge" (Flood, 1996, p. 74) culminated in a spiritual knowledge that, it is believed, can be gained through world-renunciation and various ascetic practices collectively known as yoga. We find evidence of the existence of ascetic practices in the Upanishads and by the 5th and 6th centuries BCE such yogic traditions have developed in prominence within both the Vedic culture and related traditions such as Jainism and Buddhism. There are thought to have been proto-ascetic/yogic traditions within the early Vedic tradition, but a period of economic development and urban growth along the Ganges plain (by the 5th century BCE) also heralded a shift to increasing individualism and a weakening of traditional collective and ritual activity. Alongside this we find the emergence within Brahmanical Hinduism of individualistic renunciate traditions (*shramana* traditions) whereby various yogic practices of inner contemplation and discipline are favoured over external ritual action, with the aim of reaching higher states of consciousness and being released from the bonds of future rebirths. A tension thus emerged between the worldly emphasis of Brahmanical ritual and the esoteric world-rejecting emphasis of the yogic individualist. This dialectic or tension between the 'man-in-the-world' and the 'renouncer' was considered by the famous Indologist Louis Dumont to reveal the 'secret of Hinduism' (Dumont, 1970). And indeed this tension also appears in various places throughout the later tradition.

While it is within this shifting understanding of the nature of the 'absolute' and the individual, as well as the tension between renunciation and existence in the world, that we can contextualize many of the concepts and institutions of later Hinduism, there are aspects of orthodox Brahmanical religion that are rather more sophisticated and abstract (e.g. contemplation upon Brahman, the 'formless divine' and the goals of the various philosophical schools) than the down to earth practices of ordinary people. The latter typically involve the worship of various divine figures with elaborate mythologies and iconographies. Moreover, we should also remember that looking at Hinduism through its Sanskrit texts as they have evolved only tells us part of the picture about what Hindus did and believed in, as well as how the tradition developed over time. Two things are important to mention here. First, Brahmanism also absorbed more popular theistic practices, thus from about 500 BCE the sectarian worship of particular deities developed and devotion took over from Vedic ritual (although this never died out). Second, while over time pan-Indian deities emerged that are worshipped across the country and whose myths find expression within Sanskrit texts (e.g. the Puranas), there is also much religious practice at the popular or village level that is not captured by the Brahmanical, Sanskrit tradition.

1.5.3 The theistic traditions

The popular worship of Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva and the Shakti (the goddess), in particular, came to dominate Hindu belief and practice. The worship of the goddess in Hinduism sets it apart from other so-called world religions. O'Flaherty (1980) makes a distinction between two different sets of goddesses: 'goddesses of the breast' and 'goddesses of the tooth'. The former are the wives or consorts of male deities: Vishnu's wife is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; Shiva's wife is Parvati; Krishna is usually associated with the cow girl Radha (his 'girlfriend' rather than his wife); Rama with Sita; and Brahma with Saraswati (the goddess of learning). This can be seen to reinforce and reflect the model of women as wives and homemakers. The latter, by contrast, are associated with independence and sexuality – all the qualities usually deplored in actual women. We find, for instance, Kali, a goddess associated with Tantrism; and Durga who, in the Devi Mahatmya, slays Mahisha the buffalo demon, with whom none of the gods had been able to deal.

The Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are one place where stories about the deities are found, often cast as military heroes, but their mythologies are also depicted in the Puranas, as well as vernacular devotional poetry. In contrast to the idea of the impersonal absolute Brahman –

discussed and debated in the Upanishads and other philosophical texts/traditions – the theistic trends that developed considered the absolute to be one or other of the personal deities: they had names, forms and mythologies and were arguably more appealing to the average Indian than the esoteric 'Brahman'.

By the time of the seventh century CE in the South of India, and spreading to the North by the thirteenth century, the *bhakti* (devotional) movement centred upon personal devotion to the deities Shiva and Vishnu had emerged. In terms of who could participate in worship and devotion, it was more inclusive of both women and outcastes. For instance, Mahadevyakka was a wandering, naked ascetic in the twelfth century, who worshipped Shiva and belonged to the Lingayat sect. In her poetry she writes of her longing for Shiva and scorns worldly love as impermanent and unsatisfactory:

> I love the Beautiful one
> With no bond nor fear
> No clan no land
> No landmarks
> For his beauty…
>
> Take these husbands who die,
> Decay, and feed them
> To your kitchen fires (Flood, 1996: 172).

1.5.4 Popular or village Hinduism

A good place to begin a discussion of popular Hinduism is Fuller's *Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. He writes:

> By 'popular Hinduism', I conventionally refer to the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, 'practical' religion of ordinary Hindus…Popular Hinduism can be distinguished from 'textual Hinduism', the 'philosophical' religion set out and elaborated in the sacred texts that are the principal subject matter for Indologists, Sanskritists, historians of religion, and other textual scholars. The sacred texts of Hinduism…are often vitally important to popular religion, and the latter cannot be studied successfully unless textual scholarship is taken into account…Nevertheless, themes central in the scriptures are not always central in ordinary people's beliefs and practices, and textual scholars' conclusions do not necessarily provide good guides to the workings of popular religion" (1992, p. 5-6)

Fuller then returns to some of the themes raised earlier in this paper, about the distinction between popular/village Hinduism and Brahmanical/textual Hinduism. He emphasizes their mutual relationships and the need to study them together, yet also stresses that much is missed about Hindu belief and practice if one only reads the Sanskrit texts. In particular, scholars of popular or village Hinduism draw attention to the importance of the worship of local deities (*gramdevatas*) in addition to the pan-Indian deities such as Vishnu, Krishna or Shiva (Srinivas, 1952), as well as the existence of classes of priests, often from castes other than the Brahmin, who are associated with those deities (Babb, 1975). These local deities and their associated priests play a crucial function in that they are part of a sacred universe within which the individual is located and which must be carefully manipulated through the making of vows or offerings in order that misfortune is avoided and good fortune secured.

1.5.5 Summing up

The aim of the above discussion was to think about the question 'what is Hinduism?' This was approached not only in terms of thinking about key beliefs and practices, but also in terms of questions about the notion that Hinduism is a colonial construction and the undesirability of relying solely upon the Sanskrit texts to tell us what Hinduism ought to be. Instead, in addition to textual study (in both Sanskrit and other languages), ethnographic research is necessary to give a broader picture of the Hindu tradition.

My aim in the next section is to look at the relationships between Hinduism and some concepts and debates relevant to development: social ethics, including human rights and inequality; political systems; and attitudes towards economics, including notions of wellbeing, poverty and wealth.

2 The Hindu tradition and development: impact on key development concepts

2.1 Hindu social ethics

Thinking about the contribution of religious systems to ethics (particularly in the context of modern concerns such as international development) can be approached in a number of ways. Firstly, some systems of ethics reflect a lived tradition and what people actually do; they are culturally and historically grounded. They may or may not correspond to the sorts of values that development wishes to encourage. Secondly, there are 'modern' interpretations of a tradition (e.g. ecological ethics, the attempts of the Hindu reformers to modernize the tradition in line with liberal values). While any tradition can theoretically support such innovations, the extent to which the lived tradition transforms itself in line with them will vary. A good place, to begin a discussion of Hindu social ethics is with the so-called 'reformers' who have been prominent since the late eighteenth century. There is no tradition of 'engaged Hinduism' (in the same way that there is an 'engaged Buddhism') and identifying such reformers is perhaps the best way of considering early attempts to make the tradition responsive to modern liberal values. Before looking at these reform movements, some relevant aspects of Hindu social ethics will first be discussed through looking briefly at the Hindu concepts of caste, *karma* and *dharma*. I will also reflect upon the way in which these concepts are gendered and the implications of this for women.

2.1.1 Hindu concepts of caste, karma and dharma

The Hindu tradition has traditionally sustained a vision of society that is hierarchical and non-egalitarian. In particular, the caste system and the view that women are a lower rebirth than men, clearly present problems for the egalitarian values that drive modern development policies. There is some suggestion in the Vedas, the earliest texts associated with Hinduism, which date from the second millennium BCE, that society was already divided into four classes or *varnas*: the priestly Brahmin class; the warrior or *kshatriya* class; the merchant or *vaishya* class and the servant or *shudra* class. The top three *varnas* were called 'twice born', a reference to the initiation that boys undergo – the *upanayana* – as being like a second birth. They were traditionally the only *varnas* allowed to hear the *veda* being recited. There is a hymn in the 'Purusha Sukta' of the Rig Veda (the oldest Vedic text) that describes the emergence of these four classes as a cosmic sacrifice performed by Purusha (the 'cosmic man'). This mythical figure of Purusha is often taken as marking the origins of the caste system, although as will be described below, there are some differences between the notion of *varna* (class) and caste (otherwise known as *jati*). The category of *jati* is also

referred to in the Hindu texts. While there are four *varnas* there are literally thousands of *jatis*. *Jati* means 'birth' and is a system of social division based upon relative levels of purity: the Brahmins (this can be both the name of a *varna* and a *jati*) are considered to be at one extreme and the outcastes/ untouchables at the other.[6] The *jatis* are traditionally associated with different types of occupation and are endogamous. *Jatis* are sometimes considered to be subdivisions of the *varnas*.

The social ethics underlying the caste system are not just ideals projected by the Sanskrit texts but are actually manifest within the ordering of society. There is a substantial historical, sociological and anthropological literature on the caste system (e.g. Bayley, 1999; Dirks, 2001; Dumont, 1970; Quigley, 1995; Srinivas, 1962) and caste issues have come to shape many aspects of Indian political life. One of the key features of the caste system is that one is born into a particular caste as a result of actions in a previous life (*karma*) and this has a concrete effect upon one's social and economic opportunities. Another important concept linked to the ideas of rebirth, *karma* and *varna/jati* is the idea of *dharma* (duty/role). Originally, in the Vedic period, *dharma* referred to the performance of the ritual sacrifice by Brahmins, as well as the domestic rituals performed by a householder and any obligations specific to one's family and *varna* or *jati*. The performance of one's *dharma* was necessary in order to uphold cosmic order (*rita*): it is "an all encompassing ideology which embraces both ritual and moral behaviour, whose neglect would have bad social and personal consequences" (Flood, 1996, p. 52). So one popular translation of the term *dharma* is 'duty', the ritual and moral duty that one has according to one's station in life, otherwise known as *svadharma* (one's own duty). Thus, *dharma* is context specific. It is a concept that is prominent within the Bhagavad Gita,[7] where we are told that when a person acts according to his or her dharma and without any attachment to the consequences of the action, then the action creates no *karma*. These are the actions that an individual needs to perform (i.e. in accordance with *dharma*) in order to be released from *samsara* (future rebirths).

The individual, however, not only has a *dharma* according to their class or caste, but also in accordance with their stage in life (*ashrama*). Over time (by the 5th century BCE), it became required for twice-born men (women were excluded) to participate in four *ashramas* over the course of their lives: *brahmacharya* (student of the vedas); *grihastha* (householder); *vanaprashtha* (living in the forest) and *samnyasin* (renouncer). The *ashramas* of the householder and the renouncer are the most important; they are in tension with each other, yet both are considered essential for the stability of

Vedic society. On the one hand, the householder is necessary for the reproduction of the family unit, while on the other hand the *samnyasin* (renouncer) embodies the tradition of contemplation, which had developed by the time of the Upanishads and enables a high class/caste male to leave the distractions of the world behind and focus upon knowing God (Brahman), thus achieving release from *samsara*. The *ashrama* system is an attempt to reconcile these two extremes or ideals. Linked to the four stages of life are the *caturvarga* or four aims of life (*purusharthas*): *artha* (wealth/material prosperity), *dharma* (duty/rules), *kama* (enjoyment) and *moksha* (spiritual liberation). All stages of life are part of the dharmic model that shapes attitudes towards the roles and responsibilities of the individual, in which *artha*, for instance, is associated with the householder stage and *moksha* with the last two stages. They reflect the view that there is a place for all aims of life, including enjoyment and the accumulation of wealth.

It is worth making some initial comments about gender at this stage, although I will return to it below. As we have seen, women are excluded from the institution of *varnashramadharma* and throughout much of the Hindu tradition, women have been considered both to be a lower rebirth than men and to have a specific role to play as wives and mothers (*stridharma*), in addition to any caste-specific *dharma* (Knott, 1996; Leslie, 2005). There is some suggestion that during the early Vedic period women had a higher status than later in the tradition. In the Rig Veda (the earliest Vedic text) we are told that both men and women were allowed to undertake Vedic study and performance of rituals and indeed a few of the hymns in the Rig Veda are attributed to female seers. Son preference was already in evidence, but daughters were not devalued, as they came to be in later texts. Marriage was not compulsory for women, early marriage was uncommon and there was no suggestion that widowhood was a problem. However, as the Vedic period progressed, women's ritual and educational roles became marginalized: as the sacrificial ritual performance became increasingly important, men took on this role and women took on domestic chores. Sons came to be valued more highly and rituals are in evidence to prevent the birth of a daughter. By the time of the Aranyakas (the latest Vedic texts) and the Upanishads there was less emphasis on performance of the external fire sacrifice to control the universe and a shift to internal knowledge or wisdom. The ascetic life was exalted and women were less likely to become ascetics. Thus, they were already marginalized from the most important religious activities by this time.

While a man could attain liberation from rebirth, a woman could only hope for marriage and a better rebirth in the future. Thus, it was thought that being born a woman must have been the result of (bad) actions in a previous life. Women, however, are considered to stand a good chance of having a better rebirth (as a man) if they perform their duty well (*stridharma*). One element of this is to give birth to sons: to give birth to a daughter is not as good as giving birth to a son. Although traditionally funeral rites need to be performed by a son, in modern times son-preference has been exacerbated by rising dowry costs.

Scholars have argued that it was the 'Laws of Manu' (written between 2nd century BCE and 2nd century AD) that solidified and institutionalized such negative attitudes towards females. They argue that there was a gradual decline in women's fortunes from the Vedic period to the period reflected in the 'Laws of Manu', a legal text called a *dharmashastra*, which was written by Brahmins (the highest priestly class). It is useful to look at some passages:

> 213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world); for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.
> 214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger (chapter II)
>
> 55. Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare.
> 56. Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.
> 57. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.
> 58. The houses on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic.
> 59. Hence men who seek (their own) welfare, should always honour women on holidays and festivals with (gifts of) ornaments, clothes, and (dainty) food.
> 60. In that family, where the husband is pleased with his wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be lasting. (chapter III)
>
> 147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.
> 148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.
> 149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

> 150. She must always be cheerful, clever in (the management of her) household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure.
> 151. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives, and when he is dead, she must not insult (his memory).
> 155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart (from their husbands); if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that (reason alone) be exalted in heaven. (chapter V)[8]

We can note a number of points here relevant to our discussion of Hinduism, gender and social ethics: firstly, women are to be honoured and adorned (this is said to bring good fortune to fathers, brothers etc.); secondly, a woman is to be protected by her father, husband or son: 'a woman does not deserve independence'; thirdly, women are to be guarded against provocation: they cannot be trusted and may bring shame upon the family; fourthly, to protect women is the 'highest *dharma* of all four classes'; and finally, women are to look after the household and bear children. There is a certain ambiguity here. On the one hand, women must be given the utmost respect but, on the other, they deserve no freedom. In fact, the emphasis in the passage is upon the duty of men to protect women as much as the denial of freedom to women. As Basham wrote, "the ancient Indian attitude to women was in fact ambivalent. She was at once a goddess and a slave, a saint and a strumpet" (Basham, 1954, p.182).

The links between such textual teachings on gender and actual cultural practices in India that oppress women (e.g. dowry violence, female infanticide related to son-preference, sati, child marriage) have been the subject of much debate. These cultural practices have a bearing on the development issues on which many faith-based organizations (FBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working in India. The extent to which culture/religion is seen as a factor contributing to these practices and issues varies. There are sociological and anthropological studies that aim to look at the interactions between textual attitudes towards gender and those that prevail in practice (Gold and Raheja, 1994; Pintchman, 1997). Others, such as Erndl (1992, 2007) and Diesel (2002) have used Kali and Durga images to form a distinctly Hindu feminist response to patriarchy. They both advocate that NGOs use some of these powerful images in their work, to persuade local communities to respect and challenge practices that oppress women (see also Bradley, 2006, 2009).

By contrast, other scholars and activists are resistant to thinking about the ways in which religion may be at the root of violence against women in India or how reinterpretation of religious traditions could play a role, alongside secular ethics, in curbing a deeply engrained cultural bias against women (Narayan, 1997; Sunder Rajan, 2000). Kishwar, in particular, finds the linking of the Laws of Manu to women's oppression in so many accounts as problematic. While the 'Laws of Manu' were used by the British colonialists in the eighteenth century to develop Hindu personal law, he and many others argue, this was a misappropriation - this particular text was only assumed to be authoritative in a pan-Indian manner because the British liaised with the Brahmin class. In fact, they argue, decisions about social and moral issues in Indian society were not based on this text, and in practice communities made decisions in a variety of ways and reflecting local realities. As Kishwar writes:

> The very idea of 'Hindu' law, in fact, was as much a novelty as the idea of a pan-Indian Hindu community. In the pre-British era, people of this subcontinent used a whole range of markers based on region, jati, language, and sect to claim and define their identities. Hardly anybody identified themselves as 'Hindu' – a term first introduced by foreigners to refer to people living across the Indus River. The British lent new zeal in bringing actual substance to the new identity markers imposed by Europeans on the diverse non-Muslim inhabitants of the subcontinent. The codification of their so-called 'personal laws' became an important instrument in that endeavour. …….
>
> Those who insist on attributing our social ills to the shastras repeat the mistake of our colonial rulers. Just as a doctor can kill a patient through wrong diagnosis and treatment of the disease – no matter how benign the intention – in the same manner social reformers can wreak havoc on the people if their understanding of social ills is flawed.…Sadly enough, the disgraceful treatment of Dalits and downgrading of women are among the most shameful aspects of contemporary Indian society. But they will not disappear by burning ancient texts because none of the 'Hindu' scriptures have projected themselves as commandment-giving authorities demanding unconditional obedience from all those claiming to be Hindus (Kishwar, n.d).[9]

Kishwar is objecting to the way in which this text makes it seems as though all Hindu women are oppressed and for the same reasons (i.e. because of the injunctions in a particular text). She argues, by contrast, that where women are oppressed, the way to address this issue is not through 'burning texts' but through an analysis of broader socio-economic dynamics and inter-relationships. We cannot, in her view, lay all the blame at the feet of Laws of Manu because they were never that authoritative anyway. So does 'religion' have no impact upon social attitudes towards women? Is Kishwar just reacting to the way in which this particular text has been used? In practice, she is not

dismissing the impact of 'religion' *per se*, but the idea that there is a codified textual tradition which impacts upon all women in the same way; to look at the impact of religion in this way, she argues, is to overlook the localized ways in which religion shapes women's identities and social attitudes towards women. It assumes a timeless, unchanging Hindu tradition, an attitude very much current within colonial attitudes towards religion.

2.1.2 Hindu reform movements

That there is a link between religion and social ethics was recognized by the so-called Hindu reform movements. From the late nineteenth century onwards there was a strong movement to reform Hinduism from within and to bridge the perceived gap between tradition and modernity. In particular, these movements expressed concerns over Hindu institutions such as the caste system and the way in which women were systematically devalued by the view that they are a lower rebirth. Contact with the West, particularly through British colonialism, introduced ideas of human rights and equality into a culture that had hitherto been concerned with unequal duties (O'Flaherty and Derrett, 1978; Coward, 1991). While some scholars have interpreted these changes in Indian social thinking as a product of contact between educated Indians and the British, others argue that there is an indigenous foundation for values that resemble modern human rights (Beckerlegge, 1990, p. 120). Whatever the exact processes involved, Ram Mohan Roy and other reformers, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, were all influential figures in the emergence of interpretations of Hinduism that were both self-critical and innovative. These reformers aimed to enable the tradition to operate in a new century, as well as an increasingly globalized world, in which greater respect for equality and human rights was being demanded.

In 1828 Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj and "as a social reformer, … managed to outrage orthodox Hindus by writing against idolatry, sati, child-marriage, and caste, and in favour of education for women" (Knott, 1998, p. 71). However, not only did he want social reform within Hinduism but also he wished to mould the tradition into something that more closely resembled a 'religion' (the Christian model). In particular, he stressed that the Upanishads were the authentic Hindu text, promoting a "reasoned, ethical monism" rather than the idolatrous polytheism typical of much popular Hindu practice (1998, p. 72). Another prominent movement was the Arya Samaj, founded in 1975 by Dayananda Saraswati, which also stressed social and religious reform within Hinduism.

Finally, it is important to mention Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Vivekananda's contribution was twofold. On the one hand, he is infamous for having 'branded' a style of Hinduism that was appealing to the West (he was in fact the first Hindu teacher to travel to the West and to teach about the tradition to potential 'converts'). He appropriated a style of vedanta philosophy that earned the label 'neo-vedanta' and his western audience "learnt that the impersonal, ultimate reality was also the personal God that people worshipped, and that this God was also the higher self within each human being" (Knott, 1998, p. 29). On the other hand, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission (named after his Bengali teacher), a socio-religious welfare organization that is still active in development and humanitarian work in India today. He was not only interested in attracting westerners to Hinduism but also in gaining their financial support for development work in India. The ethical and philosophical basis for individuals supporting the poor, he argued, was that each individual is identical since they are each identical to God. Mahatma Gandhi was similarly concerned with social and religious reform, yet his activities were more clearly political than the other reformers discussed. Above all, Gandhi was concerned to rid India of British rule and also to improve conditions for marginalized groups, such as dalits and women.[10]

2.1.3 Human rights and traditional understandings of dharma

Although the reformers attempted to modernize aspects of the Hindu tradition that were regarded as acting against human rights, it must be borne in mind that, while a tradition can be interpreted as supporting social equality, this does not mean that it will be easy or straightforward to transform people's attitudes and behaviours. In particular, the traditional Indian expression of 'duty' (*dharma*) is found within a highly stratified social order in which people are considered to have differential value by virtue of their past actions (*karma*). People have their 'own duty' (*svadharma*) according to their sex (*stridharma* is a 'woman's *dharma*') or caste (*jatidharma*). Thus, there are unequal duties, as well as different levels of value, between different members of society. This goes beyond the idea of individual responsibility to a model of social relations in which each person has a role to play as part of an interconnected system. This system, moreover, transcends mere social relations and has a broader cosmological significance. In the Vedas, for instance, the earliest texts of the Hindu tradition, the maintenance of *dharma* is said to be necessary to maintain 'cosmic order' (*rita*) (Kunst, 1978, p. 6). Within this system, 'one's own *dharma*' (*svadharma*) is specific to factors such as gender, age or caste and is, therefore, different for each individual. One's 'position' in this social hierarchy is

accounted for by the results of actions in a previous life (*karma*) and to act in accordance with one's *dharma*, it is believed, will ensure a higher rebirth in the future (O'Flaherty and Derrett, 1978).

As a consequence, the caste system and the inferior position of women are both deeply engrained within Indian society, limiting people's life-chances and opportunities for development, as well as the realization of equal human rights. Critics of the Hindu tradition have argued that in order to develop, India must abandon this 'Brahmanical culture' in which Brahmans form the highest social class and have been dominant in shaping the pan-Indian version of Hinduism that privileges their interests, because it "is status-oriented, and it inherently shuns change, social and technological…we are held back by our archaic systems and deep divisive traditional instincts" (Moddie, 1968, p. 11-12; Dasgupta, 1977; Nanda, 2002).

While such a hierarchical model of social organization would seem, for instance, to act against any imperative to allocate scarce resources equally amongst the population (Khare, 1998), the tradition does, however, distinguish another type of *dharma* that is common to all human beings: 'everyday' or *sadharana dharma* (O'Flaherty, 1978; Lipner, 1998: 223-5). This is also known as *sanatana dharma* (eternal) and *samanya dharma* (equal). O'Flaherty (1978, p. 97) lists "the ten-limbed dharma for all classes" as non-injury, truth, purity, not stealing, charity, forbearance, self-restraint, tranquility, generosity, and asceticism. Reformers and critics of the oppressive hierarchies inherent within the Hindu tradition are attracted to the notion of *sadharana dharma* as the basis for a universal and egalitarian ethic with the capacity to bridge the gap (in culturally appropriate ways) between the stratified tradition of *svadharma* and modern secular human rights (Tomalin, 2006). Thus, rather than standing opposed to modern human rights discourse, the concept of *sadharana dharma* represents a potentially useful point of intersection.[11] As Khare suggests, "the ethics of everyday dharma still remains socially so open, tolerant and inclusive that it may provide perhaps the best hope, as a modern Hindu reformer like M.K. Ghandi had argued, for Hindus to link up with democratic and egalitarian social forces aimed at the maximum public good. Human rights activists may also find here that much-needed internal social foothold" (1998, p. 261).

Sharma has discussed the content of a 'Hinduism for our times' (1996). In this study he aims to reinterpret aspects of the Hindu tradition that seem problematic in this modern age, including *karma* and rebirth, caste and *dharma*. For instance, he puts aside the fatalistic interpretation that the doctrine

of *karma* limits one's ability to influence the future and, therefore, the individual has to accept their position in life. Instead, he argues for a "concept of dynamic karma" (1996, p. 40) whereby identities are not fixed, and one can elevate one's social standing in a current lifetime. He also argues against the Hindu idea of 'selfless action' (*karma yoga*) if interpreted to mean "doing one's duty irrespective of how the other person is behaving" (1996, p. 36). Strict observance of 'duty' in this sense, he argues, can mean that individuals become unconcerned about their rights and open themselves up to exploitation and manipulation. He suggests that "selfless performance of duty" ought to be accompanied by "selfless assertion of rights" and that "this principle applies to Hindus as individuals, as husbands and wives, for instance; and communities within Hinduism, such as Harijans,[12] for instance; and to the Hindus as a community" (1996, p. 37).

While Sharma's discussion is interesting, and mirrors the way in which many educated Hindus might interpret their tradition today, he does point out, with respect to his observation on rights, that he is unsure how he would actually "operationalize this insight" (1996, p. 37). His concern would seem to be borne out when we consider that, despite the existence of a secular rights-based constitution since 1949, Indian society has been unable to protect itself from an array of customs, such as child marriage, *sati* ('widow burning'), dowry (often leading to the death of women) and caste discrimination, which act against the interests of human rights. This unresolved clash between the "modern Western presuppositions of the right to equality.. [and] ..the traditional world view in which equality at the highest level is not a legal right but a hard won achievement resulting from good ethical choices – the doing of one's dharma – in this and previous lives" (Coward, 1991, p. 3) can be described as a "failure of modernity in India" (Bhatia, 2000, p. 312).

The legal system in India is based on English Common Law and as a secular state certain parts of the law are kept separate from religion. However, with respect to personal or family law, which deals with issues such as marriage, inheritance and divorce, the state has always looked to the religious laws of particular communities. Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists are dealt with under Hindu law, whereas Muslims and Christians have their own laws. Women's groups in particular have called for a Unified Civil Code in India, to free women from the influence of the patriarchal views enshrined within their religious traditions and the associated personal law. Moreover, the impact of religious personal law has been to divide communities where there is a perception that, according to their religion, different groups of people have different rights (Larson, 2002).

2.2 Political systems

2.2.1 Kingship

While the modern system of politics in India is based on a democratic model (see below), the power of the King has traditionally been significant. The role of the King was intimately connected to religious concepts and institutions. The concept of *dharma* also regulated the behaviour of the (ideal) King. The King was, on the one hand, considered to be the ideal householder but also, on the other hand, divine. As Flood writes: "the king is the pivotal point of the body politic: the 'body of the kingdom' is recapitulated in his own body. If he acts in accordance with dharma then the kingdom prospers, but if he acts against dharma, the body of the Kingdom – which means the people – suffers" (1996, p. 70). The central functions of the King – his *rajadharma* – are: "the protection of the people; the maintaining of social order through the control of caste boundaries; the administration of justice (danda)" (1996, p. 71). While during and following the British colonial period the traditional kingship model was dismantled, the idea of the King as upholder of *dharma* also manifests itself in contemporary politics (see discussion of Hindu nationalism below).

2.2.2 The Hindu epics

Important textual sources for kingly *dharma* are the Hindu epics: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. From about 500 BCE through the 1st millennium CE sectarian worship of different deities increased and Vedic sacrifice, although it did not die out, gave way to devotional worship or *puja*. *Puja* is a worshipful act of devotion to a personal deity and is expressed in the epics, in the mythological and ritual treatises called the puranas, as well as in devotional or *bhakti* literature. As Brockington writes:

> Originating in the period following that of the Vedic literature and reflecting the interest and concerns of the kshatriya aristocracy, the epics reveal much about the process by which the more theistic emphases of classical Hinduism emerged from late Vedic ritualism. Their origins may perhaps be traced to some of the ballads about gods and heroes recited within the overall context of Vedic rituals, but their real growth was owed to the bardic tradition which emerged at the courts of kshatriya rulers, where storied about the exploits of heroes were naturally welcomed (2002, p. 116).

The Epics belong to the Kshatriya aristocracy rather than Brahmins and, as Brockington points out, they were:

> Originally secular works, recited at courts by bards attendant on the kings, both epics grew over a long period to include much other traditional material and acquired religious significance as an important figure in each was identified as an incarnation of Vishnu; in the process their transmission and amplification they passed into the hands of the Brahmans, the establishes guardians and teachers of tradition (Brockington, 1998, p. 54).

The core of each epic existed by 5th or 4th century BCE but continued to expand until around 4th century CE, the beginning of the Gupta period. However, the political situation both reflect goes back further still, possibly another five centuries for the Mahabharata (Brockington, 1998, p. 54). By the first century CE both the epics had been committed to writing, and their transmission had passed into the hands of the Brahmins. The epics are, however, part of a tradition of narrative storytelling: why did they tell these epic stories? Are the stories just myths or do they have deeper significance for their audiences? Do they convey values and ideas? If so, what are these values and ideas? I will look at this briefly in the Ramayana.

2.2.3 Dharma and the Ramayana

In a nutshell: King Dasharatha of Ayodhya has several sons by three wives. Rama is the eldest and most loved by the citizens of Ayodhya and is to succeed his father. Kaikeyi, Rama's stepmother, persuades Dasharatha to banish Rama to the forest and that her son Bharata should become King. Rama goes off with Sita, his wife, and his brother Lakshmana to the forest. The demon Ravana kidnaps Sita and takes her to Lanka. Eventually they rescue her with the help of the divine monkey Hanuman. They return to Ayodhya, where Rama becomes king, but he is worried about tales of Sita's chastity. She undergoes a 'trial by fire' to test her faithfulness and succeeds. However, Rama is not satisfied so she is banished again, gives birth to his two sons and then dies by returning to the Earth (Knott, 1998, p.43).

Although there are many versions of the Ramayana, its main message is about *dharma*. As discussed above, each twice-born man was believed to have his own *dharma* or *svadharma*, according to his class/*varna* and stage of life (hence the term: *varna-ashrama-dharma*). In the Ramayana we observe

the interaction between *dharma* and *adharma* ('anti-*dharma*') through the behaviour of the characters. Rama, for instance, is the ideal son who is obedient to his father's reluctant order that he should go off to the forest. By contrast, Lakshmana argues against the order. Rama is also the ideal husband, but when he hears rumours about his wife's chastity he has to banish her to maintain the stability of his Kingdom, thus indicating that he is also the ideal King. Sita, by contrast, is the ideal wife. As a woman she does not have to follow *varnasharmadharma* but has her own *stridharma* in which a woman's chastity and obedience is essential in order to maintain her husband's reputation. Sita follows Rama into the forest, despite his protestations, is faithful to him during her imprisonments and undergoes 'trial by fire' to prove her chastity. The Ramayana thus illustrates a golden age of *dharma* when people acted in accordance with their duty. The order of society is, therefore, more important than individual preferences and an individual's role only has significance in relation to other roles in the society.[13]

These texts are, however, still popular today and have an influence "not only as a 'critical edition' or as the object of scholarly study, but also as a vital and fluid part of contemporary Hinduism, still in the process of being recast in different modes" (Flood, 1996, p. 105; see also Tully, 1992; Knott, 1998 p. 40; Rajagopal, 2001; Bose, 2004).[14]

2.2.4 Contemporary Indian politics and Hinduism: the 'failure of modernity' and the secularism debate

Some commentators consider the so-called 'failure of modernity' in India to be a product of the model of secularism adopted since independence in 1947. Firstly, it is argued that ignoring the hold that religion has over people's lives and instead establishing a legal system that (apart from personal or family law) makes no reference to religion, is bound to fail. Thus, it has been argued that the state seems unable to consistently pursue a human rights agenda (despite the constitution) because of tensions with customary law and tradition. Moreover, as Khare writes, "the Indian human rights movement will remain a cultural anathema to ordinary Indians until the Indian traditional and modern worlds devise ways to transcend many internal gaps, anomalies and contradictions between them" (1998, p. 256). Anti-secularists, such as Nandy (1990, 1997) and Madan (1987, 1992), argue that this so-called 'failure of modernity' is a consequence of the fact that secularism was a foreign import. As Varshney points out, although secularism has become an accepted feature of western culture, "there is no similar civilizational niche for secularism in India. Religion was, and remains today, the ultimate source of morality and meaning for most Indians" (1993, p. 243).

Secondly, although following independence the Indian state declared itself to be 'secular', its version of secularism has been based upon the principle of keeping "the state equally distant from all religions and not letting it favor any one in public policy" (Varshney, 1993, p. 259) rather than a complete separation of 'church and state'. This allegedly 'shallow' or 'pseudo' secularism has resulted in a situation in which the state, despite endeavouring to maintain a neutral position, has found it increasingly difficult to criticize practices carried out in the name of 'religion' or tradition, thereby laying the ground for an upsurge in communal problems grounded in various religious nationalisms (Varshney ,1993, p. 250).

2.2.5 Hindu nationalism

Hindu nationalism has its roots in the emergence of religious identities in colonial India, the Hindu reform movements and nationalist politics of the pre-independence era. In all communities - Sikh, Hindu and Muslim - people began organizing along religious lines. For Hindus, this meant "delineating a broad-based communal identity beyond caste that had not been strongly emphasised before" (Gold, 1991, p. 537). As McKean writes, "the Hindu nationalist movement is by no means a monolithic entity. It is supported by a spectrum of leaders, groups and individuals whose ideological positions range from moderate to miliatant and whose projects vary from charitable work and religious education to political power, hatemongering and communal violence" (1996, p. 277).

In 1909 the Hindu Mahasabha was formed amongst members of the Arya Samaj (one of the prominent reform movements) and it "soon developed into a right-wing militant Hindu political party. It has remained one of the national parties based on a narrow definition of Hindu nationhood" (Klostermaier, 1994, p. 463). V.D. Sarvakar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha from 1937-1942, wrote a famous book called "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" while in prison (it was smuggled out in 1923), where he argued that only Indic religions were 'Hindu' and that other religions had no place in India. He promoted the idea of a Hindurashtra (Hindu nation), in which only members of the Indic religions are considered to be truly Indian. In 1925 another prominent Hindu nationalist organisation, the Rashtriya Svayam-sevak Sangh (RSS), was formed by K.V. Hedgewar, a Hindu Mahasabha member. The RSS is not a political party, instead considering itself to be a cultural organization that emphasizes militaristic style training for men, women and children. M.S. Golwalkar, successor to Hedgewar, took a broader understanding of 'who is a Hindu', distinguishing between culture and religion and taking religion to be a 'private' matter. Thus, although the public culture must be Hindu, in his view people's private faith was a matter of religion.

Today, the RSS is one 'wing' of the so-called *sangh parivar* (family of organizations), which also includes the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, founded in 1980). The VHP (founded in 1964) is a religio-cultural organization that attempts to articulate a universal Hinduism. As McKean writes: "in its literature the VHP describes itself as a religious cultural and social organization for 600 mission Hindus living in eighty countries. It claims to favour no specific sect which identity themselves as Hindu, i.e., those that reverence the central tenet of Hindu nationalism: India is their holy land" (1996, p. 102).

Thus, the key tenets of Hindutva include the idea that the Indian subcontinent is the homeland of Hindus and that Hindus are those who follow Indic religion (although Golwalkar's version includes other religions). It is opposed, for instance, to the idea that an Aryan invasion caused the decline of the Indus Valley civilization – calling it a 'myth' – and draws attention to the ways in which Hindus have been oppressed by invading Muslims and Christians. To remedy this situation, the Hindu Right in India maintains that a Hindu state must be established, with an emphasis on the revival of Hindu culture. A number of pivotal and high profile events have drawn international attention to the rising communal tensions in India since the 1980s. For instance, on 6th December 1992, over 200,000 Hindu fundamentalists destroyed the Babri Masjid, a 16th century Muslim mosque in the Northern Indian town of Ayodhya. They argued that the mosque had been built on the site of an earlier temple that marked the birthplace of the Hindu deity Rama: this was known as the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign. Thousands of people were killed.

2.2.6 Women and Hindu nationalism

Basu writes about instances where women involved in the Hindu nationalist movement have participated in acts of violence against Muslim women and children:

> In October 1990 in the town of Bijnor in western Uttar Pradesh, Hindu women led a procession through a Muslim neighborhood with trisuls (tridents) in hand, shouting bigoted, inflammatory slogans. In the aftermath of the violence in which several hundred people were killed, these women radiated pride at their actions (Basu, 1998, p. 167).

Kapur and Crossman (1994) ask why women support the fundamentalist ideology of Hindutva, identifying a number of reasons: it affirms their identity as mothers and wives, it offers programmes for women (e.g. the female wing of the RSS: Rashtriya Sevika Samithi, which offers physical, intellectual

and spiritual training), and it can provide an escape from the world of domesticity. However, they write that "these organisations bring women out of the family in ways that do not fundamentally challenge their traditional roles within the family… [and that]…feminists must counter the fundamentalist attack on women's rights, and the appeal of this Hindutva ideology to women themselves". The nationalist movement wants to create a Hindu state and idealizes women as wives and mothers: the family, it asserts, is the backbone of the Indian nation. There are some interesting studies on the religious symbols used within the women's wing of the RSS around the worship of the goddess Durga, who represents women's place in the movement in her mythological role when she slayed the buffalo demon Mahisha (Sarkar and Butalia, 1995; Sarkar, 2001; Jeffery and Basu, 1998; Kovacs, 2004).

2.2.7 Hindutva and civil society – the hijacking of the 'third sector'?

This politicization of religion in India has strengthened the secularist cause. While some anti-secularists argue that it is the very model of secularism that has created the rise of Hindutva, others, such as Meera Nanda (2002), are avowedly secularist and, while they draw attention to the shortcomings of current understandings of Indian state secularism, are against any call for a greater formal involvement of religion in political matters.

These concerns and debates in India have a clear relevance for thinking about the work of FBOs in development. For instance, with respect to Hindu groups, there seems to be a suspicion that they are affiliated to various Hindu Right groups or that they can be easily co-opted. In recent years, many have become wary of the so-called 'Hinduization of civil society', which specifically refers to the endeavours of the RSS and the VHP to infiltrate erstwhile Hindu organizations or to co-opt secular groups under their mandate (see Sarkar, 2002; Roy, 2002). There are concerns that Indian civil society has become 'Hinduized' or hijacked by the Hindu Right. This raises problems for organizations that draw upon the Hindu tradition yet do not support Hindutva thinking, since the linking of Hinduism with public concerns increasingly gives rise to suspicion on the part of those worried about the ascendancy of the Hindu Right.

One example that has been discussed in the literature is the movement to oppose the Tehri dam that is being built on the River Ganges. The anti-dam movement was set up in 1978 and has routinely resorted to using Hindu myths to speak about the consequences of the dam, as well as actively seeking to gain the support of religious *sadhus* (Sharma, 2001, 2002). However, more recently an

organized Hindu presence has been evident in the campaign through VHP involvement, and various rallies and marches have taken place. Sharma quotes a *sadhvi*[15] who attended a rally organized by the VHP in 2000:

> …the Tehri dam is being constructed to imprison the Ganga forever.[16] This is an organised conspiracy to demolish our religion and culture. The way we had to demolish the Babri mosque at our own risk, we have to get ready now for the demolition of the Tehri dam (Sharma, 2001).

The recourse to religious ideas about the Ganges was a strategy employed by the original anti-dam movement to encourage people to take the issue seriously and has certainly raised the profile of the controversy surrounding the Tehri dam. By contrast, many of those who are stimulated by the religious rhetoric surrounding the dam today actually seem more concerned with the Ganges as a symbol of Hindu culture and nation than with the ecological implications of the dam. Alley suggests that the Hindu Right has 'hijacked' the anti-Tehri dam campaign, initially as a political tool during the 1998 election, although it quickly lost interest once it had secured victory (2002, p. 223-226). Thus, "religious environmentalist" discourse (Tomalin, 2004) has played different roles in the anti-Tehri dam campaign, from the Gandhian idealism of Sunderlal Bahuguna, the veteran Chipko activist who founded the movement, to the divisive nationalism of the VHP. Nevertheless, Baviskar suggests that the distance between these two may not be so great, since Bahuguna has been reported to have presented himself as one of the VHP delegates (who recently met with the prime minister) calling for the construction of a temple at the site of the Babri mosque (Baviskar, 2004). Similarly, Sharma points out that Bahuguna has been observed "invoking popular stereotypes about the Muslim community" (2002, p. 5). Thus, they query the extent to which this veteran of ecological activism is using instrumental devices to court the support of conservative Hinduism, or whether his views more broadly reflect the spirit of the Hindu Right (Tomalin, 2004).

Processes similar to the 'hijacking' of the anti-Tehri dam campaign by the Hindu Right have been experienced in other areas of civil society. As Sarkar[17] writes, with respect to the infiltration of civil society by *Hindutva* ideology and her observation that this is ignored by the Indian media:

> The total silence and ignorance about a sprawling middle ground is very significant. There is a host of intermediate range ideological organisations and grassroots institutions, schools, women's organisations, sanskar kendras, welfare associations, and temple networks that bind and unite the two poles.[18] This sub media domain or

> middle ground is particularly crucial because it is from here that the BJP draws its power and its electoral success… The Sangh achieves a creeping hegemony over civil society by a protean penetration into the very pores of civil society through these institutions and activities. Forgetting about this sub-media, this intermediate range is fatal to the understanding Hindu communalism (Sarkar, 2002).[19]

Sarkar is particularly interested in the ways in which women have been co-opted by the *sangh parivar*, and is concerned that when she asked a group of women: "Can you account for poverty in India?" they replied, "Don't mention the word. It is divisive, demoralising and anti-national to talk about poverty" (Sarkar, 2002). Women members of the *sangh* have taken part in extreme acts of violence against their Muslim enemies, including children and other women. They have absorbed the *sangh* rhetoric, which is "curiously empty of any development welfarist associations.. [and, when pressed on] …what they thought were relevant development issues...said nothing" (Sarkar, 2002). Instead they expressed support for the destruction of the Babri Mosque and the killing of enemies of *Hindutva*.

While this is a limited example, it draws attention to the increasing domination of civil society space by a form of religious politics that is neither inclusive nor directed towards progressive development goals. As Roy writes:

> Whipping up communal hatred is part of the mandate of the Sangh Parivar. It has been planned for years. It has been injecting a slow-release poison directly into civil society's bloodstream. Hundreds of rss shakhas and Saraswati shishu mandirs across the country have been indoctrinating thousands of children and young people, stunting their minds with religious hatred and falsified history. They're no different from, and no less dangerous than, the madrasahs all over Pakistan and Afghanistan which spawned the Taliban. In States like Gujarat, the police, the administration, and the political cadres at every level have been systematically penetrated. It has huge popular appeal, which it would be foolish to underestimate or misunderstand. The whole enterprise has a formidable religious, ideological, political, and administrative underpinning. This kind of power, this kind of outreach, can only be achieved with State backing (Roy, 2002).[20]

2.3 Attitudes towards economics, including wellbeing, poverty and wealth

2.3.1 Hinduism and economics

One strand within Hindu religious thought is that wealth and other trappings of the material world play a part in binding the individual to future rebirths. The more attached we are to materialism the more strongly the *atman* (individual 'self') is bound to material existence. Thus, there is a strong anti-materialist theme within Hindu thought. This can be traced back to the renunciate traditions, in which the only way to achieve *moksha* (liberation from *samsara*) is to renounce the world. In contrast, there is also a sense in which material wealth and security can be seen as a sign of religious virtue – i.e. an outcome of previously meritorious behaviour. There seems to be a tension here between a possible understanding of poverty as a virtue (i.e. lesser attachment to the material world) and understanding of wealth as a virtue (i.e. because it is a sign that one has done one's *dharma* well). This tension is also found within other world religions.

Hinduism reflects two main attitudes towards the accumulation of wealth: that it is a legitimate aim for humans (in terms of *artha*, one of the four 'aims of life') and that it is something that prevents people from realizing the highest goal of spiritual liberation (or *moksha*). As we saw above, the *ashrama* system (the four stages of life) was an attempt to include both of these tendencies within the lifecycle of 'twice born' men as part of the *dharma* (duty) of the individual. However, while these two attitudes/ tendencies form part of a progression in the ideal of the *ashrama* system, they also exist alongside each other in tension within Indian society. Some (mainly men) still choose to renounce the world after bringing up and supporting a family. However, the householder stage is the most common and the majority of people do not undertake any form of spiritual training in their youth or renunciation in later life.

In the following section, the question posed is what sort of economic system does Hinduism favour, support or advocate? In contemporary India we find capitalism has taken hold, but how does this sit with Hindu teachings? There are different types of literature that deal with these questions. First, there are studies that take a grand historical approach to discussing how Hinduism may have influenced different economic forms in India over time (e.g. Deheja and Deheja, 1993; Khandwalla, 1995). Second, and linked to the historical approach, there is a significant body of literature that (following the

work of Max Weber) is concerned to assess the extent to which India, under the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, has favoured the spiritual over the material, stunting its economic development and/or preventing people from exploiting economic opportunities (Weber, 1992; Singer, 1956; Uppal, 2001; Goheen et al., 1958; Chakraborty and Chakraborty, 2001; Moddie, 1968; Dasgupta, 1977). Third, there are studies that critique industrialization and capitalism for its failure to accommodate the 'spiritual dimension' and which promote a more ethical and human-centred Hindu economics. The literature on Gandhian economics falls within this category. Finally, there is anthropological literature that focuses on small-scale case studies of the influence of ritual and belief upon people's economic activity and the value that is placed upon various types of economic exchange (e.g. Brouwer, 1997). These are less political and polemical, but also are mostly not explicitly linked to development.

- **An historical approach**

Deheja and Deheja begin their article *Religion and Economic Activity in India: an Historical Perspective* with the claim that, "religious thought and economic activity have been closely linked throughout the history of India" (1993, p. 145). They examine two periods in Indian history, the Mauryan Empire (c. 321 – 185 BCE) and mediaeval India of the 8th to 13th centuries, arguing that uncovering these linkages throughout history is important for understanding the "social environment of contemporary India" (1993, p. 145). They draw attention to the common perception of India as a place that values mysticism and other-worldliness but also illustrate the ways in which Indian religious thought addresses this-worldly concerns (i.e. the tension and reconciliation between *moksha* and *artha*). In particular, they link the successful Mauryan Empire to the "self-poised and self-assured character of the Upanishadic religion…both religion and the economy relied on and stressed the actions of individuals to generate progress" (1993, p. 146-147). In contrast, they suggest, by the mediaeval period, "the lofty Vedantic monotheism…was replaced by a form of theistic Hindu…thought…advocating the joy of devotional surrender to God" (1993, p. 147). The feudal system that defined the mediaeval period differed markedly from socio-economic conditions during the Mauryan Empire:

> While feudalism ushered in an economic structure of a stepladder dependence, bhakti [devotion] as a religious idiom made spiritual freedom dependent upon God...Both stood in sharp contrast to the self-assured independence…of ancient Indians...there was a strong complementary relationship between religious thought and economic structure. Perhaps the most significant instance of this, was the caste system…Though an ancient

> doctrine….the caste system was flexible and tolerant in that it allowed for mobility…and did not discriminate on the basis of caste with respect to economic opportunity and education. However, in the medieval period the caste system became inflexible and consequently impacted…on the economic system (1993, p. 148-149)

The authors are careful to point out that they are not suggesting that religion *caused* the economic system to develop in this way, instead suggesting that there are significant relationships that are worthy of attention.

In shifting to the current era, they note that India has moved away from the Upanishadic (philosophical) and the *bhakti* (devotional) systems and that there has been "a growth of gurus and godmen promising either solace or instant salvation" (1993, p. 150). Moreover, state secularism in India – promoted by the Nehruvian government at Independence – has, in their view, deteriorated into a 'pseudo secularism' in which the state is "equally involved in all religions" (Deheja and Deheja, 1993, p. 150). Both the rise of guru culture and Hindu nationalism (which are particularly well linked in McKean, 1996) are, for the authors, part of a general decline of Hinduism that they link to the "torpor and stagnation of the economy"[21] and a general decay of social values in modern India.

Khandwalla also takes up this historical narrative in his article *The cult of Vishnu and India's economic development*, where he argues that "the cult of Vishnu and its associated work ethic have played a notable role in the economic development of India during the past 2,000 years or so" (1995, p. 147). He suggests that in Vishnu's mythological encounters, he acts as a "resourceful manager", spawning pragmatic attitudes to economic activities and appealing to trades people of various types. Moreover, he highlights the prominence of Vishnu as one of the main gods in the Bhagavad Gita, which promotes a particular type of work ethic that stresses "duty over gain", in terms of its emphasis upon doing one's duty regardless of the outcome. He draws parallels between this and Weber's Protestant work ethic, according to which "work is worship: conscientious labour, not in the pursuit of leisure and enjoyment, but undertaken as a calling of God, increase[ing] the chances of receiving God's grace without which salvation…is not possible' (1995, p. 155). He aims to demonstrate that business and trades people were particularly attracted to the worship of Vishnu and that this, in turn, meant that Vishnu developed into a deity considered supportive of economic values. Hence, the worship of Vishnu, in his view, has influenced economic development in India through supporting a managerial spirit and a particular work ethic.

Khandwalla seems to be aware that some of his conjectures are difficult to prove, and this is of course the danger with theories that attempt to explain causal links between co-existing social phenomena: the variables are so varied and complex that it is difficult not to impose one's own agenda on the interpretation of the material.[22]

- **Weberian approaches: explanations for poverty and underdevelopment**

Another body of literature that is concerned to identify historical linkages between Hinduism and India's economic development is attempts to assess the extent to which the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism has meant an elevation of the spiritual over the material, which has stunted India's economic development. In addition, Hinduism can be interpreted to support the view that a person's social and economic status is a product of their actions in a previous life. Thus being born into or ending up in poverty can be seen as a result of *karma*. This seemingly fatalistic approach is further compounded by the caste system, which can make it very difficult for people to improve their social and material conditions. According to the Hindu tradition, people can improve their future rebirth through carrying out their specific *svadharma* (own duty) and this understanding does allow for a way out of poverty (although not in this lifetime). However, it has also been criticized for resulting in a culture that is obedient to authority and adheres to rules. This, it is argued, has tended to make 'Indians' less inclined to innovation and risk-taking, stifling the creative impulses necessary to compete in a modern global economy. It is argued that Brahmanical culture or the 'Brahmanical mind' is the antithesis to modern development and progress.

Thus, it is argued that Hinduism, on the one hand, favours the spiritual over the material, and, on the other hand, has fostered a culture that is fatalistic, rule bound and lacks the inclination to take risks. The combination of these factors is considered to have stunted India's economic development. This body of literature is to be positioned within the Weberian tradition. Max Weber posited that his Protestant work ethic explained the rise of capitalism in Northern Europe and also tried to explain the 'slower' economic development in India in terms of its cultural and religious values (1992 [1958]). Debates about links between Hinduism and India's economic development became particularly popular from the 1950s onwards. These questions were very pressing at the time, since India had just emerged from colonialism and all eyes were on the first post-independence government, which in the face of mass poverty was adopting a socialist model for development. Development concerns,

combined with various Orientalist and Anglicist[23] attitudes towards Indian religiosity and culture that were prominent during the colonial period, produced what now seems to be a rather essentialist and biased interpretation of the role that religion has played in India's economic development.

One version of this discourse is the so-called 'Brahmanical mind debate'. It is worth looking at this is some detail, but with the caveat that the material I discuss was written in the 1950s-70s and hence its contemporary relevance is limited. Since the 1990s, India has undergone massive economic growth and a new middle class that is educated and economically prosperous has emerged. Moreover, the material discussed does seem crudely generalist and essentialist. However, as with discussions about politics (particularly the tension between the anti-secularists and secularists), in accounting for the problems facing India today (be they political, social or economic), developing an understanding of the relationships between traditional 'Hindu' values and worldviews and the pressures of modernity is important. Although India has modernized, not everyone has benefited equally and the extent to which inequality may, at least partially, be explained by the persistence of certain religio-cultural forms in society continues to occupy academic research. A contemporary understanding, however, needs to move on from the rather outdated and essentialist account provided below.

- **The 'Brahmanical mind' debate**

Moddie argues that the "the Indian mind" lacks the "scientific temper [of] an open attitude of mind rooted in the questioning of dogma and authority" (1968, p. 194). The idea that there is something characteristic about the "Hindu mind", that rules out an "open attitude of mind rooted in the questioning of dogma and authority" is echoed by DasGupta, who describes the 'Hindu' as follows:

> He [sic] is essentially authoritarian. He has a closed mind. He is puritanical in enforcing the ritual of rules...He needs external support whenever he seeks to make a movement. The in-built timidity before the unknown makes him bend before every shrine that comes his way. Rules are his crutch and his guilt-laden, anxiety-prone conscience makes him worship the account books as well as take to all the cheap and essentially spurious means of appeasing the supernatural powers that be - like a dip in the Ganges, rushing to the astrologer or to placate a monk-father (Guruji)...To be rational for him is to multiply rules upon rules and insist on formal conformity to them though he tolerates the violation of the spirit of the rules for private gain without any such moral qualm (Dasgupta, 1977, p. 246).

DasGupta's description of 'the Hindu stereotype' was an attempt to explain why Indian or Hindu society had not been as successful at modernizing as other countries. In particular he compares India with the USA, where

> The qualities which struck me as uniquely American were freedom from convention, its concomitant courage and the urge for expansion and self-expression...it calls for courage to defy the past, belief in rationalism as the sheet anchor of all values, abiding trust in empiricism and confidence in the future (1977, p. 13)

The contrast between the open-minded, rational and self-confident American and the rule-bound, self-doubting and superstitious Indian provides, for DasGupta, the key to understanding why India had been unsuited to taking up the challenges offered by different forms of modernity, including the ability to excel in science. According to this model, 'the Indian' is shackled by the rigidity of the caste system and the inheritance of rules that govern social and religious life, showing little inclination towards the style of lateral thinking necessary to compete in the contemporary global arena:

> The rules and ethos of rules which originated in the area of religious and other ceremonial occasions during the Vedic and post-Vedic times have become a basic constituent of the Hindu psyche and today determine his responses in the work-a-day world; rules as ends in themselves and not as means - the Hindu infatuation for rules as such continues to guide the Hindu behavior pattern (1977, p. 205).

Dasgupta is arguing that rules and recourse to external authority have been inherited from the ancient religious culture of the Vedas. During this period, the most important socio-religious activity was the performance of an elaborate ritual sacrifice to the Gods, performed by the Brahmin priests. The continuance of this sacrifice was essential to the continuance of cosmic order, or *rita*, and each individual was considered significant in terms of his or her role in supporting this supreme human task. Although by the time of the Upanishads, religion had become less focused on the performance of an external sacrifice and an awareness of a more individual internal religion had arisen, he suggests that rule adherence still ran stealthily through Indian culture to the time at which he was writing.

Whilst Dasgupta acknowledges that not all people living in India are Hindu, he considers that these features of 'Hindu' culture cut across religious divides and form the basis of a shared national character trait. Moddie uses the phrase Brahmanical rather than Hindu to describe this: "by Brahmanical I do not mean the culture of Brahmins as a caste group, but of a wider social culture

which we now inherit as a direct result of the Indo-British connection of the last hundred years" (1968, p. 3):

> It may also be shared by non-Brahmins and even by non-Hindus. With slight variations, Muslims, Sikhs, Christian and Parsees can absorb that culture and function within its cramping limitations...It sums up the essence of the traditional culture in India at the end of the Indo-British connection better that any other word, a culture of rigid and narrow caste or class superiority, subservient attitude to authority, and static attitudes towards change in thought, systems and relationships (1968, p. 11).

In outlining the above debate, I do not intend to suggest that it is relevant today, certainly not in the given form. The version presented above is essentialist and imperialist (particularly in drawing shallow comparisons with North America). We do find nonetheless that prominent secularists in India also draw attention to the retrogressive aspects of the Hindu tradition in their defence of secularism. They are, however, more likely to focus upon the costs to individual liberties and freedoms that come from strict adherence to a traditional Hindu world view than they are to stress the ways in which India should aspire to North American values and economic models (Nanda, 2002). Research on understandings of the *karma-dharma* nexus, on how this influences social attitudes towards caste and gender, and the ways that it shapes the understandings/explanations individuals provide for their own and others' economic position, is nonetheless of relevance to this research programme.

The famous America anthropologist, Milton Singer, has also written on this topic. In his article *Cultural values in India's economic development* (1956), he agrees that there is something more renunciatory and less materialistic (more "spiritual") about Indian religious culture. However, he critiques any attempt to draw a hard and fast distinction between "spiritualism" and "materialism", saying that the implication that materialism has no value in India or that spiritualism and materialism are mutually exclusive is "perhaps more commonly drawn by Westerners than by Indians" (1956, p. 82). He argues, with reference to Gandhi's ascetic values[24] and interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita as promoting "selfless action"[25], that there is no absence of materialism in Indian society and denies that renunciation and asceticism are necessarily impediments to economic growth.

- **Hindu economics: Gandhian influence**

The literature that discusses the components of a distinct Hindu approach to economics focuses upon key figures such as Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), noting that they all emphasize that the material dimensions of life are secondary and inferior to the spiritual. This seeks to establish a Hindu economics different to capitalism, in which profit drives economic activity rather than spiritual development. Gandhi and Aurobindo[26] (Minor, 1998) are well known for their association with ashrams or communities based upon a combination of spiritual teachings (rooted in Hinduism) and attempts to live in community-oriented and self-sufficient ways.[27] Tagore, for example, set up the Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal, in the same place where his father (the spiritual leader Debandranath Tagore) had established an ashram in 1863 (Dutta and Robinson, 1997). While there is a substantial literature on all these figures, and their impact has been widely felt across India and beyond, it is the writings and activities of Gandhi that have been most influential.

Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi were all prominent in the Swadeshi movement of the early twentieth century, the free India movement that sought to end British colonial rule. Their combination of Hindu spirituality with lifestyle models drew upon what each saw as crucial for the future of an independent India. Gandhi is well known for his lack of trust in industrialization and capitalist expansion, promoting instead an economic system based upon the village system, with an emphasis on local production, crafts and self-sufficiency. The image that he adopted for an independent India (and which still appears on the Indian flag) was that of a spinning wheel. On the one hand, this was a reaction against the British export of cotton, while on the other it symbolized a vision of a self-sufficient India (Narendar, 2002; Narayan, 1970; Sharma, 1997).

The legacy of this thought, which was rooted in the Swadeshi movement and Hindu spirituality, lives on in the present day. While India is overwhelmingly a capitalist economy, there are pockets of activity in which followers attempt to live by principles that reflect the ideas of these earlier thinkers. This includes, for example, the continuation of the ashrams and communities inspired by Gandhi or Aurobindo, as well as Hindu theological writing that aims to establish the ways in which the Hindu tradition supports economic systems that are less harmful to people and the environment than the capitalist system. An article in the magazine *Hinduism Today* entitled *Ethical economics*, contrasts so-called Hindu economics with western economics.[28] The article begins with the claim that:

> At the heart of Hindu economics is this: the test of every policy is not profit, employment or growth, but how it strengthens family and community, individual character and sensitivity[29]

The article cites the work of Dattopant Thengdi, who in his book the *Third Way* argues that

> Hindu economics is fundamentally different from Western economics. To start with, he says, in the West economics is treated as a separate discipline. But within Hinduism, economics falls under *artha,* one of the four legitimate aims of life: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). In Western economics, human beings are too often regarded as essentially economic beings, carrying out economic activities, producing goods and, in turn, consuming goods to complete the economic cycle…. In contrast to the mechanical approach of Western economics, Hindu philosophy holds that human beings are not just physical entities to be kept happy by producing and consuming. Rather, humans comprise physical, mental and spiritual aspects, and for the happiness of an individual all three should be taken into consideration. When you apply these fundamental beliefs, the kind of economics you get is very different (Pandaya, 1998).

Such theology is open to criticism since, just because Hinduism can be interpreted to support such a view of economics, this does not mean that it reflects how Hindus actually conduct their economic lives. Perhaps to counter such a critique, the article does finish with the popular example of Ralegaon Siddhi, a village near Pune, where a man called Anna Hazare, inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi, established a village based upon “Hindu economics, governed not by profit motives but by dharma, encompassing not just the value of goods, but also of lives” (Pandaya, 1998). Using traditional methods of water harvesting and soil conservation, he enabled people to transform a drought prone area into a prosperous village where literacy rates rose, alcohol consumption fell and people contribute excess grain to a ‘grain bank’ for communal use when grain is scarce. The village temple was reconstructed, serving as a focus for both village meetings and worship.

- **Anthropological approaches**

Aside from theological reflections on the contribution that certain interpretations of Hinduism can make towards thinking about an ‘ethical economics’ (and indeed there is some evidence of examples where such theologizing has had a positive impact), there are anthropological studies that describe the ways in which religion interacts with different economic systems in India. These grounded studies are

carried out by academics and have a less political agenda than the three approaches discussed above.

For instance, Brouwer in his article, *The goddess for development: indigenous economic concepts among South Indian artisans*, writes about the Vishvakarma caste in Karnataka – a caste of blacksmiths, carpenters, coppersmiths, sculptors and goldsmiths. He tells us that "they consider themselves to be descendents of the mythical Lord Visvakarman, mentioned in the Rig Veda" (1997, p. 71). While the Brahmins see this deity as a creator god, and as subservient to other deities, the Vishvakarma caste considers him to be their Absolute. The Vishvakarma craftsman himself, being the worldly counterpart of the heavenly Vishvakarman, is an image of the universe.

> Through the imagery of the tools, the participants conceptualise their workshops also as an image of the universe and finally, their (main) finished products are images of the whole universe (visva) (1997, p. 72).

Brouwer is interested in how the craftsmen make the shift between the transcendental aspect of their profession and the fact that they are also in the world (in terms of obtaining raw materials, selling their products and dealing with debt from loans). He is interested in the meaning of economic transactions for the craftsmen, showing that "the social, religious (ritual), economic and political domains are intertwined in this system" (1997, p. 81). He points out that modern development discourse tends to attribute "to money a set of meanings emanating from their own culture. Ignoring the relevant concepts behind local practices in indigenous knowledge systems then is an impediment for development" (1997, p. 81). He is interested to look at how caste members understand monetary exchanges and the payment of debt in particular.

As I have argued throughout this paper, ethnography is crucial to understanding what Hinduism is as well as how it intersects with development concerns. With respect to thinking about 'Hinduism and economics', unless historical and text-based studies are complemented by ethnographies that aim to uncover what people actually do, rather than what the texts say they should do or what would seem to be the case in terms of grand causal theories, we can learn little about how the lived Hindu tradition actually interacts with issues and concerns of relevance to development. Another important source of interest is research that is concerned with organizations that offer and implement particular interpretations of Hinduism as supporting positive and empowering development goals. For instance,

many organizations draw upon Hindu teachings about *dana* (giving) and *seva* (service) as the basis for their humanitarian and development activities.

2.3.2 Dana (giving) and seva (service)

The above discussion has opened up reflection on the ways in which the Hindu tradition can provide explanations for and understandings of poverty and economic development. While explanations for poverty that centre upon *karma* may well inform people's understanding of and explanation for poverty, there is also a strong tradition of alms giving (*dana*) and *seva* (service) to the poor. This is considered to be part of the duty/*dharma* of the individual and increases their religious merit (*punya*).

In a paper that discusses state-administered programmes to ensure 'food-for-all', Khare notes that there is "dual control of food in India" (1998, p. 271). He writes that: "while ordinary Hindus, like other Indians, now depend on government programmes for food supply in partially regulated markets at a reasonable price, they also eat and feed according to family customs, local caste rules and religious values" (1998, p. 271). Nevertheless, he argues that state programmes are blind to the ways in which such customs, rules and values "impede or help achieve the goal of a hunger-free society" (1998, p. 271). In particular, he is interested in whether support for the principle of "the right to food" can be found within the Hindu tradition and notes that his informants constantly referred to the notion of *sadharana dharma* (universal *dharma*) as a basis for sharing food with the poor. They also argued that *sadharana dharma* ought to take precedence over the restrictive and exclusive rules of caste duty that might otherwise result in uneven food entitlements.

Khare argues that state food programmes are more likely to be successful if they are sensitive to the ways in which Hindu culture can both impede and support the goal of a hunger-free society. Drawing attention to the feeding of strangers during religious festivals "irrespective of the condition and status of the recipient" (1998, p. 261), he argues that although "religious charity alone could not wipe out hunger and poverty" (1998, p. 258), it is sociologically relevant to ask "what keeps the traditional Indian food-gifting charity and philanthropic initiatives isolated from those that the state launches?" (1998, p. 258). He concludes that there are "two distinct cultural languages (in simple terms 'traditional' and 'modern')…[that]…often exist and work in India under either mutual denial, separation or obviation" (1998, p. 255). Khare's study suggests that development must find ways of bridging this gap, through a consideration of the interaction between traditional values and modernity (Tomalin, 2006).

It is relevant here to return to the example of Swami Vivekananda because, as I have already mentioned, on the basis of his religious teachings, a successful welfare organization was established offering services that include literacy projects, agricultural extension work and disaster relief. Vivekananda was a disciple of the nineteenth century Bengali saint Sri Ramakrishna and was one of the first Hindu teachers to travel to the West. His particular brand of Hinduism stressed a 'formless' version of the divine, which appealed to a Western audience who would have been suspicious of the iconic and polytheistic styles of Hindu belief and practice that were prevalent in India. Moreover, he was critical of the injustices of the caste system and advocated improved rights and conditions for women.

In 1897 he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, a socio-spiritual welfare organization that now has branches throughout the world. While the movement is apolitical and as such does not actively campaign for human rights causes, Vivekananda is known to have been a 'mentor' to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India. It is believed that he had significant influence upon Nehru's support for human rights, which coloured the Indian constitution (Beckerlegge, 1990, p. 131). For the Ramakrishna Mission, social service is a *sadhana*, a religious path, based upon the (spiritual) realization that all humans are equal (Miller, 1999, p. 124). As one Indian female development worker explained:

> Persons who join RKM join neither for money, nor fame, nor for anything else. Their motive is essentially to serve. Swami Vivekananda had preached 'one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of his brothers'…. In looking at the development activities of the World Bank, or of UN agencies, or of government projects, projects especially meant for the poor, these have often failed for there is neither a sense of 'service' nor 'renunciation', and often a lack of understanding of the essence and soul of the poor people in a given culture. Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi had developed their understanding of the poor by living amongst the poor, and listening and interacting with them.[30]

2.4 Summing up

The aim of this section was to provide an overview of studies that have looked at the ways in which Hindu teachings, beliefs and practices impact upon key development concepts and debates: social ethics, including human rights and inequality; social, political and economic systems; and attitudes towards wellbeing, poverty and wealth. In the final part of this paper, I will focus on the relationship between Hinduism and specific high priority development concerns: credit and debt; gender roles and equality; the role of and access to education; engagement in public life through politics, social movements, advocacy and community organisation; and corruption/ethical behaviour in public life.

3 General observations on the relationships between Hinduism and key development concerns

3.1 Credit, debt and interest

Hinduism does not have any injunctions against the accumulation of interest on savings or on debt, as in Islam. However, with respect to the issue of how the individual might earn money, restrictions linked to the maintenance of caste boundaries and the fact that certain groups of people cannot undertake occupations that are not considered to be meant for their caste have existed. Moreover, systems of bonded labour still exist in India as remnants of a feudal and colonial past and within these systems caste also plays a role. The impact of caste on occupation has weakened, with legislation that outlaws caste discrimination and the reservations of quotas for low caste people in certain occupations. In practice, nonetheless, people from lower castes still tend to be poorer and are effectively marginalized from job and educational opportunities open to the higher castes. The Gandhian approach tends to dominate organizations and initiatives concerned to achieve economic transformation in the context of modern development problems.

The issue of 'global debt' does concern some Hindu groups (e.g. Hindu Aid). In the UK, for instance, Hindu communities participate in interfaith initiatives against global debt and in support of the Millennium Development Goals[31]. However, this issue does not feature to the same extent as within, for instance, different Christian communities

3.2 Gender roles and equality

The impact of Hinduism upon gender roles has received attention in the literature. I have already discussed this above with respect to the influence of traditional understandings of women as secondary to men and as naturally destined for a domestic role as being reinforced by Hinduism. Tomalin (2007) looks at the links between Hinduism and practices that effect women, including reproductive choice, son preference and dowry practices. Dhruvarajan takes these discussions further arguing that 'development efforts in modern India have largely failed to help women because of the male-centred religious ideology of pativrata [literally: 'husband worship']. This ideology encourages the adoption of a submissive and dependent position by Hindu women' (1990, p. 57). She argues that whereas public life in India is secular, the private sphere is regulated by religion and the family system is 'patriarchal, patrilinear and patrilocal' (1990, p. 58). There is little choice for women about alternatives to married life, their main duty is to engage in reproductive labour and the ideal woman worships her husband. Women are socialised, she argues, from a young age into the pativrata

system and this position is reinforced by certain Hindu attitudes that 'men are believed to be ritually pure" and "women are believed to be ritually pollutable' (1990, p. 59).

She argues that development programmes frequently target the family rather than individual women and as such do not actually aim to disrupt the traditional gender roles therein. They work with the existing patriarchal structures. She suggests that in order to change women's position 'pativrata' must be overturned. This can be done through religion (i.e. seeking feminine imagery and teachings and practices that can emphasise equality) but also education, the mass media and women's groups that aim to create solidarity (1990; 1996).

3.3 The role of and access to education

The current education system in India has its legacy in the colonial period and is modelled on Western (British) institutions. It is largely secular and is open to both sexes and all castes. There are caste, religion and language-based reservations and schools can opt to become minority status institutions. As a secular country, India does not support the teaching of religion in state-run schools, but schools run by religious organizations may engage in religious instruction. The link between religion and education in India, however, is very ancient: the Hindu institutions of Guru-shishya and Gurukul provided education to young boys under the guidance of spiritual teachers. The Guru-shishya tradition involves the transmission of knowledge from a guru to a student/disciple and dates back to the oral traditions of the Upanishadic period. This guru-disciple relationship was essential for the transmission of religious knowledge and has been central to Hindu institutions throughout history. The Gurukul is the place where such religious instruction takes place. These traditions are being revived to some extent in modern India.

One of the most well known is the Ananda Marga Gurukula, established in 1990 by Shrii Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar, who in 1955 set up an organization called 'Ananda Marga' (the path of bliss)

> .. and began training missionaries to spread his teachings of 'self-realization and service to humanity' all over India and later throughout the world. Reflecting the broadness of his universal vision, Ananda Marga has become a multi-faceted organization with different branches dedicated to the upliftment of humanity through education, relief, welfare, the arts, ecology, intellectual renaissance, women's emancipation, and humanistic economy.[32]

From 1963 onwards, he began an educational movement, with a network of schools that "culminated in the founding of Ananda Marga Gurukula University with its links to several hundred Master Units (self reliant eco villages projects) throughout the world".[33] The Vivekananda College near Madurai is another example[34] of the adoption of the Gurukula system, as is Sândipani in Ujjain; Prabodhini Gurukula, in Karnataka;[35] and Vedavijnana Gurukulam,[36] Shubham Karoti and Om Shantidhama, which are near Bangalore. These are single sex institutions, most of which cater for boys. They are linked to the tradition of *brahmacharya*, one of the four stages of life, but teach a mixture of modern and religious subjects and do not formally operate caste restrictions. While girls were traditionally barred from this educational system, today there are some female Gurukulas such as Maitreyi Gurukulam, Bangalore.

The rise in the popularity of these institutions in modern India is linked with the rise of the Hindu Right and many are concerned that they reflect another dimension of the Hinduization of society. There is also a concern that the Hindu Right is seeking to bring religion (Hinduism) into the classroom more generally, in both state and Hindu schools. During the period of Hindu Right-led national government (1998-2004), the separation of religion from education became less clear and many are calling for stricter legislation to maintain this separation. Froerer (2007) discusses the ways in which, since 1997, the RSS has been involved in redesigning school textbooks and curricula "with an explicitly Hindutva flavour" (2007, p. 1034; see also Panikkar, 2001). She is interested in exploring the links between education and nationalism, specifically RSS-run schools and their goal of inculcating students into Hindutva values, although she also argues that "focusing strictly on the ideology of hate in RSS schools…tends to conceal the more covert (or even overt) forms of saffronisation found within government schools" (2007, p. 1068) through influence on their curriculum (2001, p. 1067).

3.4 Engagement in public life: politics, social movements, advocacy and community organization

Because Hindus are in the majority in India, the need for specific Hindu advocacy groups is less pressing than for other religious traditions. Such groups do, however, exist to support and represent the interests of non-resident Indians (NRIs) abroad, for instance, the Hindu Forum of Britain[37] and the Hindu American Foundation.[38]

In India, Hindu temples play a strong role in community organization. A temple is often the 'hub' of a community, providing a place to meet and to conduct various community activities. For instance, temples often give food to the poor (Khare, 1998) and run schools. However, most Hindus' engagement in forms of social movement activity tends to be secular (i.e. it does not explicitly draw upon religious values or teachings nor involve the participation of religious institutions). For instance, the women's movement has been influenced by left-wing, feminist, secular thought and sees Hinduism as backward and oppressive towards women. The environmental movement, in contrast, has attracted religious input and the participation of religious organizations and institutions. However, there has also been a tendency by some scholars and activists to over-romanticize the role of religion in environmental, peasant or farmers' movements. For instance, the view that various types of environmental struggle are undertaken by people to preserve their traditional ways of life and cultural practices is often put forward, when in fact the primary goal is to secure their basic needs (Tomalin, 2004).

As discussed above, despite being a secular country religion does play a prominent role in Indian politics. Although officially religion is separated from the state, the government has not managed to strictly enforce this. On the one hand, different religious constituencies have been critical of the government for appearing not to maintain neutrality towards other religions. Thus critics have felt that the Congress party (which is non-religious and has held power for large swathes of time since independence) has nevertheless shown favouritism to one religion or another. On the other hand, various religiously-based political parties are not prohibited by the constitution and exist across India. In particular, from 1998-2004 the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was dominated by the Hindu Right BJP party, exacerbating communal tensions across India and leaving a persistent legacy.

3.5 Corruption/ethical behaviour in public life

According to the traditional Indian worldview discussed above, understandings of *dharma* were intended to maintain the functioning of an effective social and political system in which each person had their own role or duty. To act in accordance with the role was regarded as *karmically* positive, while to act against it was thought to create negative *karma* and have a detrimental impact on future rebirths. Ethical behaviour in the public sphere would seem to have been intrinsic to this system. Vittal

(2001) draws our attention to the Arthashastra, in which King Kautalya deals with the characteristics of a well-run administration, emphasizing that there is both an obligation on the part of rulers to rule well and on each individual to subsume his/her personal desires in those of the greater good. Similarly, according to Vittal, the Hitopadesha, a collection of fables in Sanskrit, tells us:

> Subordinate the interest of an individual for the sake of the family, of the family to subserve the interest of the village, of the village in the interest of the state, or all worldly interest in order to obtain eternal bliss (Vittal, 2001, p. 7).

He concludes that "if we explore the roots of ethics in public administration, we find that we have a rich tradition" (2001, p. 9)

Despite the presence of resources within Hinduism to support the idea of ethical behaviour in public life, a cross-national study by Beets (2007) suggests that Hindu majority countries are amongst those most liable to corrupt behaviour. Religion is a relevant factor in understanding corruption. On the one hand, religious values may influence a person's involvement in corruption and, on the other, in many contexts religious institutions have become involved in anti-corruption campaigns. While the correlation between national religious characteristics and corruption found by Beets is interesting, suggesting that further analysis would be relevant, the methodological approach adopted has been criticized (Marquette and Alolo Al-Hassan, 2009) and his findings do not necessarily mean that Hinduism is a cause of corrupt behaviour.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to provide a background discussion to the intersection between Hinduism and development. While the colonial construction of Hinduism is to be borne in mind, in modern India and beyond, many individuals, political parties, social movements and community groups employ the category of Hinduism (variously interpreted) as a marker of identity, as well as a means of motivating changes in values and behaviour. Some modern expressions of Hinduism consciously aim at reform (therefore marking their distance from a 'corrupt' past in which caste and gender oppression were justified by religious means). Others, by contrast, explicitly seek to unite with the past, invoking notions of an authentic Hinduism that is asserted to supersede other religious forms in the region (i.e. the Hindu Right).

It is important to reiterate a key theme of this paper: that no religion, Hinduism included, influences people's behaviour and actions in a straightforward and predictable fashion. The Hindu Sanskrit texts do not exactly mirror the lived tradition, reflecting instead the Brahmanical view of the religion. Therefore, the possibility of extracting a 'Hindu view' on any particular topic or theme from the texts is both limited and is unlikely to reflect how people actually behave. There is a need for research interested in understanding the links between Hinduism and development to engage in ethnography in addition to work that is textual and historical in nature.

Notes

1 **http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_hindu.html**

2 **http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_hindu.html**

3 The colonial construction of Buddhism has been discussed in Tomalin (2007) (see also Almond 1988). A similar debate surrounds Sikhism, particularly with respect to contestation over the boundary that is typically drawn between Sikhism and Hinduism (Oberoi 1994). The construction of religious boundaries is, however, not only a colonial interest: it has also been central to the emergence of distinct religio-nationalistic identities in India (e.g. the 'Khalistan' movement for Sikhs; and notions of 'Hindutva' ('Hinduness') and 'Hindu Rashtra' (the creation of a 'Hindu nation') for Hindus).

4 A challenge for this research programme, as well as for any modern attempt to discuss the nature and content of 'Hinduism', is the emergence of the Hindu Right. Even though the vast majority of Indians are Hindu, there is sometimes a tendency in India to consider all reflection on Hinduism to be part of the Hindu religio-nationalist agenda.

5 There is a political dimension to some modern tendencies to trace Hinduism back to an indigenous Indian culture rather than a product of invasions: there is a desire within the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement to argue that Hinduism is the authentic and original religion of the Indian subcontinent and it therefore claims the indigenous origins of Hinduism to support this argument.

6 Interpretations of the significance and meaning of caste vary widely. One popular theme is that the emphasis upon caste, as well as the way that it is interpreted, are largely a product of colonial influence (Dirks, 2001; Quigley, 1995) and key orientalist texts (e.g. Dumont's 1970 Homo Hierarchicus, which places caste at the centre of an analysis of Hindu society and religion). Quigley (1995), for instance, is critical of the view that the caste system can be explained in terms of the tension between the purity of the Brahmin and the increasing impurity of the other castes. His model places the notion of Kingship at the centre of the analysis.

7 The Bhagavad Gita is widely thought to be the most popular Hindu text. It is part of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata.

8 **http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu.htm**

9 **http://www.infinityfoundation.com/ECITmythicalframeset.htm**

10 Gandhi did not aim, however, to actually remove the caste system, which is a point of contention for dalit groups in India today.

11 However, it is important to note that contradictions between these two systems of svadharma and sadharana dharma have never been satisfactorily resolved, because the tradition gives no clear instructions as to which should take precedence (see O'Flaherty, 1978, p. 96ff and Lipner,1998, p. 228-231). With respect to the ethic of ahimsa/non-violence (part of sadharana dharma) problems arise with respect to the kshatriya (warrior) class whose svadharma permits violence.

12 Harijan ('child of God') is the word for the caste of people formerly known as 'untouchable'.

13 It is interesting to note that recent versions of the Ramayana support a right wing conservative depiction of women by focusing on Sita's role as the dutiful wife. Sita is not focused on so heavily in traditional versions, such as Valimiki's (see Bose, 2004). This suggests that, in the eyes of the compilers of these recent texts, the Ramayana continues to play a role in shaping people's social attitudes. In this case the Hindu Right is keen to stress a view of women that suits its socio-political agenda.

14 The Ramayana no doubt gained additional popularity through being televized in the 1980s (Rajagopal, 2001), when the actors who played the key figures, many of whom were deities, were effectively deified themselves by members of the public.

15 A female mendicant.

[16] This echoes Kipling's story 'The Bridge-Builders', set during the British colonial period, which relates "Mother Gunga's' rage at being locked in by a newly constructed bridge and her appeal to the other Gods for help. They, on the other hand, have decided that it is time she backs down and takes 'her appointed place in the new imperial geography" (Prakash, 1999, p. 168).

[17] Sarkar has written on the role of women in Hindu nationalism and their use of religion (2001; Sarkar and Butalia 1995). Not in refs

[18] The BJP and the VHP.

[19] http://indiatogether.org/women/violence/will2viol.htm, 'A Will to Violence' Manushi, November 2002.

[20] **http://www.sedos.org/english/roy.htm**, 'Democracy: who's she when she's at home?' Outlook India, 6th May 2002.

[21] They were writing in 1993. In the context of economic liberalization since 1991, and things have moved on somewhat. Despite continuing massive poverty and inequality in India today, the economy has shifted to that of a global power that is fully interlinked into world markets.

[22] Below we will turn to the anthropological work that looks at links between ritual and belief and economic activity. In this work, we find less emphasis on identifying grand causal relationships and a greater focus on small-scale studies that reveal important linkages between specific rituals and beliefs and economic practice in particular locations.

[23] Orientalists praised and even romanticized Indian cultural traditions. Anglicists, by contrast, promoted western views on education and saw Hinduism as primitive and backward.

[24] See discussion of Gandhi below. Gandhi was not in favour of industrialization, whether the socialistic version adopted at independence or the capitalistic version that was eventually adopted following liberalization.

[25] See Goheen (1958) for a series of debates and discussions about Singer's article by different commentators.

[26] The Sri Aurobindo Ashram was set up in 1926, near Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, and in 1968 Mirra Alfassa, or 'The Mother', a follower of Aurobindo, set up Auroville, an 'experimental township', in Tamil Nadu.

[27] Gandhi's most famous ashram is Sabarmati Ashram, near Ahmadabad, Gujerat (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabarmati_Ashram). However, Gandhian principles continue to influence many contemporary ashrams in India.

[28] **http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1998/3/1998-3-18.shtml**

[29] **http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1998/3/1998-3-18.shtml**

[30] Email response January 3, 2003.

[31] See **http://www.wcrp.org/resources/toolkits/faith-in-action** and Hindu Aid website **http://www.hinduaid.org/**

[32] **http://www.gurukul.edu/about_founder.php**

[33] Ibid

[34] **http://www.viveka.org/day.htm http://www.hindu.com/edu/2005/01/10/stories/2005011000730300.htm**

[35] **http://prabodhinigurukula.org**

[36] **http://vvgurukulam.org**

[37] **http://www.hinduaid.org/docs/connectingbh.pdf**

[38] **http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/job_ads.htm**

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