Chapter-III:

Indian Ethos: An Understanding

What is India? What are the ethoses of Indian people? Why do Indian people shout “Bharat Mata Ki Jay?” Why India is considered to be the mother? Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, who made a very lucid attempt to understand India in his famous discourse The Discovery of India, wrote a beautiful narrative that “Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome would greet me: “Bharat Mata Ki Jay”- ‘Victory to Mother India.’ I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this Bharat Mata, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 60)

Or one can quote Romaine Rolland, as quoted by Jawaharlal Nehru as saying that “If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 89)

Perhaps the most suitable and appropriate way to be introduced to this Chapter is through the words of Jawaharlal Nehru. He narrates that
“During these years of thought and activity my mind has been full of India, trying to understand her…what was this India that possessed me and beckoned to me continually…It seemed monstrous to me that a great country like India, with a rich and immemorial past, should be bound hand and foot to a far away island which imposed its will upon her. It was still monstrous that this forcible union had resulted in poverty and degradation beyond measure. What is this India, apart from her physical and geographical aspects? What did she represent in the past? What gave strength to her then? How did she lose that old strength? And has she lost completely? Does she represent anything vital now, apart from being the home of a vast number of human beings? How does she fit into the modern world? Did I know India? – I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage? There was a great deal that had to be scrapped, that must be scrapped; but surely India could not have been what she undoubtedly was, and could not have continued a cultured existence for thousand of years, if she had not possessed something very vital and enduring, something that was worthwhile. What was this something?” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 49)

The religious life of India is something like the river Ganges, which flows out of the Himalayas and is enlarged by the tributaries as it moves east toward the Bay of Bengal. Because the water of the Ganges is regular and dependable it has allowed civilization to flourish across much of northern India. It has also given Indian culture a sense of security protection, and even care which has led to the popular name for the river, Ganga Ma (“Mother Ganges”). The Indian life has flowed along for
thousand years, swirling from its own power but also from the powers of the new streams that have added to its force. Many influences-early indigenous religion and influences from later migrants- have added to India’s way of life, we can easily call it Hinduism, since it’s not a religion but a civilization, Hinduism’s inherent momentum. It has no one identifiable founder, no strong organizational structure to defend it and spread its influence nor any creed to define and stabilize its beliefs; and in a way it seems to defy reason Hinduism unites the worship of many gods with a belief in a single divine reality. In the words of Michael Molly “Hinduism is more like a family of related beliefs and the name Hinduism, if used to suggest a unified religion, can be misleading. But the limitations of Hinduism may also be its strengths. It is like palace that began as a two-room cottage. Over the centuries, wings have been built on it, and now it has countless rooms, stairs, corridors, statues, fountains, and gardens. There is something here to please and astonish—and dismay—almost everyone.” (Molly, Michael. Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999, p. 58)

Professor Carl Clemen defines Hinduism as “extremely comprehensive. It has not only a religious, but also a social meaning, for the caste system is a very important constituent of it. As the name of a religion, it excludes those religious societies which do not recognize the Veda as authoritative-Buddhism, Jainism etc.- but includes practically all other shades of Indian religion from the first centuries B.C. down to the present day.” (Clemen, Carl. Religions of the World. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005, p. 108)
In the words of Charles Gorham, Hinduism is “a faith which does not gather round the person of a real being, whether human or believed to be divine. It is based on a collection of ancient Sanskrit writings, the Vedas.” (Gorham, Charles. *Ethics of the Great Religions of the World.* Delhi: Aparna Publications, 1904, p. 29)

Mark Juergensmeyer also equates ‘Hinduism’ as “the name for India’s traditional culture and a title of a specific religious community. In traditional India there is no clear distinction between religion and general culture of religion: even the words Hindu and India are etymologically linked. Both were coined by outsiders to refer to the land and the people along the Indus River.” (Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 81)

To understand the Indian ethos, it is primary to understand the Hindu psyche, for the simple reason that both of them are, more or less, one and the same, to that an extant that, they can be used interchangeably. By Hindus what is meant is all those people who accept, or did accept, that social polity and religious discipline which is based on the teachings of the Vedas. Jagadisha Chandra Chatterji, in his book titled as *Hindu Realism* gives the idea of the Hindu philosophy by contrasting it with the western philosophy. He believes that “It seems to a Hindu that the Western students of his philosophy start generally with the following presuppositions, which are apparently assumed as established facts:

1. Man can never know metaphysical truths by direct experience, in the same way, for instance, as he can know sense objects.
2. Even it is conceded, as a sort of possibility, that men may perhaps know these truths some day by direct experience, yet there has been so far no man who has known them in this fashion.

3. Therefore, being matters of pure speculation…

As against this, the Hindu pre-conceptions are:

1. Man can know metaphysical truths like any other truths, by direct experience, and not merely by speculation…

2. There have been men in the past who have thus known the whole truth of our nature and existence, as well as that of the universe as a whole.

3. And, it is by knowing metaphysical truths by direct experience that some of the Rishis have taught to the Hindus.

4. But the Rishis have taught the Metaphysical truths not as dogmas, to be received on faith, but by rational demonstration.”(Chatterjee, Jagadisha Chandra. Hindu Realism. Delhi, Swastika Publications, 1975, p. 6-7)

So to understand India and Indian Ethos it is imperative that one should be aware of the components that make what India is. And the journey goes back to the era of the Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads to understand what Indian Ethos is. India sans religion is almost nothing. To understand India it is necessary to understand Indian religion life and its influences on life. One may have a question: why does religion exist? Or what is the need of understanding a religion to understand the people who practice it? Michael Molly attempted similar questions when he states that “Because we and our loved ones must die, we have to face the pain of
death and the inevitable questions it brings about whether there is any soul, afterlife, or rebirth. People often look to religion for the answers. Religion can help us to cope up with death, and religious rituals can offer comfort…Human beings are also social by nature and religion offers companionship and the fulfillment that can come from belonging to a group…Human beings have a need to seek out and create artistic forms of expression. Religion stimulates art, music, and dance, and has been the inspirational source of some of the most imaginative buildings in the world. Religion not only makes use of multiple arts but also integrates them into a living, often beautiful whole.” (Molloy, Michael. Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p. 3)

The Indian psyche can never be free from the influences that these great works are having. Any Indian may be living in rural or urban India may be rich or poor, may be intelligent or humble in skills, may be literate or illiterate, India and Indian Ethos run through the veins of Indian silently. These great works of literature of ancient Indians are necessary to understand Indian ness. The point emphasized here is the importance of the Epics and Puranas in the history of Indian thought.

The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Bhagvad Gita, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana may be regarded as the source and fountain to which the later developments of Indian thought can be traced. The Rig Veda, the most important of the Vedas, has an account of the origin of the universe. The universe is said to have emerged from a division and cosmic sacrifice of a primeval super person, Purusha. But the account includes a touching admission of uncertainty. The four Vedas
end with even later works, called the Upanishads, which express the religious and philosophical ideas that arose in introspective and meditative traditions.

The Vedas were the outpourings of the Aryans as they streamed into the rich land of India. They brought their ideas with them. The Vedic hymns are people’s collective reaction to the wonder and awe of existence. So there is no need to attach tag ‘Hindu’ to the Vedas. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly points out that “Many Hindus look upon the Vedas as revealed scriptures. This seems to me to be peculiarly unfortunate, for thus we miss their real significance- the unfolding of the human mind in the earliest stages of thought. And what a wonderful mind that was! The Vedas were simply meant to be a collection of the existing knowledge of the day; they are a jumble of many things: hymns, prayers, ritual or sacrifice, magic, magnificent nature poetry. There is no idolatry in them; no temples for the gods. The vitality and affirmation of life pervading them are extraordinary. The early Vedic hymns were so full of zest for life that they paid little attention to the soul. In a vague way they believed in some kind of existence after death.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 79)

According to Michael Molloy, the most important concepts of Upanishads are “Brahman, Atman, maya, karma, and moksha. These primary concepts, which would become important notions in much later Hindu spirituality, continue to be taught today…The Upanishads insist that Brahman is something that can be known-not simply believed in…What is it to know Brahman? The Upanishads insist that it cannot be
put fully into words, but they give hints. Brahman is a lived experience that all things are in some way holy because they come from the same sacred source…Although Atman is sometimes used interchangeably with the term self or soul, the notion of Atman in the Upanishads is larger than the notion of an individual soul or self. In Hindu belief, each person has an individual soul, but the Upanishads teach that all human beings share the same Atman…The Upanishads speak of the everyday world as maya, which is usually translated as “illusion.”…What determines the direction of one’s rebirth is Karma. It implies the notion of moral consequences that is carried along with every act. Karma is the moral law of cause and effect, and belief in Karma is a belief that every action has an automatic moral consequence…In the Upanishads; moksha is the ultimate human goal. It has various connotations. Moksha certainly includes the notion of getting beyond egoistic responses, such as resentment and anger, which limit the individual…moksha implies liberation even from limitations of being an individual.”(Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p. 64-67)

These lofty ideas of the Upanishads have influenced the lives of the people of India in every walk of life. The Upanishads are instinct with a spirit of inquiry, of mental adventure, of passion for finding out the truth about the things. The search for this truth is, of course not by the objective methods of modern science, yet there is an element of scientific method in the approach. No dogma is allowed to come in the way. The emphasis is essentially on self-realization, on knowledge of the individual self and the absolute self, both of which are said to be the
same in essence. The objective external world is not considered unreal but real in a relative sense, an aspect of the inner reality.

Another remarkable influence on Indian perspectives is that of the Bhagvad Gita. Among other important notions expressed in the Gita, and which influence Indian life greatly, is its way of defining *Karma*. Contrary to the teaching of nonviolence that was at the time of Mahabharat’s creation growing strong in India in traditions like Buddhism and Jainism, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to fight to protect his throne and the structure of society-to fight is his duty. According to Michael Molloy, “At a moment of great revelation, Krishna shows Arjuna that a divine reality is at work within everything in the universe-in living and also in dying. Krishna even says that for the warrior, there is nothing nobler than a righteous war. The recommendations that Arjuna should fight has posed a moral problems for some of the followers of Hinduism. Gandhi is typical of those who have solved this problem…Gandhi held that the call to arms is not about the real war but a call to fight against dangerous moral and psychological forces, such as ignorance, selfishness and anger. This interpretation, though it seems to go against the literal intent of the text, has been influential.”(Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p. 70)

The beauty and the most impressive aspect of Indian way of life in the ancient time is that there was very less difference between the class and the mass in terms of attitudes towards life. The loftiness of the thoughts presented in the Vedas and the Upanishads were not only confined to chosen ones, they were a part and parcel of the entire community. Carl
Clemen points out that “no one who is familiar with the phenomena of religion can imagine for a moment that these speculations (of Hindu way of life) represent the average level of the ordinary Indian…Hinduism has managed to survive in its native India down to the present day.” (Clemen, Carl. *Religions of the World*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005. p. 105)

As perceived by many, India is made of such stuff that it can produce excellent individuals, but can not become an excellent society. The ideology of the Vedas and the Upanishads put emphasis on the development and enlightenment of the individual. This is, may be, due to the qualities of Indo-Aryans. But it seems that the intense individualism of the Indo-Aryans led, in the long run, to both the good and the evil that their culture produced. It led to the production of the very superior types, not in one particular period of history, but again and again, age after age. Jawaharlal Nehru points out the negative impacts of such a psyche by saying that “very individualism led them to attach little importance to the social aspect of man, of man’s duty to society. For each person life was divided and fixed up, a bundle of duties and responsibilities within this narrow sphere in the graded hierarchy. He had no duty to, or conception of, society as a whole, and no attempt was made to make him feel his solidarity within it. This idea is perhaps largely a modern development and can not be found in the ancient society. It is unreasonable, therefore, to expect it in ancient India. Still, the emphasis on individualism, on excessiveness, on graded castes is much more evident in India. In later ages it was to grow into a very prison for the mind of the people—not only for the lower castes, who suffered most from it, but for the higher ones.
So much emphasis is laid on ‘impersonal God’ in the Indian way of looking that ‘personal gods’ are taken as a kind of stepping stones towards the ‘impersonal God’. The Indian philosophical and spiritual quests have been influenced by this mode of acceptance. The theory of *karma* is result of such views, which has greatly influenced Indian psyche. Carl Clemen opines in this regard that “There were many divine beings, but the place of living personalities to whom a personal relation was possible was taken by the mechanical service of sacrifice…The rise of the theory of *Karma* drove the idea of personal deity still farther in to the background. If a man’s moral deeds automatically determine the fate of his soul in the next life, if his external and the internal fate is thus self determined, there is no room for that cry for help addressed by weak man to superior powers which give such a strong support to the faith in a deity. And the worship of a God was further weakened by the vision of the Brahma as taught in the oldest Upanishads. To be Impersonal Absolute, of which a man is himself a part, there can be no such relation as that implied in personal worship.”(Clemen, Carl. *Religions of the World*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005. p. 106)

There are people who are of the opinion that India does not have a sense of history. Another charge against India is that India has never been a ‘nation’. These two charges are interrelated in the sense that both are having wider effects on each other. India does not have a sense of history simply for the fact that Indian psyche is more individualistic than collective one. In sharp contrast to the Western mindset where the
emphasis is on the society and outer development, in Indian thought tradition the emphasis is on the individual emancipation. That’s why India can produce remarkable individuals; it can never have a remarkable society. So there is less care to be a part of a history. Regarding the second charge of not being a ‘nation’, it can be attributed to the fact that the whole concept of ‘nation’ is a Western one. Traditionally, India is a place where every one, including animals and in-animate objects, can live in harmony. The concept of ‘nation’ is a limited and a product of war mentality. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly points out that “Recent events all over the world have demonstrated that the notion that nationalism is fading away before the impact of internationalism and proletarian movements has little truth. It is still one of the most powerful urges that move a people, and round it cluster sentiments and traditions and a sense of common living and common purpose. While the intellectual strata of the middle classes were gradually moving away from nationalism, or so they thought, labor and proletarian movements, deliberately based on the internationalism, were drifting towards nationalism. The coming of war swept everybody everywhere into the net of nationalism…If nationalism is still so universal in its influence, even in countries powerfully affected by new ideas and international forces, how much more must it dominate the mind of India…Nevertheless, India, for all its intense nationalistic fervor, has gone further than many nations in her acceptance of real internationalism and co-ordination, and even to some extent the subordination, of the independent nation state to a world organization.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 52)
But due to being under the rule of Mughals and the Britishers for a long period of time, India has developed a sense of nation. And with this shift there is a shift in Indian perspective to the world. There appears a lack of continuity in Indian thought pattern due the invasion. But there has not been such a break and there is a definite continuity. Also from time to time, vivid periods of renascence have occurred, and some of them have been long and brilliant. Always there is visible an attempt to understand and adapt the new and harmonize it with the old, or at any rate with parts of the old which were considered worth preserving. Jawaharlal Nehru points out towards this tendency of Indian mind by saying that “Often that old retains an external form only, as a kind of symbol, and change its inner content. But something vital and living continues, some urge driving the people in a direction not wholly realized, and always a desire for synthesis between the old and the new. It was this urge and desire that kept them going and enabled them to absorb new ideas while retaining much of the old. Whether there was such a thing as an Indian dream through the ages, vivid and full of life or sometimes reduced to the murmurings of troubled sleep…Every people and every nation has some such belief or myth of national destiny and perhaps it is partly true in each case.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 55)

It has been a long debate either Indian way of life is the acceptance or the negation of life. The precise phrase used by the Western mentality is that India is other-worldly place and Indians are other-worldly people. Many Western writers have encouraged the notion that Indians are other-worldly. Jawaharlal Nehru gives a nice answer to this notion by noting
that “the poor and unfortunate in every country become to some extent other-worldly, unless they become revolutionaries, for this world is evidently not meant for them.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 81)

In India we find during every period when her civilization bloomed an intense joy in life and nature, a pleasure in the act of living, the development of art and music and literature and song and dancing and painting and the theatre, and even a highly sophisticated inquiry in the sex relations. It is inconceivable that a culture or view of life based on other-worldliness or world-worthlessness could have produced all these manifestations of vigorous and varied life. Indeed it should be obvious that any culture that was basically other-worldly could not have carried on for thousand of years. Perhaps both principles are present in varying degrees in all the old religions and cultures. Jawaharlal Nehru also confirms that “Indian culture taken as a whole never emphasized the negation of life, though some of its philosophies did so; it seems to have done so much less than Christianity. Buddhism and Jainism rather emphasized the abstention from life, and in certain periods of Indian history there was running away from life on a big scale, as for instance, when large numbers of people joined the Buddhist monasteries….But Buddhism, in spite of theoretical approach, or rather approaches, for there are several, as a matter of fact avoids extremes; it is the doctrine of the golden mean, the middle path. Even the idea of Nirvana was very far from being the nothingness, as it is supposed to be sometimes; it was a positive condition, but because beyond the range of human thought negative terms were used to describe it. If Buddhism, a typical product of
Indian thought and culture, had merely a doctrine of life negation or denial, it would surely have had some such effect on the hundreds of millions who profess it. Yet, as a matter of fact, the Buddhist countries are full of evidence to the contrary, and the Chinese people are an outstanding example of what life affirmation could be.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 83)

There are legitimate reasons for this confusion between life affirmation and life confirmation. The confusion seems to have arisen from the fact that Indian thought was originally and always laying stress on the ultimate purpose of life. It could never forget the transcendent element in its make up; and so; while affirming life to the full, it refused to become a victim and slave of life. Jawaharlal Nehru elaborates that “Indulge in right action with all your strength and energy, it said, but keep above it, and do not worry much about the results of such actions. Thus it taught detachment in life and action, not abstention from them. The idea of detachment runs through Indian thought and philosophy, as sit does through most other philosophies. It is another way of saying that a right balances should be kept between the visible and invisible worlds, the other world is forgotten and fades away, and action itself becomes without ultimate purpose. There is an emphasis on truth, a dependence on it, and a passion for it, in the early adventures of Indian mind. Dogma and revelation are passed by as something for lesser minds which cannot rise above them. The approach was one of experiment based on personal experience. That experience, when it dealt with the invisible world, was, like all emotional and psychic experiences, different from the experiences of the visible, external world. It seemed to go out of the three-
dimensional world we know into some different and vaster realm, and was thus difficult to describe in terms of three dimensions. What that was experience was, and whether it was a vision or realization of some aspects of truth and reality, or was a merely a phantasm of the imagination, I do not know. Probably it was often self-delusion. What interests more is the approach, which was not authoritarian or dogmatic but was an attempt to discover for oneself what lay behind the external aspect of life.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 85)

Another remarkable influence on Indian life is that of Buddhism. The Buddha’s way was a path of moderation, a middle path, not only for himself but also for his disciples. It was midway between the worldly life of the householder that he had lived before leaving home and the ascetic life of social withdrawal that had followed after his departure from home. Michael Molloy regards “Buddha’s teachings are like the Buddha himself-practical…the Buddha concentrated on what is useful. HE refused to talk about anything else…The Buddha wished to concentrate on the two most important questions about existence: How can we minimize suffering, both our own and that of others? And how can we attain inner peace?” (Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p.108)

Two great movements grew out of the opposition of the Aryan traditions in India, and which have put impact on Indian life are Buddhism and Jainism. Jainism has not spread widely and had a less impact on Indian
life because it is uncompromising: in it we find extremist quality that is 
fascinating, thought provoking, and often noble. Tendencies toward 
nonviolence and austerity apparent in Hinduism and Buddhism are 
carried to their logical conclusion. Although Jainism has not spread 
widely, its strong ideal of non-violence has attracted interest throughout 
the world. Michael Molloy describes Jainism as a religion that “sees 
human being as composed of two opposing parts. The material side of 
human being seeks pleasure, escape from pain, and self-interest while the 
spiritual side seeks freedom and escape from all bondage to the material 
world and from the limitations of the ego.” (Molloy, Michael. 
*Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. 

The best synthesis, that is essential quality of India, can be seen in 
Sikhism. Sikhism grew in Punjab. Although the region has a long history 
of religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims, it is also an area in 
which significant attempts have been made to bridge division and 
misunderstanding. Therefore, it is not surprising, that Sikhism exhibits 
element reminiscent of both groups.

Indian way of life and Indian patterns of philosophy are not different 
entities. They were thought to be one and inseparable. So the philosophy 
was not business of few philosophers and highbrows. Philosophy was an 
essential part of the religion of the masses. This is a major difference 
between the Indian approach to philosophy and the Western approach. In 
India philosophy was part and parcel of religion, it is an approach for a 
more beautiful, more harmonious, more intense, deeper, more meaningful 
life. While in the West, philosophy is considered to be more a matter of
mind, less tied to life and more of a practice of few chosen ones. In India the philosophy was for some deep and intricate attempt to know the causes and laws of all phenomena, the search for the ultimate purpose of life, and the attempt to find an organic unity in life’s many contradictions. Jawaharlal Nehru is impressed by this quality of Indian people. He notes that “Something of that great wisdom impressed itself even upon the illiterate and ignorant masses…our trial has been more drawn out and poverty and uttermost misery have long been the inseparable companions of our people. And yet they still laugh and sing and dance and do not loose hope.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 84)

To understand India and Indian ethos it is very necessary to understand the Indian caste system. The roots of the Indian caste system trail back to the era of the coming of the Aryans. The coming of the Aryans into India rose new problems-racial and political. The conquered race, the Dravidians, had a long background of civilization behind them, but there is little doubt that the Aryans considered themselves vastly superior and a wide gulf separated the two races. Then there were also the backward aboriginal tribes, nomads or forest dwellers. Out of this conflict and interaction of races gradually arose the caste system, which, in the course of succeeding centuries, was to affect Indian life so profoundly. Probably caste was neither Aryan nor Dravidian. It was an attempt at the social organization of different races, a rationalization of the facts as they existed at the time. It brought degradation in Indian social fabric afterwards, and it is still a curse and burden. But at a time it was customary for the conquerors to enslave the conquered races; caste
enabled more peaceful solution which fitted in with the growing specialization of functions. Life was graded and out of the mass of agriculturists evolved Vaishyas, the agriculturists’ artisans, and merchants; the Kshatriyas, or rulers and warriors; and the Brahmins, priests and thinkers who were supposed to guide policy and preserve the ideals of the nation. Below these three were the Shudras or laborers and unskilled workers. Among the indigenous tribes many were gradually assimilated and given a place at the bottom of the social scale that is among the Shudras. The process of assimilation has been a continuous one. Michael Molloy gives reference of The Bhagavad Gita to understand the caste system of India. He remarks that the caste system receives “further religious approval in the Bhagavad Gita, which recognizes that there are different types of people and that their ways of perfection will differ, depending on their personality type and the role in society. For example, active people will perfect themselves through the unselfishness of their work; and intellectual people will perfect themselves through teaching and study.” (Molloy, Michael. Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p. 71)

The Indian mind has been extraordinary in putting the life’s activities into different compartments. Jawaharlal Nehru explains the trait of Indian society by saying that “The Indian mind was extraordinarily analytical and had a passion for putting ideas and concepts, and even life’s activities, into compartments. The Aryans not only divided the society into four main groups but also divided individual’s life into four parts: Dharma, the first part consisted of growth and adolescence the student period of life, the student period of life, acquiring knowledge, developing
self discipline and self-control, continence; Arth, the second one of a householder and man of the world; Kaam, the third one was that of an elder statesman, who had attained a certain poise and objectivity; Moksh; this last stage was that of the recluse, who lived life largely cut off from the world’s activities. In this way also they adjusted the two opposing tendencies which often exist side by side in man- the acceptance of life in its fullness and the rejection of it.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 86)

Yogesh Atal, a renowned sociologist, notes the impact of caste system in modern India by saying that “Concern about caste is amply evident in modern India. In our quest for modernity we wish to bid good bye to tradition. Since caste is viewed as a representative of tradition, its condemnation by the new elite is understandable; by under-scoring past we have given legitimacy to our desire to derecognize caste. But little do we realize that wishes are not horses and that legislation is not magic lamp. Social structures do not disappear, or even change simply in response to speech-making or wishful thinking. One may desire to see the departure of a tradition but the tradition may enact seemingly fresh arrival in some other guys.” (Atal, Yogesh. Understanding Indian Society. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1993. p.117)

The foreign influences which have affected the development of Indian religion have differed greatly in kind and degree. Of the two great religions which have affected India as a result of political events, Islam exerted far less influence than did Christianity. Islam has not been
successful in changing the Indian psyche in general as the Christianity has been.

The coming of Islam, along with new ways of living and new world view, has definitely influenced Indian psyche at the deepest possible level. Not only that it has influenced the general lives of the people of India, it has greatly influenced ‘Hinduism’ and its shades have been colored by the advent of Islam and the Muslim in this hitherto almost indigenous country and culture. Due to the spread and dominance of Islam in India, Hindu as a religion as well as a person has been greatly changed and it is still changing. Hinduism, as a way of life of the people of this nation, has become, for the first place, a reactionary one, which, it was never in its history. Professor Carl Clemen notes the same perspective when he says that “Only a minority of the Mohammedans in India can be traced back to foreign conquerors that brought their faith with them. The majority were originally Hindus who, owing to political events which culminated in the dynasty of the Mohammedan Mogul emperors, adopted Islam, some by compulsion and some voluntarily. Of course this great extension of the foreign religion was bound to have effects on the faith of the Hindus, although, these were confined to certain periods and certain men or groups of men. Even after the Mohammedan domination of India had ceased, however, the religious differences between Hindus and Mohammedans continued to play a large part in the life of India. The British Government has exploited them to the utmost.” (Clemen, Carl. Religions of the World. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005. p. 94)
Jawaharlal Nehru believes that “Partly because the great majority of the Moslems in India were converts from the Hinduism, partly because of the long contact, Hindus and Muslims in India developed numerous common traits, habits, and ways of living and artistic tastes, especially in northern India- in music, painting, architecture, food, clothes, and common traditions. They lived peacefully as one people, joined each other’s festivals and celebrations, spoke the same language, lived in more or less the same way, and faced identical economical problems.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 268)

Islam introduced the concept of monotheism and human brotherhood in India after Upanishads, but it itself became victim of Manusmriti after some time and caste system took roots in it. The Muslim influence can be seen in all walks of life. But no where it is seen so vividly as in customs, in intimate details of domestic life, in the fashion of dress, in the ways of cooking, in the marriage ceremony and in the courtly institutions and the etiquette of Maratha, Rajput and Sikh Princes.

The fabric of India is woven strongly by various movements. One of the greatest influences on Indian way of living is by the Bhakti Movement. The human brotherhood of Islam gave rise to the Bhakti Movement in South India and later spread in the North. This movement totally rejected the laws of Manusmriti and gave equal status to all men and women. That was why it was very popular in the lower strata of the society. The movement, which shook the entire country for more than two centuries, contributed much to the national awakening of the people- both the Hindus and the Muslims.
After conquest of India by Britain, modern scientific thought was introduced to India, which resulted into two movements. One was influenced by modern scientific thought led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, was called Brahma Samaj. It showed the leading path for the secularism and socialism which India adopted after independence. Other was reactionary movement led by Swami Dayanand was called Arya Samaj. It revived Brahmanism and gave rise to Hindu Mahasabha which has probably given birth to R.S.S. Dr. Ehsanullah Khan describes that “The British rulers and their supporters had painted the darkest languages and cultures of India in the darkest colors. Still, many of the educated Indians coming out of the new colleges became ardent lovers of their own languages and cultures and devoted their lives to serve them. The arrogance and superior airs of the British only roused in the enslaved Indian people a new pride and an awareness of their own cultural inheritance. Many European and Indian scholars delved deep into the past and produced original works as well as translations of Sanskrit classics to show that the Indian culture was not inferior to that of any other country. Thus, contrary to the expectations of the British imperialists, patriotic sentiments and progressive ideas began to stir in Indian minds and, in course of time, they influenced the literature, philosophy and political thought of India.” (Khan, Ehsanullah. The Evolution of the Religious and Social Life of Man. New Delhi: Bait-At-Hikmat Trust, 1989. p. 43)

Jawaharlal Nehru believes that the impact of “Western culture on India was the impact of a dynamic society, of a ‘modern consciousness’, on a static society wedded to medieval habits of thought which, however
sophisticated and advanced in its own way, could not progress due to its inherent limitations. And yet, curiously enough, the agents of this historic process were not only wholly unconscious of their mission in India but, as a class, actually represented no such process… they encouraged and consolidated the position of the socially reactionary groups in India, and opposed all those who worked for political and social change.” (Nehru, Jawaharlal. The Discovery of India. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund & Oxford University Press, 1948 p. 291)

But the extension and consolidation of the British influence over Indian ethos took place simultaneously. So many movements and activities of the British era are the proof of this. Carl Clemen cites the example of Brahma Samaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Ray. He notes that the “extension and consolidation of the British sovereignty in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century meant the introduction of Christian and European influence. An important movement began in Calcutta about that time. Its leader was Ram Mohan Ray (1772-1833). At school he had been brought into contact with Islam, but after entering the British Government service and coming into touch with the missionaries he was led to study Christianity…He then conceived the idea of founding purely a spiritual religion, which should combine what was best in Hinduism with Christian faith and manner of life. To this end he founded a religious community called Brahma Samaj.” (Clemen, Carl. Religions of the World. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005. p. 133)

In the words of Michael Molloy, the challenges lying ahead India in the cultural sense are manifold since “European values have gradually posed a major challenge to traditional Hinduism…The most significant
European influence on India, however, was English...Although India became independent of Britain in 1947, British influence is evident in modern India’s law, education, architecture, rail transportation, and military life.” (Molloy, Michael. Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p.90)

But to find a synthesis between Hinduism and Christianity has never been an easy task for an Indian. This is more intriguing purely for two aspects, which must be distinguished between two factors contained in Christianity: the religion taught in the Gospels, and the system of social ethics with the customs and practices prevailing in Christian countries. It was a tough task to synthesize between Christianity as a religion and as away of life. In the words of Carl Clemen “The first stage is an overwhelming sense of the majesty of the Gospel; then comes the recovery of the faculties, in which the value of the inherited religion is felt again, this sense of its value, however, being modified by the conviction that it needs to be purified or reinterpreted. The influence of Christianity as a religion thus operates indirectly; where as the influence of the Christian social ethics is direct.” (Clemen, Carl. Religions of the World. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2005. p. 135)

In the words of Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Moguls and their British successors formed alliance with local kings and left traditional Hinduism largely untouched. Hinduism remained unscathed in its cultural contacts in part because of its “tolerance”- a stance that is, in fact, an ability to absorb an opposition and ultimately to dominate it.” (Juergensmeyer,
India deliberately chose to be secular state because the founding fathers of this great independent nation accepted the multi-religious nature of its pluralistic society. The independent India did not want to form a government designed to defend the faith of only the Hindu majority. Modern Indian secular state demands creation of a community which includes the total population of the Union of India, irrespective of their religious differences.

The Indian way of life applies in all the walks of life and a typical Indian fragrance is, therefore, present in everything India produces. There may be seen the impacts and influences from outside world on Indian endeavor, but ultimately what ever an Indian produces becomes essentially India. The rule is more visible in Indian English literature. Motilal Jotwani observes that “In spite of the modern forms and the common denominator of scientific and technological development all over the world, Indian literature will remain Indian, since it is the quality of mind and attitude towards the problems of life and death that distinguishes one literature from the other. The writer’s whole way of life is involved at the basis of his or her particular choice of images and symbols, ideas and associations.” (Jotwani, Motilal. Of Grass and Roots: an Indianist’s Writings. New Delhi: Sampark Prakashan, p. 2)

In Indian spiritual tradition, especially in Hinduism, there is a lot of emphasis on the role of ‘guru’-a teacher in one’s life. Because Hinduism is not organized in a hierarchical fashion, devotion to a guru (Spiritual
teacher) is a large and ancient component of Hindu spirituality. The etymology of the word guru is expressive: “that one who removes darkness.” Anyone who seeks spiritual growth may turn to guru.

It has been an important Indian ethos to give equal position to women in the society. The role of women has expanded in modern India. In India’s distant, pre-Aryan past, it is possible that women played an important role in important public role, but the coming of Aryan culture was thoroughly patriarchal. Nowadays, however, the situation has changed. Women are now almost equal to men. This development, however, is also a fairly urban phenomenon, as most Indian women outside the cities remain in their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

India and Indian traditions are distinctive among world religions for its kindness to animals. A devout Hindu does not kill or eat animals. As Michael Molloy describes, “Cows often wander along Indian streets, and cars and taxis take care to drive around them. Furthermore, visitors to some Hindu temples may find monkeys and even mice well fed and running free. Several extremely popular gods, such as Ganesha and Hanuman, have animal features; the gods like Shiva and Vishnu are regularly portrayed in the company of the animal companions.” (Molloy, Michael. *Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p.85)

It would be interesting to look at a Psycho-Analytic Study of an Indian in general and of Hindu in particular given by P. Spratt in his book *Hindu Culture and Personality*. The basics of his study are in psycho-analysis. He clarifies that “According to psycho-analytic theory, the child in its
early years assimilates current ideals and examples of adults, and these form the ego ideal. Actual behavior short fall of the ideal, but the ego is spurred by the super-ego…the conscience is thus a charge of aggressiveness directed against the ego and forcing it to try to live up to its ideal. The emotion which it engenders is that of guilt.” (Spratt, P. *Hindu Culture and Personality*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966. p.6)

Then Spratt applies this theory on a Hindu psyche by saying that “love for the self gives Hindu conscience more idealistic character. The Hindu ego-ideal is undoubtedly more idealistic than the European…The Hindu strives to ace rightly or to improve himself, not so much out of guilt feeling as out of love for himself and, derivatively, for the ideal. The resulting wide gap between ideal and reality- it is wide every where, but wider than normal in India-it is well recognized.” (Spratt, P. *Hindu Culture and Personality*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966. p.7)

Regarding the Hindu guilt conscience, Spratt observes that “The Hindu psyche is not free from guilt. But its guilt feeling is less intense than that of a punitive…the guilt of the Hindu arises from fear of the operation of an impersonal law of Karma, implanted not in early infancy but in later childhood through verbal teaching, and in consequence less deeply felt.” (Spratt, P. *Hindu Culture and Personality*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966. p.8)

According to Spratt, this love for ego-ideal among the Hindus gives birth to narcissistic psyche. Thus the “source of the energy of self-discipline is the love of the ego, and thence of the ego-ideal. This is the aspiration which animates the yogi-a concentration of all the psychic energy upon
the development of the ego; and the yogi is the model towards which the Hindu psyche is attracted.” (Spratt, P. Hindu Culture and Personality. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966. p.9)

But the coming times are not going to be as simple as they are now. India will also suffer or gain, as the time will say it, due to the new world order that is on the verge of execution. The new world order makes cross-cultural contact practically unavoidable as television, radio, film, travel, books, and the Internet all work to narrow the gulfs that once separated people, nations, and even religions. Michael Molloy believes that “there is a good amount of religious interchange…we find some appropriation in some religious symbols: the Christian cross is now an international fashion item…it will be very difficult for any culture, nation or religion in the future to belong to a single culture or to be unaware of the teachings and practices of the others.”(Molloy, Michael. Experiencing the World’s Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999. p.459)

India is not a ‘nation’ in the Western sense of the term. India has flourished and flowered in the past centuries out of numerous influences, starting from the coming of the Aryans and their ways of life. But the common thread of, what is commonly and rightly known and accepted as, Hinduism has been running through Indian ethos like blood in the veins through out ages and across the sections of societies. The influences of the classics like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Mahabharata can never be removed from Indian psyche. The teachings of these classics have inseparably mingled in the lives of the people who are born in this great nation. The Islam and the British
have undoubtedly shaped and re-shaped Indian ethos beyond imagination, and yet India, through the strength of its roots, has been able to maintain its identity in the world. The Buddhist and Jainist movements have only worked in expanding the essential Indian spirits.