

RAJIV MALHOTRA: A UNIQUE EXPONENT OF THE HINDU WORLDVIEW

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We Indians must, according to me, find some time not only to read but also to contemplate over writings of Rajiv Malhotra because they inform us of the uniqueness of Hinduism. I intend to elaborate through the present paper contents of two books penned by Rajiv Malhotra as both of them highlight with apt evidences the distinctiveness of the Hindu worldview. First half of this paper is devoted to elucidate *Being Different* and the second half is meant to present analytical appreciation of another book *Indra's Net*.

Significance of 'Being Different':

As for the book *Being Different*, the title itself catches the attention of readers. The present worlds' trend is in favour of globalization; no wonder, Friedman's book *The Flat World* has earned good popularity. Demolition of walls based on social, economic, cultural and national differences has thus received a hearty welcome from the people at large. It is against this setting that Rajiv Malhotra's advocacy of Indian civilization as distinct or different particularly from the European and American paradigm leaves us astonished! Rajiv Malhotra has, of course taken cognizance of this impression and offered a very logical defense or a rationale behind writing this book. He thus accepts in the first chapter of his book that at present elites and masses as well are deeply fascinated by phrases such as 'universal point of view', 'global identities, etc. The fact that 'the sameness' impacts young people is accepted by Rajiv Malhotra, who, however points out in the same vein that under the garb of 'sameness' dominant Euro-Americans opt for isolating and inculturating Asians and Africans. Rajiv Malhotra, in short wants us to note that those who dominated the world for the past 500 years continue to consolidate their own identities in the shadows of globalization. He therefore finds it indispensable for Indians to preserve their distinct differences. Malhotra informs us that at several interfaith dialogues, protagonists of Christianity bluntly refused to replace the term 'tolerance' with the phrase 'mutual respect'. He rightly mentions that 'tolerance' mirrors patronizing or condescending attitude on the part of dominant partners towards followers of other religions, whereas 'mutual respect' indicates the operation of parity principle. "No Abrahamic religion", Malhotra informs us "respects any other

religion, whether Abrahamic or non-Abrahamic”, because it considers itself as the only authority for all matters of faith or doctrine. How does it, in other words, acknowledge any other religion as legitimate and equally valid path to God?

Rajiv Malhotra has realized that Abrahamic religions like Christianity pay only lip service to the notion of ‘sameness’, that they refuse to worship Krishna or Shiva as the same universal God described in the *Bible*. He has also noted that under the mask of ‘sameness’, Christianity super imposes its concepts, aesthetics, language, paradigms, historical template and philosophy from above and presents them as the universal worldview.¹ What is shocking for Rajiv Malhotra is the indifference on the part of several Indians over European positioning at the centre of the world. The resultant dilution of Indian identities is moreover justified by the Indian themselves on the ground that the Vedanta philosophy underscores only One reality as absolute and the world as only relative. Such sort of misinterpretation of the Vedanta-philosophy, from the perspective of Rajiv, is totally wrong. The fact that Shrikrishna himself has taught us to take the worldly affairs seriously and to reach the absolute ‘One Reality’ through unattached transactions is underscored by Rajiv in this connection. It is indeed quite funny that the Christian tolerance and inculturation are treated as signs of respect for Hinduism! Hindu elites and masses wrongly believe that Christian missionaries have sanctioned a level playing field. This is why they questions: “Why to oppose the notion of sameness? “Why to take pride in being different?”

He brings to our notice that Christian missionaries have become sponsors of ‘sameness’, because the cover of this notion enables them to convert non-Christians into their faith. He similarly points out that Hindus favour ‘sameness’ on the basis of wrong interpretation of the tenets of Vedanta-philosophy. Readers come across very neat elaboration of Rajiv Malhotra’s rationale of his pride in being different at the end of the first chapter of his book. This chapter, in short, informs us that our insistence on preserving our distinctness does not connote any type of exclusivism as our accommodativeness respects pluralism and welcomes all religions. Nor our distinctness is built on unity is diversity; it does not generate pains and strains. We must indeed guard our distinctness, as otherwise the implicit advocacy of Euro-Centric paradigm through the admiration of sameness will place Indian civilization in museums.

Four areas of differences:

Hindu worldview differs from the worldview of Abrahamic religions in four respects. Thus, one comes across the following four areas of difference between Hinduism and Abrahamic religions.

- Embodied knowing vs. History-centrism
- Integral unity vs. Synthetic unity
- Comfort with complexity vs. Anxiety over Chaos,
- Sanskrit untranslatables vs. Cultural digestion.

It is essential to elaborate in detail such areas of difference in the following manner.

Embodied Knowing vs. History-centrism

There has emerged in India the epistemology of *Adhyātmavidyā* thanks to Hinduism, in fact thanks to *Dharma* family comprising Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. The development of several inner sciences as well as experiential technologies for achieving divinity and the higher states of consciousness - has accordingly become a U.S.P. of India. This *Adhyātmavidyā* enables anybody to fine tune or to calibrate his or her mind, essential for achieving divinity. India has thus observed a legacy of *R̥sis* and *Munis*; the legacy which has transmitted this *vidyā* from one generation to another - through *Guru-Śiṣyaparamparā*. India can therefore make a legitimate claim that it is a repository of embodied knowing. Human faculties such as the mind, senses, memory, etc. are called internal instruments of investigation, and these very instruments are refined by *Adhyātmavidyā*. Those human beings who succeed in this venture finally actualize higher knowledge in their bodies their disciples further enrich such legacies and transform their own bodies into instruments of knowledge. As Hinduism considers everything including human beings as sparks of divinity, it can witness specimens of embodied knowing. Western culture, however considers human body as intrinsically sinful, as an innate evil, and senses as the source of temptation. No wonder, there is no sanction to the embodied knowing.

Christian religion is of the firm opinion that no human is able to achieve union with the divine. It recommends salvation as the spiritual goal for human society. It mentions in the similar vein that only those human beings who obey the divine will through full faith in the prophetic tradition as well as in historical events will achieve the salvation. From the perspective of Christians, certain events in the

life of Jesus Christ are historically crucial. Christians are accordingly expected to have full faith in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are also supposed to believe in the prophetic tradition. Most of the disputes in Christianity have arisen due to the differences over the details regarding above mentioned historical specifics. It is a conviction on the part of Christians that the God resides somewhere above the cosmos and from there he sends messages to humanity through the chosen prophets. That is why, the historical details of scripture and of prophecy is immensely important in Christianity. History-centrism of Christianity and embodied knowing of Hinduism are thus totally different from each other!

Integral Unity vs. Synthetic Unity:

Indian *Dharma* Family believes in *Purṇastotra*, which contains the following lines:-

पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

(*Purṇamadha*, *purṇamidam*, *purṇatpurāṇamudachyate*, *purṇasyapurṇamādāya*, *purṇamevavaśiṣyate*—That is *purṇa*. This is *purṇa*. *Purṇa* comes from *purṇa*. Take out *purṇa* from *purṇa*, still *purṇa* remains.)

According to Sri Aurobindo, *purṇa* means integral. *Purṇastotra* informs us that just as ‘that’ transcendent divine and the cosmic macrocosm are *purṇa*, ‘this’ microcosm is also *purṇa*. We can therefore rightly claim that from the perspective of Hindu worldview there is integral unity between this microcosm and that macrocosm. Swami Vivekananda has elaborated very nicely how microcosm evolves itself into macrocosm! He quotes a line from *Patanjali Sutra*: -“*Jātyāntara parināmaḥ prakṛtyapurat!*” *Jāti*, that is, one species transforms or changes into another species, by *prakṛtyapurat* - by the infilling of nature. Vivekananda thus informs us that the body or *Prkṛti* inhales energy from the unfathomable stock of energy in cosmos and evolves into another species. Such an evolution reminds us of a spider’s web. As the God is immanent as well as transcendent, an individual, the cosmic macrocosm and the divinity are interlinked. According to Hinduism, God does not reside somewhere above the cosmos. He resides within the cosmos. He is not however comprehensible through five senses and the mind. The story of six blind men and elephant is quite apt in this connection. Each of the blind fellows touches this or that part of the body of elephant and comes out with the wrong conclusion. Blindness of each man comes in

the way of reaching the whole truth; it allows him to know the partial truth only. Similarly, through God is immanent, through it exists in every atom, through and through, 'He' does not come within the reach of six senses. 'He' is transcendent in that sense. The God or the divinity or the energy gets manifested in the universe, in the amoeba as well as in the Buddha. Of course, if the little bit of the energy is manifested in the former, relatively a big amount of energy gets unfolded in the elephant. But amoeba is involved Buddha and Buddha is evolved amoeba. Such sort of integral unity is conspicuously absent in the Christian worldview.

The Indian worldview assumes that the cosmos is a unified whole sheltering interconnectedness between absolute reality and relative manifestations. Absolute reality is, of course, basic; it has its own independent existence. Just as face is independent and the smile or any expression is dependent on the face, similarly every entity is dependent on the cosmic whole.

Western worldview occupies the opposite pole. It considers that the cosmos is intrinsically an agglomeration of parts. From its perspective basic and how they can be joined together is a cause of worry. Indian worldview ponders over the emergence of multiplicity out of unity. The Western worldview however is worried over creation of unity out of multiplicity. Naturally conscious external efforts are required to create such unity. This is why, the unity attempted in the West synthetic. Christianity considers that each individual is a born sinner and that Jesus Christ came to redeem him from sin. No individual is therefore capable of achieving divinity on his own. Least wonder, no attention has been paid in Christianity to fine tune or to calibrate human mind. History-centrism came in the way of the development of inner sciences; it has also placed obstacles in developing strong intellectual tradition. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Protestant Reformation and the Renaissance Movement did give a call to Christians to be free from the Catholic priesthood and Roman hegemony and also to be friendly with scientists. They however never pursued the goal to be free from history centrism. Mind-body dichotomy by Rene Descartes worsened the situation, as such a dualism entrusted body to the jurisdiction of the laws of physics and mind to the God's *Commandment*.

Descartes has thus added a new binary between body and mind to the old binaries such as God and Creation, God and humanity, spirit and matter etc. Western worldview has been trying its best to unite these inherently separate entities. Rajiv

Malhotra has given us the example of the United Nations Organization for elaborating the concept of synthetic unity. As all of us know the U.N. means a gathering of several sovereign nations, which show full interest in maximizing their own separate interests and not the common good.

Comfort with Complexity vs. Anxiety over Chaos:

I have already stated that from the perspective of Indian worldview, each individual is capable of accessing divinity and higher states of consciousness. This is why; it welcomes differences and the resultant chaos. The Indian worldview feels that as everyone is able and free to walk on his or her trajectory to access divinity, differences in precepts and practices are bound to prevail and one must not be restless over such disorder! This worldview, of course carries conviction that each and everybody is linked with each other and similarly with the cosmos and with the transcendental divinity. As a result, an Indian feels confident about the emergence of order in due course. He can therefore afford to be patient and comfortable in chaos. He can face complexities in a detached manner.

The Western worldview, on the other hand believes in history-centrism. It gives exclusive significance to unique historical interventions, to God-dispatched prophets and to the contents of scriptures. The Western worldview holds firm opinion that only such historical interventions would bridge the gap between human beings and ultimate reality. There is moreover conviction on the part of this worldview that an individual being inborn sinner is incapable of accessing divinity. No wonder therefore that articulation of different individual precepts and practices and the consequential chaos cause incalculable irritation to the protagonists of the Western worldview. Such protagonists, in fact find chaos as a threat to the order. They naturally rush to put an immediate end to the chaotic scenario either through eradication or through assimilation. Roots of Western anxiety over chaos are traceable in the Western Fascination for certainty. Insistence on either or polarities is also one of the salient features of Western religions. Advocates of these religions are convinced that a human being faces after the end of the present life either salvation or damnation. Such attraction for either/or polarities makes Western religions dogmatic and prompts them to launch a war against 'evil' with a view to annihilating it completely. The Indian worldview opts on the other hand for 'as well as' line of

thinking, due to its conviction that the truth can be articulated and the divinity can be accessed through several different paths.

The Hindu worldview regarding the scenario after the end of present human life also deserves to be elucidated now because such elucidation will enable me to highlight why and how Indians are least perturbed over chaos, whereas followers of Western religions are restless during chaos. From the angle of the Indian worldview, a human being enters *Swarga* or *Naraka* after the end of his life. But neither *Swarga*, nor *Naraka* is a permanent place of residence. That is why, after the exhaustion of good karma, the resident of *Swarga* comes back to his world. And similarly, the resident of *Naraka*, after undergoing torment comes back to the earth. Both types of human beings engage themselves after their return to the earth in new efforts for achieving self-realization. The idea of rebirth is thus quite crucial and distinct for the Hindu worldview. There is, of course, no doubt regarding commonality to some extent between both worldviews. Thus, Hinduism as well as Christianity shares the same perception that enjoyment in Heaven (*Swarga*) or the punishment in Hell (*Naraka*) is the consequence respectively of good or bad deeds in the present world. But whereas from the angle of Christianity, the assumption of original sin restricts the freedom of human deed, from the Hindu worldview, the human attachments or *vāsanās* shape their deeds. Secondly, Christian worldview considers that celestial stays either in Heaven or in Hell are permanent or eternal. From the angle of the Hindu worldview, however, such stays are temporary, as they commensurate with their accumulated deeds! Everybody is thus given to understand in the Hindu worldview that he or she alone is responsible for his or her deeds and for the consequences of such deeds.

There are indeed two differences in this connection between the Christian worldview and the Hindu worldview. The Christianity considers every human as a born sinner and accordingly incapable of accessing divinity. One and the same rationale prompts Christianity to compromise human freedom and to argue that every human being must wait the day of Judgement when the account of everybody's work will be finally settled! The Hindu worldview on the other hand discards the so-called Day of Judgement and argues that there is a separate account for each individual for recording the effects of his or her work. Secondly, if from the perspective of the Christian worldview, the outcomes of human actions are confined to a single life-

cycle, the Hindu worldview argues that a human being may be required to undergo several life cycles for experiencing the fruits of his or her accumulated karmas. The Hindu worldviews, in short, accepts several or numerous births and the concomitant unpredictability as well as ambiguity and uncertainty. It withstands chaos comfortably, whereas, Christian worldview suffers from anxiety over chaotic scenarios.

Sanskrit Untranslatables vs. Cultural Digestion:

Malhotra's insistence on preserving India's distinct identity is mirrored equally vividly in his analysis of the contrast between Sanskrit untranslatables and cultural digestion or appropriation on the part of Euro-Americans. He correctly informs us that Sanskrit words are most untranslatable. He substantiates his statement by referring to some words such as *Brahmā*, *Shiva*, *Ātman*, etc. Thus, the term *Brahmā* cannot be translated as God because the former resides in each one of us and is accessible to the enlightened spiritual masters, whereas God is distinct and separate from the universe, God moreover intervenes in history at specific times and at places. Similarly, 'Shiva' cannot be translated as the destroyer, although apparently it does appear antithetical to *Brahmā*, the Creator and *Vishnu*, the preserver. In actuality, 'Shiva' is a transformer, who, of course does dissolve falsely constructed mental frame of reference (*nāma-rupa*) but remains away from destruction. The English word 'Soul' does not connote what the Sanskrit word *Ātman* effectively denotes. The *Ātman* is linked with reincarnation and *karma*, in the sense that through it takes the form of a particular individual in the present birth; it is linked with the past as well as with the future through the present *karmas*. The Western soul is however confined to the finite time. The word *dharma* can never be translated as religion, because human beings are expected to lead harmonious lives through achieving *artha*, *kāma* and *moṅṣa* in the light of *dharma*, whereas religion mirrors only one subset of *dharma*'s, range of meanings. *Dharma* cannot be similarly translated as law because no sovereign promulgates any *Dharmaśāstra* for any specific territory. Sanskrit is one of the most ancient languages of the world; it is rooted in a peculiar cultural context. This is why without understanding the culture of India; one cannot grasp the exact connotation of any Sanskrit word. Least wonder, if a foreign culture brings in its own simplistic translations of Sanskrit words it causes incalculable harm to the Indian ethos!

It is fact that Christian missionaries do refer to *Vedas* or the *Gītā* as the Hindu *Bible* and present Jesus as a ‘*Rṣi*’ or ‘*guru*’. They thus carry forward the typical legacy of Euro-Americans initiated in the late Eighteenth an early nineteenth centuries; the legacy of appropriation or digestion by the West, of the intellectual and cultural property of various non-western civilizations. We, Indians can’t afford to ignore such appropriation or digestion of our civilizational ethos, because it finally culminates in the dismantling of our peculiar views regarding self and its relationship to a transcendent principle. We should therefore protect Sanskrit language and refuse to bear wrong translations of Sanskrit words and *Mantras*.

Peculiarities of *Indra’s Net*:

Having elaborated the content of the book *Being Different*, so far in the lines above, it is essential to undertake now the analytical education of Malhotra’s another book entitled: *Indra’s Net*. If ‘Being Different’ counters the Euro-American conspiracy to appropriate or digest non-Western civilizations under the grab of the ‘Sameness’, *Indra’s Net* provides befitting replies to the Euro-American projection of neo-Hinduism as a fake, fictitious and phony religion. Rajiv Malhotra thus informs us through the former half of *Indra’s Net* how during 1950’s, European indologist Paul Hacker began to prove through his writings and speeches that in the pre-colonial years of India, Hinduism was a conglomerate of various religions; how it was more or less a hotchpotch and during colonial years how 19th century-Indian reforms in general and Swami Vivekananda, in particular gave a new shape to Hinduism, of course with a view to implementing the political agenda of building a nation in India. As the former half of *Indra’s Net* is devoted by Malhotra for examining European indologists’ allegation against Vivekananda-sponsored (so called) ‘Neo-hinduism’, it contains certain myths propagated by very indologists regarding India and Hinduism. Malhotra brings to our notice here that according to colonial indologists during the pre-colonial era neither India was a nation, nor Hinduism was a unified entity. He mentions that same indologists have alleged that Vivekananda and other thinkers like Tilak and Gandhi picked up appreciable dimensions of Christianity and projected them as tenets of Hinduism. Malhotra informs us further that in the opinion of European indologists, ancient Hinduism lacked in social consciousness and that was why 19th century Indian reformers imported such consciousness into India from Europe and America. What is noteworthy is the fact that Malhotra retorts quite

logically all such myths and allegations in the latter half of *Indra's Net*. Thinkers like Paul Hacker, Aghananda Bharati, Wilhelm Halbfass, Ursula King, and Anantanand Rambachan constructed and disseminated perverted myths about India and Hinduism and Indian scholars like Romila Thapar, Meera Nanda, and Pankaj Mishra etc. also wrote essays on similar lines. What disturbs Malhotra most is the impact of such writings on Indian masses. Malhotra thus mentions that common Hindus have been led to believe that Hinduism lacks legitimacy.

Paul Hacker's Allegations against Vivekananda:

It was during the decade of 1950s that Paul Hacker, a German Indologist initiated his attacks on 19th century Indian reformers in general and on Vivekananda in particular. Hacker alleged that Swami Vivekananda's realization of the inferiority of Hinduism vis-à-vis Christianity's tradition of altruism; collectivity and philanthropy triggered the genesis and growth of 'neo Hinduism'. He stated that Vivekananda picked up all such pluses from Christianity and presented them as inherent features of Hinduism. In actuality, according to Paul Hacker ancient Hinduism is the most ill organized conglomerate of several religious principles. As Vivekananda was bent on building a nation on the basis of Hinduism, he opted for digging out Sanskrit mantras and quotations from the ancient texts with a view to strengthening his claim that he merely carried ahead the legacy of Hinduness. Paul Hacker was however determined enough to present that Vivekananda was the sponsor of inauthentic Hinduism. He therefore pointed out that Vivekananda deviated from original Hinduism in four respects.

- Vivekananda thus gave priority to the empirical verification of spiritual truth over obtaining *Brahmavidyā*; whereas Shankaracharya considered *Brahmavidyā* or *Śruti* as self-valid source of our knowledge of absolute reality.
- Secondly, Vivekananda's interpretation of the Upanishadic notion *Tat tvam asi* is at variance with Shankaracharya's explanation of the same notion. Vivekananda's interpretation of this notion teaches everybody of us to be altruistic because each and everyone is the manifestation of Tat (*Brahman*) and that is why one must spontaneously love and care for others. Hacker points out here that according to Shankaracharya however *Tat tvam asi* means complete merger of oneself into the ultimate Self (*Brahman*).

- Thirdly, Vivekananda utilize Shankaracharya's philosophy of *Advaita* for facilitating spiritual recovery of India and for India's national reconstruction.
- Fourthly, Vivekananda's advocacy of inclusivism is also least compatible with Shankaracharya's avoidance of the minuses of inclusivism!

It is essential to elaborate now how the European indologists make allegations against Vivekananda and how Rajiv Malhotra defends Vivekananda.

As for the first allegation that Vivekananda's advocacy of the priority in favour of *Yoga mārṅa* is a deviation from Shankaracharya-sponsored original Hinduism, Malhotra points out that Shankaracharya does consider the *Yoga* of Patanjali as useful in advancing up to a point which is below *moḁṣa*. Rajiv thus points out that although Shankaracharya favoured metaphysical, abstract and unworldly path of *jñāna* for attaining *moḁṣa*, he did not declare *Yoga* as useless and contrary to *Advaita Vedānta*. Shankaracharya, in other words, averred that *jñāna mārṅa* enables a person to attain *parāvidyā* (higher knowledge) and *Yoga mārṅa* helps him in obtaining *aparā-vidyā* (lower knowledge). Malhotra substantiates his viewpoint by referring to Shankara's commentary on the Upanishads wherein *Yoga* is presented as a method of meditation leading to self-knowledge. He also invites our attention to Shankara's commentary on the 46th Śloka of the second chapter of the *Gītā*: The *Śloka* runs as follows:-

यावानर्थउद्पाने, सर्वतःसंप्लुतोदके ।
तावान्सर्वेषुवेदेषुब्राह्मणस्यविजानतः ॥

(Just as a well, or a water reservoir has no utility when there is water everywhere, similarly *Vedas* have no utility for an enlightened *Brahman*.)

Shankaracharya informs us through his interpretation of this *Śloka* that the person with Knowledge of the *Vedas* has no relevance in front of the person with direct experience. Vivekananda, in short least deviates from the path sponsored by Shankaracharya, as a Shankara himself pleads for the person with direct experience- thus asserts Rajiv.

Second allegation is pertaining to *Tat tvam asi* ethic. Paul Hacker and other European indologists convey to us that in the pre-colonial era of India, people used to interpret this Upanishadic notion as a message to everyone of us to merge one's individual self into the ultimate Self (*Brahman*). They further inform us that during colonial rule over India, however, sponsors of neo Hinduism taking cue from Arthur

Schopenhauer found the seeds of altruism in the just mentioned Upanishadic notion. The very 'advocates of neo-Hinduism' such as Vivekananda realized that according to Arthur Schopenhauer, the *Tat tvam asi* -notion' advises each person to recognize his self as that which is manifested in every other person and accordingly asks him or her to undertake altruistic acts. 'Neo-Hinduism', being interested in the mission of nation-building thus opted for picking European interpretation of the Upanishadic notion; thus, assert Paul Hacker and his colleagues. Malhotra rightly retorts here that such European indologists forget that *Bhagvat Gitā* itself uses the wording सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा in the fifth chapter. *Gitā-Grantha* thus places the lofty goal in front of us of attaining identity with all the selves of the world. The allegation that Vivekananda, Tilak and Gandhi copied convenient interpretation of the *Upanishadic Mantra* from a German thinker Schopenhauer is thus totally false.

Third allegation made by Hacker and company against Vivekananda alludes to Nationalist agenda of 'neo Hindus'. As per this allegation, 19th century Indian reformers like Vivekananda and others borrowed social activism from European Protestants and offered new interpretations to concepts like *Dharma* and *Jati* etc. Vivekananda thus pleaded that *Hindu Dharma* supports egalitarianism and social justice. He also asserted that the concept of caste is based on inner qualities and not on the birth of a person. Paul Hacker however asserts that original Hinduism relies on the boundaries of birth-based castes and stages of life. Vivekananda sponsored interpretation is thus least in consonance with original Hinduism thus avers Paul Hacker! European indologists like Hacker further accuse that neo Hindus such as Vivekananda took inspiration from Protestant Christians and claimed that according to Hinduism it is the worth, rather than the birth which is significant! They have, in other words argued that it was the impact of Protestantism which shaped Vivekananda-sponsored neo Hinduism. Malhotra refutes this allegation and points out that it was Ramakrishna Paramahansa whose teaching shaped Vivekananda's thinking. Malhotra is absolutely right, because Ramakrishna, Vivekananda's Guru taught his disciple to interpret ancient *Mantra: Shivobhutva Shivamyajet*. The fact that according to Hinduism macro-cosm in the form of *Śiva* is manifested in microcosm in that of *Jiva* has been accordingly endorsed by Ramakrishna and enriched further by Vivekananda. Malhotra states equally emphatically that if other religions are entitled to come out with new interpretations suitable to changed times

and present their scriptures in new forms, why is Hinduism debarred from following similar course? It is indeed quite misleading to argue that that Vivekananda borrowed social activism from Euro-Americans, because since ancient times, Hinduism has witnessed harmonious coexistence between old and new precepts and practices. Vivekananda enriched this legacy.

Fourth allegation made by Euro-American indologists against Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tilak and Gandhi is unique, as it accuses such sponsors of the so called neo Hinduism that they have appropriated several heterogeneous, disparate religious viewpoints. Through opting for inclusiveness from the perspective of Hacker and company, these neo Hinduism-sponsors have abandoned traditional Hinduism of Shankaracharya. Rajiv Malhotra's retort to this allegation is also unique. As per this retort, Hinduism has been inclusive and accommodative since its inception. It has always adapted to the changed circumstances its own core principles and adjusted to the indigenous conditions principles and notions imported from other isms. Is it not a fact that Shankaracharya himself co-opted lofty notions of Buddhism? No wonder, Swami Vivekananda spelt out common bases of Hinduism with a view to incorporating disparate views and thoughts in the body of Hinduism. He simply harmonized various interpretations of *Vedānta* that had emanated from the Vedic source. He refused to conflate Hinduism with *Vedānta*, *Vedānta* with *Advaita Vedānta* and *Advaita Vedānta* with Shankara's philosophy, as his Hindu mind refused to be reductionist. His efforts, oriented towards harmonization, of course, did not compromise with basic tenets of original Hinduism. Vivekananda thus welcomed all those who had faith in basic principles such as divinity, integral unity, open architecture, karma-reincarnation, etc. Malhotra has indeed succeeded in proving that Vivekananda-sponsored Hinduism was fully authentic; that the tenets of this philosophy are completely compatible with those of traditional Hinduism.

Strategy for the Defense of Hinduism:

Last two chapters of the book *Indra's Net* are quite significant, as they contain guidance to all of us; they elaborate the strategy for the defense of Hinduism. If Chapter -12 diagnoses the European attacks on Hinduism, the concluding or the final chapter prescribes the strategy for the defense of Hinduism. Thus, in the chapter -12, Rajiv informs us about the Euro-American appropriation of Indian traditions and practices such as spiritualism, *Vedānta*, Transcendental Meditation, *Yoga*, Music,

Bhakti, etc. through dismantling, rearrangement and finally digestion into Western Framework. Such appropriation or digestion is justified by depicting Hinduism as most disorganized or incoherent paradigm. This type of depiction of Hinduism is a logical aftermath of Paul Hacker claim that Vivekananda-sponsored neo Hinduism deviates from original Hinduism and picks up core ideas from the Christian West! Resultant confusion and disorientation among Hindu masses causes worry to Rajiv triggering him to come out with the prescription of a strategy for the defense of Hinduism.

I have already stated how the open architecture of Hinduism enables Abrahamic religions like Christianity to digest lofty, sublime principles of our civilization. Rajiv Malhotra has therefore proposed that Hindus should classify participants in interfaith relations into *Āstikas* (affirmers) and *Nāstikas* (deniers). He thus further spelt out that *Āstikas* comprise such persons who possess qualities like faith in the freedom of belief and practice, the ability to achieve embodied knowing and the proneness to modify one's own unique path.² Rajiv's assertion that Vivekananda himself expressed categorical aspersions regarding Abrahamic religions in general and the so called *Nāstikas* in particular is evidenced in the following extract of Vivekananda's speech titled *My Master* - "I do not understand how people declare themselves to be believes in God, and at the same time think that they are the guardians of the rest of humanity. How can you call that religion? Religion is realization; but mere talk, mere trying to believe, mere groping in darkness, mere parroting the words of ancestors and thinking it is religion-is not religion at all... Do not try to disturb the faith of any man. If you can, give him something better; if you can, get hold of a man where he stands and give him a push upwards; do so, but do not destroy what he has."³

Malhotra who has advised Hindus to welcome *Āstikas*, recommends in similar vein the course of action to reject *Nāstikas* as well. He has thus stated that Hindus should reject anybody who considers that (i) human beings are born-sinners and therefore incompetent to acquire spiritual insights, (ii) the universe is basically atomistic and fragmentary and therefore deserves to be united artificially; and (iii) followers of non-Abrahamic religion need to be tamed and conquered!

To me, it is quite appropriate to end the present essay by quoting the following statement of Rajiv Malhotra, as it highlights not only the purpose of writing

'*Indra's Net*', but also the success achieved by the writer in accomplishing this purpose: "My motive for using *Indra's Net* as the central metaphor of this book is to highlight the intricacy, the complexity and the delicate balances built into Hinduism, which becomes compromised the moment one dismantles its constituent parts and attempts to relocate them outside its framework".⁴

References:

- 1 Rajiv Malhotra, *Being Different*, (Noida-India, 2011), p.37
- 2 Rajiv Malhotra, *Indra's Net: Defending Hinduism's Philosophic Unity*, (Noida-India, 2016), p.283
- 3 See: *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1981), p.356
- 4 Rajiv Malhotra, *Indra's Net: Defending Hinduism's Philosophic Unity*, (Noida-India, 2016), p.313