

## Thoughts about Bridging Christianity and Hinduism

by Jan Erik Sigdell (Slovenia, January 2018)

### Preamble

*This study began with the question if there could be a closer relationship between Hinduism and Christianity than actually seems to be the case. Is it really conceivable that the two are in an opposition that may even lead to enmity between them? Since Christ is of a basic importance as a savior of humanity, it appears hard to imagine that there could be no traces of him in Hinduism, being a major religion that in past millennia was encompassing a major part of the world (in the ancient times including much of East Asia up to Indonesian islands). Regrettably, in Christian organizations, literature and websites there are few signs of anything else than demonization of Hinduism and that seems to lack the fairness and brotherly love that Christ's messenger Jesus taught us. On the other side, one today can read some disturbing notes in the Internet about assaults on Christians in India in comparable injustice. In this study I discovered that apparently a historic figure Ayyappan in Kerala may have exhibited a more or less Christian personality that led someone to assume that Jesus could be an incarnation of him, whereas – if this would really be so – rather the other way around, since he was later than Jesus. This is ridiculed in Christian circles and there is today regrettably even an anti-Ayyappan movement among Christians in Kerala.*

Here the scientific transliteration of characters in the Sanskrit alphabet *Devanāgarī* is used. Ś and ṣ are two somewhat different “sh” sounds that the reader must not distinguish. A dot under a consonant marks that it is actually a cerebral sound that, however, the reader must not consider. A stroke above a vowel indicates that it is long.

There are a few creation stories in Hinduism that to some extent are different, but the central concept involves a trinity (trimūrti) of Brahma(n), Viṣṇu and Śiva. Brahmā is the creator, Viṣṇu maintains the creation, Śiva established it and will destroy it at the end when it has served its purpose. The purpose could be to enable entities of the light to learn from experiences in exile (cf. below). Brahman (neuter) is the creator in the highest but formless state (nirguṇa, without qualities), self-born and ever existent, who manifests in a formed state (saguṇa, with qualities) as Brahmā (male). Brahman is the highest and pure existence, the ultimate reality and the force and energy out of which everything forms in the creation. The one who does it, who makes it all come to be, to appear and exist out of this energy is Brahmā, the manifested Brahman who appears together with Viṣṇu and Śiva. There are somewhat different descriptions in the vast Sanskrit literature about how this occurs.

These primary gods have their consorts. Brahmā's consort is Sarasvatī, Viṣṇu's is Lakṣmī and Śiva's is Pārvatī. All of these deities have a multitude of other names signifying either different traditions and aspects or various incarnations of them.

It is of some interest that a high entity was born under very special conditions in that trinity. Viṣṇu for certain reasons took on a female incarnation as Mohinī. Śiva was enchanted by her beauty and embraced her, out of which Dharmāśāstā (also called Mahāśāstā or only Śāstā) was born. There are different stories about how this came to be. One has it that they had sex and Dharmāśāstā was born “between her thighs”, since she had no womb. Another claims that during a “violent coupling” with Mohinī, Śiva's semen fell to the ground and Dharmāśāstā came out of it. Apparently there is a resistance involved in various attempts for interpretation against seeing this as a homosexual act, but it could not well have been such an act, since 1) Mohinī's *body* was really female and 2) homosexuals do not produce offspring. Śiva and Pārvatī (who was present) are said to have left the child in shame.

A buffalo-headed demon (asura) named Mahiṣāsura once lived in the region where today the city Mysore is (it is named after him, today officially Mysuru). He terrorized the population and people prayed to be delivered from him. Then the goddess Durgā (an appearance of Pārvatī) came and killed him. His wife (some sources: his sister) Mahiṣāsūrī or Mahiṣī was furious and could achieve a boon from the gods that she could not be killed also, except by someone born out of Viṣṇu and Śiva (apparently such a boon must have some exception that is often nearly impossible). This was overcome through the “trick” played by Mohinī and then Dharmāśāstā could kill Mahiṣī, too. Now “killing” is here another thing than how we understand it in the human world. It actually means to free someone from his or her physical

entrapment in an incarnation, so that the soul or entity thus incarnated can leave it and continue without it and that is what happened to Maḥiṣī, who then was relieved to be liberated. Strictly speaking, killing a human in a way has a similar effect of liberating a soul from the body... Only, we humans have no idea about what this means and we are certainly in no way even able to kill with a “divine” intention! Thus it is for us humans always a severe crime to kill.

Actually, Maḥiṣī had become a human with the head of a buffalo as a result of a curse. What Dharmasāstā did was to liberate her from that curse rather than to really “kill” her. In divine and spiritual realms, things sometimes look different.

Dharmasāstā has been assumed to have incarnated in Kerala as Ayyappan millennia later, to whom a famous temple on the Śabarimala Mountain is dedicated.

However, since Ayyappan had a Muslim friend Vavar, the physical appearance of Ayyappan must have occurred no earlier than in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE and it does not appear very convincing that he would be an incarnation of Dharmasāstā. Therefore, the “killing of Maḥiṣī” cannot well be ascribed to Ayyappan himself, but to Dharmasāstā. This “killing” must have taken place in the times of Mahābhārata and by Dharmasāstā appearing in the form of Maṇikaṇḍan or maybe of Bhūtanātha.

It should be mentioned that Paraśurāma (“Rāma with the axe”, the founder of Kerala) is said to have erected the temple on the Śabarimala Mountain for Ayyappan. However, since he belongs to the times of Mahābhārata and since Kerala is known from trades since more than 3000 years back, the temple will actually have been built for Dharmasāstā. However, in the folk tales, Ayyappan is regarded as an incarnation of Dharmasāstā and that will be the reason to connect it with him. Ayyappan may have been a spiritually developed sannyāsin or guru devoted to Dharmasāstā and not really a reincarnation of him. Since he will have done many good things (and apparently even a few miracles), the folk tales may have exaggerated a bit, as they not rarely do. Recent information from Kerala tells that one today plans to rename the temple as dedicated to Dharmasāstā.

A remarkable idea has come up in our days, being that Ayyappan could be an incarnation of Jesus! I think that the comment in the last paragraph above casts some doubt on this theory. It is, however, remarkable that there has actually been a Christian community in Kerala, called the Thomas Christians, allegedly since the year 52 CE. The tradition is that the apostle Thomas went there and founded this community. Why should he go there? Did Jesus tell him to do so? There is much discussion and literature about the question if Jesus has been in India during the “missing years” from age 12 to 30 that form a historical gap in the New Testament. As can be expected, the Church and Christian theologians reject the idea and claim that there are other indications about how he would have spent these years, like the very improbable one that he had simply been working somewhere as a carpenter, who in that case would hardly have had something highly spiritual about him (and would most probably have married)... Why, yes really: WHY on Earth should he not have travelled in the world instead? There is absolutely no logical reason against this! Other peoples on this planet would also benefit from his teachings and as the human being that he *also* was, he could very well have sought knowledge and experience beyond the area in which he was born. The only “reason” for denying this hypothesis is an emotional one: In that case he would have learned many things that to modern theology do not fit with what they see as Christianity... holding it to be unthinkable (or rather: unacceptable) that there could be “Eastern” influences in it... I once had the opportunity to spend a few days in a Jesuit center near Calcutta (today Kolkata). I visited their library and discovered a book about the history of Christianity in India. It was written in it that the Thomas Christians had had many texts, *which were all destroyed by the Church!* What a **crime!**

Therefore, I can very well imagine that Jesus sent Thomas to Kerala *because he had been there himself* and knew the people there.

The “birth” of Ayyappan is another peculiar story. At that time, a part of Kerala was ruled by a king Rājaśekhara who had no son as heir of his throne. He one day rested at the river Pambā and heard a child crying. He went to search for it and found a baby boy lying alone on a rock. As he was won-

dering about what to do with it, an old Brahmin appeared and told him to take the child home. It would bring him glory and he would come to know all about it when it would reach the age of 12. The king adopted the boy and named him Maṇikānta (“wearing a bell”) since he was found with a little golden bell tied around his neck. This story indicates a divine origin of Ayyappan and may add to speculations about a connection between him and Jesus. Since Ayyappan will have been “born” (or rather: found) some 800 years or more after Jesus, the theoretical possibility of him being a reincarnation of Jesus cannot be immediately dismissed and since there is some evidence (see above) that Jesus may have been in Kerala, it needs to be considered. There is also a somewhat striking parallelism in that Jesus had his spiritual “coming out” at the age of 12, and so did Ayyappan. Still, this so far is not more than a speculation – but it could possibly be one of probably various reasons why the Church destroyed the texts of the Thomas Christians. Could it actually be that Ayyappan was influenced by what remained of that branch of Christianity in Kerala? And that signs of such influence led some to see him as an incarnation of Jesus?

So there could after all be some kind of a relationship between Ayyappan and Jesus, or Christ, resp.

### **Christ in Gnostic Christianity**

The Gnostic Christians originated from the very first Christians who in the beginning belonged to the inner circle around Jesus and thus had learned directly from him, “first hand”. Their creation story also has a trinity, composed by The Unnamed Creator, Barbelo (his consort) and Autogenes (“born out of himself”), commonly called Christ. It may here be remarked, by the way, that “Christ” is not a name! It is a designation or description that means “the anointed one”, the Greek translation (χριστός) of the Hebrew word *mashiah* (מָשִׁיחַ, by us called “Messiah” or “Messias”). Thus, we actually do not have a name for him... Barbelo can be understood as *the creative force* that gave **birth to the creation**, wherefore it is regarded as feminine.

The original Christianity became distorted in the Paulinian (falsified) “Churchianity”, in which no female entities were accepted (except Mary) – even though the “Holy Spirit (Ghost)” is seen as female in Gnostic Christianity (and probably as sexless in “Churchianity”). Since things deteriorated in humanity, Christ sent a messenger, who incarnated as Yeshua, to teach us concealed truths that we were not supposed to know, such as Yahweh not being the original God but a usurper. For that, he was killed. Yahweh then expected that the Gnostic Christianity (prosecuted by Saul before he became Paul) would become forgotten, but it instead grew stronger after the death of Yeshua. Then he manipulated Saul/Paul to establish a pseudo-Christianity that in the council of Nicaea 325 became the basis for the Church. This was not the main theme of the Council, but since also Gnostics were present, Constantine prevented them from presenting their view at this council and gave their petitions to the fire without opening them. He wanted a Church only as an instrument for his power (and was manipulated by Yahweh for that purpose). After the council, the Gnostics were regarded as heretics and could be killed without reason and punishment. Thus, they gradually disappeared from the stage. The last Gnostics were the Cathars, cruelly killed by the Church in a genocidal holocaust in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (one of its worst crimes). Yet in 1945, a Gnostic library was found in Nag Hammadi in Egypt, so that we today again have the basics of true Christianity back – even though there had developed somewhat different views and opinions among them. It is now time to “reset” Christianity to its origins!

It is interesting that in Sanskrit literature Brahma is also called “born out of himself” (svayambhū), sometimes also Viṣṇu. I would hesitate, however, to compare them with Christ only for that reason. Nevertheless, the birth of Dharmasāstā is peculiar. Can it be compared to the birth of Jesus? Maybe, and in that case in a rather twisted manner. Viṣṇu took on a female incarnation to be able to give birth to Dharmasāstā, the Holy Spirit made Mary pregnant so that Jesus could be born (incarnate). However, Dharmasāstā was possibly born through sex (or at least something similar to a sexual act) and Jesus apparently not – unless the Spirit actually had *sex* with Mary (*horribile dictu*)! Be it as it may be and heavily concealed... both births were remarkable. Jesus – Ayyappan – Dharmasāstā – Christ... Hmmm... could there be some hidden connection here? I hesitate to mention it, but it is

somehow thought inspiring. On one side one way, on the other side another way for a related purpose? This is a little like a koan.

The name Dharmaśāstā, furthermore, means “Teacher of the meaning of life”. The concept “dharma” involves the purpose, task and sense of life, how we should live in accordance with the divine. This fits as description as well for Christ/Jesus.

And who is the Holy Spirit? The early Christians regarded this entity as female. I would compare this to Śakti in Hinduism, the primordial cosmic energy, personified as Ādi Śakti or Ādi Parāśakti, the Great Divine Mother (but I do not dare to compare this with Mohinī...).

### **Yahweh’s evil nature**

The Gnostic Christians knew quite well that Yahweh’s evil nature causes much suffering in humanity, as the bloody pages in the Old Testament reveal, especially in Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges, where a real holocaust in his name is described.

Yaldabaoth is the name the Gnostics gave to Yahweh and he is described as someone “mistakenly” created by Sophia, who then escaped in the dark region, where he built up his own world – the world we live in. I would rather see him as intentionally created without knowledge of the light he has inside – without light, there is no life, but he should be unaware of it. Because otherwise he would have brought divine light into the dark region and it would no more be dark. As Origen describes in *Perì Archōn*, a dark region was formed outside the divine light since we, as “sparks” in the light or “light children”, wanted to go out from there to have experiences the light could not give us – especially through fully living out our free will. As described in the Kabbalah (צמצום *tzimtzum*), God contracted his light so that a dark region formed outside of it and there we could then go. However, it seems that at first someone was needed in that region to organize some kind of structure, for which Yaldabaoth was sent to it, without knowing who he really is.

Actually, there is much evidence that Judaism is in part derived from what is written on Mesopotamian clay plates. Abraham lived in Sumer and in Sumerian cuneiform texts on clay plates, as well as on clay plates from a few other Mesopotamian regions, a creation story called *Enuma Elish* (or *Eliš*) is told that fits to the Biblical story in the Old Testament. In another clay-plate text, *Atra Hasis*, many other things are told that add to *Enuma Elish*, a.o. about the creation of man and the flood. Ethnologists and linguists who spend their lives studying, translating and interpreting these texts are mostly of the opinion that these texts are the origin of the stories in Genesis. Of course, theologians and rabbis go to much length to by all means deny and “disprove” that... Yet there are still more Mesopotamian texts that support this connection. Could Zoroastrianism also play a role here? Well:

1. Abraham and his family went westwards and settled in Cana’an, where an early form of Judaism arose and the people multiplied. Later, some of the people went on to Egypt to escape famine. Of these, later generations went back to Cana’an to retake the land since it was promised to them by Yahweh. They were disappointed when they arrived, since the land was not free. People lived there in towns, the descendents of their ancestors, which the Hebrews coming from Egypt no more knew about. Yahweh told them (through Moses) to kill each and everyone there and not spare a child, a woman nor an old man, so as “to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full” (Deut 6:10-11). This was a first holocaust... After stealing the land from their inhabitants, they settled there and replaced the Cana’anite religion with a rule of Yahweh that developed to later Judaism. It looks like Yahweh wanted to eradicate knowledge from Sumer that the Cana’anites had preserved, hence an ethnic cleansing...
2. Part of that knowledge will have been about how they had come to Sumer in the first place. As John Sassoon discusses in his book *From Sumer to Jerusalem - The Forbidden Hypothesis*, modern Bible translations have it that they had come *from the West* to settle in Sumer, as if they had been in Cana’an before. Sassoon shows, however, that older Bible texts rather indicate that they had come *from the East!* From where then? From Persia? That would fit to a theory of a

Zoroastrian origin still further back in time. The modern interpretation will then be a manipulation to support a wishful idea that the very origin would be earlier in Cana'an and that they had come from there and then returned to there. But that may not be so.

3. Yahweh was known as a god of thunder and storm from Sinai, and as a war god, but can be identified in many ways as the Mesopotamian god Enlil, who ruled humanity in a cruel way and had wanted to eradicate them by a flood (deluge), since he considered their creation to be a mistake. But his brother Enki secretly instructed Utnapishtim = Ziusudra = Noah to save basic life forms in an arch to survive the flood.

The "Father" that Jesus talked about, will obviously not be Yahweh – an usurper claiming to be the only god in a way that will be directed against competition, but rather disqualified himself through horrible cruelties ascribed to him on the bloody pages of the Old Testament (especially Deuteronomy, Kings and Judges). His "Father" will more likely be 'El 'Elyon (the "Highest God") known among the Cana'anites, who had 70 sons of which one was Yahweh (who also had a consort Asherah).

I understand Jesus as a messenger sent by Christ to teach us about this, which arose the wrath of Yahweh so that he wanted him killed in a revengeful way.

In Hindu texts, a demon called Hiraṇyakaśipu is described in terms that strongly remind of Yahweh. According to a legend, he was the king of the Daityas (a clan of malevolent asuras) and had earned a boon from Brahma that made him virtually indestructible and he could not be killed by man nor an animal. He grew arrogant, thought he was God, and demanded that everyone worship only him. The name means "clothed in gold" and is said to depict one who is very much fond of wealth and sex life: *hiraṇya* "gold", *kaśipu* "soft cushion". He is supposed to have been "killed" (cf. above) by Narasiṃha, but as the world shows, he seems to be much alive still... Narasiṃha was half human and half lion and hence neither man nor animal and, therefore, allegedly could "kill" him.

Asuras are considered to be more or less malevolent entities or demons opposing the heavenly devas. Since "a-" grammatically often denotes negation in Sanskrit, the word is also seen as a negation of "sura" that would thus be a synonym of "deva". Some Sanskrit dictionaries dismiss this, however, as erroneous "folk etymology". One may possibly speculate about a relation with "Aššur", the name of the capital of the Mesopotamian Assyria that is connected with the Anunnaki described on Mesopotamian clay plates. Much discussed today is the malevolence of these Anunnaki and their destructive influence on our planet and its inhabitants. Could it be that the wars described in Mahābhārata have to do with conflicts and fights with Anunnaki? And hence that the word asura relates to Aššur? This is certainly a mere speculation of mine, but it could be thought inspiring... But that is another story.

The border between devas and asuras is not very distinct and their regions seem to overlap, as the story of Maṇiṣāśura and Maṇiṣī may illustrate. A divine entity Dattā (probably Dattātreyā) and the daughter Līlā of a Maṇiṣī Gālava decided to take human form to enjoy material and carnal pleasures. After some time, Dattā realized the futility of indulging in mundane joys and that at the end it will rather lead to attachment and sorrow, and he wanted them to return to the world of the devas. Līlā, however, wanted to stay and Dattā cursed her to be born as a female buffalo. In her anger over this, she in turn cursed him to become a male buffalo to stay with her. Thus they became the asuras Maṇiṣā and Maṇiṣī. Their "killings" then, in fact, were their liberation from careless curses they had given each other in anger.

It is common to those who consider themselves "Christian" to paint Hinduism in black as if it were of Satan and the Paulinian Christianity of the Church in white as if it were the only truth. However, there is enough darkness in the "Churchianity" and also brightness in Hinduism. Is it really conceivable that Brahma is the devil? Or is he actually more or less the same as 'El 'Elyon, only with another name? It has been written that from Yahweh comes both, good and evil (cf. Isa 45,7), and we find both also in Hinduism. Hinduism knows the good devas and the bad asuras, but there is (as mentioned) no sharp division – the groups overlap. Will it not have to be so that true (Gnostic)

Christianity and Hinduism also overlap, somehow? It should be possible to compare them, but differences in terminology make it difficult.

So the whole thing will be a mixture of truth, manipulation, misinterpretation and misunderstanding. It is not easy to separate the chaff from the wheat ... Yet to see Ayyappan as a reincarnation of Jesus to me still seems speculative. It may well be that Jesus has been in India, but did not incarnate there – but can it be definitely excluded that he did? Actually, the original Christians did know about reincarnation, as the “reincarnated” Gnostic texts confirm. It could also be conceivable that there is a relation, maybe even a close one, between Christ as an entity and one of those who are mentioned to belong to the Hindu godhead.

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## To the preamble

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- Malayalam Christian portal runs hate speech against Hindus and Sri Ayyappa <https://www.hindupost.in/news/malayalam-christian-portal-runs-hates-speech-hindus-sri-ayyappa/>