

## BUDDHISM AND JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE

*Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti*  
(Fundación Instituto de Estudios Budistas FIEB, Argentina)

### *Conquest as an act of violence*

The degree with which violence manifests itself in the history of humanity is terrific. History presents to us an uninterrupted succession of wars, invasions, conquests, accompanied by genocides, massacres, reductions to servitude and slavery, with their sequence of plunder, robbery, spoliations, and which have left a sad balance: an enormous human suffering.

Among these forms of violence the most extreme and permanent is *conquest*. Through it a people stronger thanks to its technology, political organization, economical resources, cultural progress, and inspired by motivations such as greediness, ambition, fanaticism, dogmatism, intolerance, aggressivity, imposes upon another its authority and will. Conquest deprives the conquered people of its freedom, possessions and culture, and forces it to accept, together with the foreign preeminence and rule, the values, ethics, religion, beliefs, habits, political and social organization, and the language of the conquerors. Conquest destroys the identity of a people, compelling it to forget or even to repudiate all that constituted the basis upon which that identity had built itself. The conqueror undervalues or despises what is most cherished by the conquered and behaves accordingly, without caring for the humiliation and indignity under which he puts the human beings he has subjugated. It can be said that more or less the remarks that precede apply to all the conquests that have covered the humanity with blood and have darkened its history: those of the Assyrians,

Alexander the Great, the Romans, Genghis Khan, Tamerlan, Mughals, the Europeans in Asia, Africa, America, etc..

### *Attitudes in face of violence*

If the acts of violence, like conquest, etc., that fill the pages of History, disturb those who are sensitive to human suffering, it is also a cause of great anxiety for them the reactions, attitudes or approaches that people generally assume towards the violence that History reveals. The predominant reactions are indifference towards violence, complacency and solidarity with it, and even the desire to defend and vindicate it.

The historians narrate events of enormous violence and the readers learn about them, without being aware of all the suffering, destruction and death they provoked. And consequently these events are described and studied without giving rise to any emotional resonance. It seems that, as soon as the violent fact has entered into History, it becomes free from all moral evaluation, utterly disconnected from values as “good” or “bad” and from feelings as solidarity and compassion, having nothing to do with all the mass of pain and suffering with which it was tightly linked. The History gives and the reader receives a limited and impoverished vision of what really the act of violence was.

The situation is graver when the historian and the reader adhere to the violent act, feel themselves solidary with the victorious protagonists of that act and are filled with enthusiasm for its greatness and its results, either impelled by racial, cultural, religious, social, politic links that connect them with these protagonists or seduced by the aspects which we could call *positive*, which manifest themselves together with the violent act, such as courage, intrepidity, resistance, cunning, military wisdom, efficiency, success, and which, covering the whole scene, conceal all the cruelty, suffering, sordidness, destruction and death which that act originated.

The third attitude of defence, justification and praise of the violent acts which are the wars, invasions, conquests surpasses in gravity the two previous attitudes. He who adopts this attitude is not only complaisant with the violent act; he considers it as something good, valuable, positive and legitimate, that consequently must be defended from criticisms and rejections by means of explanations and rationalizations and that, even more, must be exalted and presented as a motive of pride, a source of glory and a model of action. The violent acts registered by History have always had their apologists among the ideologists, philosophers, theologians, politicians, historians, jurists, and their exalters among poets and artists. The strength and generality of this attitude is manifested by the fact that many cultures show as one of their greatest literary achievements some epic poem that glorifies violent individuals because of the task of destruction and death they carried on. In general the defence of violent acts follows a scheme of a very simple structure. In the case of conquests, for instance, the virtues, values, merits, aims, culture and civilization of the conquerors are exalted, and those of the conquered people are denigrated and undervalued.<sup>1</sup>

### *Justification of violence in the Rig Veda*

Many verses of the *Rig Veda* frankly describe the evils and calamities the Indo-European or Aryan invaders inflicted on the people that already inhabited India, destroying their culture, massacring them, taking by force possession of their land, cattle and riches, and submitting the survivors, men, women, children, to slavery and unworthy servile condition.<sup>2</sup> And at the same time we find in the *Rig Veda* arguments that are intended to justify the acts of violence the Aryan nomads carried on. These arguments can be distributed in three groups:

1. those related to race,
2. those related to religious beliefs, and
3. those related to culture in general.

In several passages of the *Rig Veda* it is expressed that the aborigines (*dasyu, dāsa*) are black, while the Aryans are white. Great emphasis is put in the religious differences between the invaders and the original inhabitants of the country: the Aryans worship the true gods, follow their rules, offer sacrifices to them; thereby they are pious believers. On the contrary the native people do not venerate the Aryan gods, do not believe in them, do not comply with their norms, do not sacrifice in their honor, do not flatter them; so they are impious, heretical, atheistic. In consequence it is right that the Aryans have recourse to religious practices in order to get help from the gods, in order to vanquish the native people, to destroy them, to submit them and to take possession of their wealth, which was considerable and constituted an object of the unlimited greediness of the Aryans. It is also right that the gods become the allies of the Aryans, because their victory will be the victory of the pious against the heretical, of good against evil. Finally the aborigines have customs and habits that are shocking and speak an indistinct language. The apex of the undervaluation is expressed with painful crudeness when the Aryans declare that the conquered people *are not human*, are demons.

We quote some verses of the *Rig Veda* that illustrate the violent deeds of the Aryan invaders and their justification, and give us an idea of what the Aryan invasion really was. They are not only historical records but also records apt to be included in Borges' *Historia Universal de la Infamia*.

*vadhīr hi dasyuṃ dhaninaṃ ghanenaṃ  
 ekaś carann upaśākebhīr indra /  
 dhanor adhi viṣuṇak te vyāyann  
 ayajvānaḥ sanakāḥ pretim īyuh //4//*

*parā cicchīrṣā vavṛjūḥ ta indrā-  
 yajvāno yajvabhiḥ spardhamānāḥ /  
 pra yad divo harivaḥ sthātar ugra  
 niravratāñ adhamo rodhasyoḥ //5//*

*pari yad indra rodasī ubhe  
 abubhojīr mahinā viśvataḥ sīm /  
 amanyamānāñ abhi manyamānair  
 nir brahmabhīr adhamo dasyum indra //9//  
 Rig Veda I,33,4-5,9*

“You slew with your mace the wealthy *dasyu*, alone, going with your helpers, O Indra; from their sandy hill they fled in all directions; the Sanakas<sup>3</sup> who do not offer sacrifices went to their death” (4).

“They fled with turned faces, those who do not sacrifice fighting with those who sacrifice, O Indra, when you, O (lord) of sorrel-coloured horses, O stayer, O fierce (god), from heaven blew off in both worlds those who have no laws” (5).

“When you, O Indra, had surrounded with your greatness on every side both worlds, you blew off those who do not think by means of those who think - the *dasyu* by means of those who possess the sacred words” (9).

*dasyūñ chimyūñś ca puruhūta evair  
 hatvā pṛthivyām śarvā ni barhīt /  
 sanat kṣetraṃ sakhībhiḥ śvitnyebhiḥ  
 sanat sūryaṃ sanad apaḥ suvajraḥ //18//  
 Rig Veda I,100,18*

“He, the much invoked,<sup>4</sup> after his wont, slaying *dasyus* and *śimyas*,<sup>5</sup> struck them to earth; he, with his white friends, won the land, won the sun, won the waters - he who possesses an excellent thunderbolt”.

*pra mandine pitumad arcatā vaco  
 yaḥ kṛṣṇagarbhā nirahann ṛjīśvanā /  
 avasyavo vṛṣaṇaṃ vajradakṣiṇaṃ  
 marutvantaṃ sakhyāya havāmahe //1//  
 Rig Veda I,101,1*

“Raise your voice, accompanied by drink, for him who is delighted; who, with R̥jīśvan,<sup>6</sup> destroyed the with black brood pregnant ones.<sup>7</sup> Looking for help, we invoke, to get his friendship, the bull,<sup>8</sup> him who in his right hand wields the thunderbolt, him who is accompanied by the Maruts”.

*indraḥ samatsu yajamānam āryaṃ prāvad  
viśveṣu śatamūtir ājiṣu svarmīlheṣvājiṣu /  
manave śāsad avratān tvacaṃ kṛṣṇām arandhayat /  
dakṣan na viśvaṃ tatṛṣāṇam oṣati nyarśasānam oṣati //87//  
Rig Veda I,130,8*

"Indra helped in battles the Aryan who sacrifices, he who grants a hundred aids in all the frays - in the frays that have as prize the sun. Punishing them, he gave up the lawless, the black skin, to Manu.<sup>9</sup> As if (he were a) blazing (fire), he burns all the thirsty/covetous (enemies), he burns Arśasāna".<sup>10</sup>

*yenemā viśvā cyavanā kṛtāni  
yo dāsaṃ varṇam adharaṃ guhākaḥ /  
śvaghnīva yo jigīvāñ lakṣam ādad  
aryaḥ puṣṭāni sa janāsa indraḥ //4//  
Rig Veda II,12,4*

"He, by whom all these feats were done, who subjugated and buried the *dāsa* race, who seized the foe's riches, like a winning gambler seizes the wager - he is Indra".

*sa vṛtrahendraḥ kṛṣṇayonīḥ  
puraṃdaro dāsīr airayad vi /  
ajanayan manave kṣām apaś ca  
satrā śaṃsaṃ yajamānasya tūtot //7//  
Rig Veda II,20,7*

"Indra, the Vritra-slayer, the fort-demolisher, destroyed the *dāsa* black wombs; he created for Manu earth and waters; he always strengthened the prayer of him who sacrifices".

*sasānātyāñ uta sūryaṃ sasānendraḥ*  
*sasāna purubhojasaṃ gāṃ /*  
*hiraṇyayam uta bhogaṃ sasāna*  
*hatvī dasyūn prāryaṃ varṇam āvat //9//*  
*Rig Veda III,34,9*

"He won the racehorses, he won the sun, Indra won the cow that feeds many, he won the possession of gold - killing the *dasyus* he protected the Aryan race".

*tvaṃ pipruṃ mṛgayaṃ śūśuvāṃsam*  
*ṛjīsvane vaidathināya randhīḥ /*  
*pañcāśat kṛṣṇā ni vapaḥ sahasrāt-*  
*kaṃ na puro jarimā vi darḍaḥ //13//*  
*Rig Veda IV,16,13*

"You gave up the mighty Pipru Mṛgaya<sup>11</sup> to Ṛjīsvan, the son of Vidathin. You smote down fifty thousand blacks. You destroyed their forts as age destroys a garment".

*uta śuṣṇasya dhṛṣṇuyā pra mṛkṣo abhi vedanam /*  
*puro yad asya saṃpiṇak //13//*  
*Rig Veda IV,30,13*

"And you valiantly seized the riches of Śuṣṇa,<sup>12</sup> when you crushed his forts".

*dive dive sadṛśīr anyam ardhaṃ*  
*kṛṣṇā asedhad apa sadmano jāḥ /*  
*ahan dāsā vṛṣabho vasnayanto-*  
*avraje varcinaṃ śambaraṃ ca //21//*  
*Rig Veda VI,47,21*

"Day after day, from their seat to another place he drove away the black creatures of equal aspect; the bull slew in Udavraja<sup>13</sup> the two higgling *dāsas*, Varcin and Śambara".<sup>14</sup>

*tvadbhiyā viśa āyann asiknīr  
asamanā jahatīr bhojanāni /  
vaiśvānara pūrave śośucānaḥ  
puro yad agne darayann adīdeḥ //3//  
Rig Veda VII,5,3*

"For fear of yours the black people fled away, going in different directions, abandoning their possessions, when glowing for Pūru,<sup>15</sup> O Vaiśvānara, O Agni, you shone destroying their forts".

*nyakratūn grathino mṛdhravācaḥ  
paññīr aśradhāñ avṛdhāñ ayajñān /  
prapra tān dasyūñr agnir vivāya  
pūrvaś cakārāparañ ayajyūn //3//  
Rig Veda VII,6,3*

"Agni has chased far away the irrational crooked niggards, of barbarian language, without faith, who do not support (the gods), who do not perform sacrifices, (he has chased far away) these *dasyus*; he, the foremost, has made those who do not sacrifice to be the hindmost".

*na yātava indra jūjuvur no  
na vandanā śaviṣṭha vedyābhiḥ /  
sa śardhad aryo viṣuṇasya jantor  
mā śiśnadevā api gur ṛtaṃ naḥ //5//  
Rig Veda VII,21,5*

"No evil spirits, O Indra, have impelled us, nor fiends, O mightiest (god), with their cunning devices; let the Aryan mock at the adverse people; let not the phallus-worshippers come to our pious service".

*adān me paurukutsyaḥ pañcāśataṃ trasadasyur vadhūnām /  
maṃhiṣṭho ayaḥ satpatiḥ //36//  
Rig Veda VIII,19,36*

"Trasadasyu,<sup>16</sup> son of Purukutsa, has given me fifty women, he the most generous, noble (arya) protector".

*apī vṛśca purāṇavad vratater iva guṣṭitam  
ojo dāsasya dambhaya /  
vayaṃ tad asya saṃbhṛtaṃ vasvindreṇa vi bhajemahi  
nabhantām anyake same //6//  
Rig Veda VIII,40,6*

"Tear asunder as of old, like the tangle of a creeper, demolish the might of the *dāsa*. May we, with Indra's help, divide the treasure he has amassed. Let all our foes burst!"

*daśa mahyaṃ pautakrataḥ sahasrā dasyave vṛkaḥ /  
nityād rāyo amaṃhata //2//  
śataṃ me gardabhānām śatam urṇāvatinām /  
śataṃ dāsāṃ ati srajaḥ //3//  
Rig Veda VIII,56,2-3*

"Dasyave-Vṛka,<sup>17</sup> the son of Pūtakratu, has given me ten thousand from his own wealth (2), a hundred asses, a hundred sheep, a hundred slaves (*dāsa*) and garlands of flowers besides" (3).

*anyavratam amānuṣam  
ayaḥjvānam adevayum /  
ava svaḥ sakhā dudhuvīta parvataḥ  
sughnāya dasyuṃ parvataḥ //11//  
Rig Veda VIII,70,11*

"May the mountain, his friend, shake off (the *dasyu*) who follows other laws, who is not a man, who does not sacrifice, who has

no gods - (may) the mountain (shake off) the *dasyu* in order to be easily killed".

### *The Spanish conquest of America*

The Aryan conquest of India reminds us of another conquest: the conquest of Latin America by the Spaniards. It is not necessary to refer to the brutality and cruelty shown by the Spanish conquerors in Latin America, to the task of destruction and massacre they carried on, to the indignities they inflicted upon the conquered Indian communities, to the robbery and plunder they carried on. They acted inspired by greediness and aggressivity under the pretext of honest religious interests. And they justified their violence with the same arguments used by the Aryans, thirty centuries ago, in the *Rig Veda*: the Indians belong to an inferior race; the Indians are infidels and heretics, they do not follow the Christian faith; the Indians have abominable habits and practices. It was doubted whether they possessed a soul and were humans. Under these circumstances anything done against them was well done - specially taking into account that they possessed great quantity of gold which provoked the insatiable covetousness of the conquerors. Arguments to vindicate the Spanish conquest were presented, commented, developed by a host of jurists, theologians, historians: not only they did not repudiate the violence, but, on the contrary, adopting the third attitude referred to in the beginning of this article, defended it and justified it - as the poets of the Rigvedic hymns.<sup>18</sup>

### *Justification of violence in the Bhagavad Gītā*

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* we find a more complex justification of violence in the teachings imparted to Arjuna by Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna must fight, must accomplish an act of violence, must destroy his enemies, who belong to his own family or who are his masters and friends, because this is his *svadharmā*, his duty as a *kṣatriya*, as a warrior:

*svadharmam api cāvekṣya  
na vikampitum arhasi /  
dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat  
kṣatriyasya na vidyate //31//*

*atha cet tvam imaṃ dharmyaṃ  
saṅgrāmaṃ na kariṣyasi /  
tataḥ svadharmaṃ kīrtiṃ ca  
hītvā pāpam avāpsyasi //33//*

*śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ  
paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt /  
svadharṃe nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ  
paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ //35//*

*Bhagavad Gītā II,31,33; III,35*

"Having regard for your own duty, you should not tremble, for there is nothing better for a warrior than a just war"(II,31).

"Now, if you will not perform this just battle, then abandoning your own duty and glory, you will incur in evil" (II,33).

"Better one's own duty, though imperfect, than another's duty well-performed; better death in one's own duty; another's duty brings danger" (III,35).

If the warrior fulfils his duty and dies in the battle-field his reward will be heaven:

*yadṛcchayā copapannaṃ  
svargadvāram apāvṛtam /  
sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha  
labhante yuddham īdṛśam //32//*

*hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṃ  
jītvā vā bhoksyase mahīm /  
tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya  
yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ //37//*  
*Bhagavad Gītā II,32,37*

"Presented of itself, an open door of heaven - happy the warriors, O son of Prithā, that get such a battle" (32).

"Either slain you shall gain heaven, or conquering you shall enjoy the earth. Therefore arise, O son of Kuntī, making a firm resolve to fight" (37).

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* to fight, violence in other words, becomes the patrimony of warriors. It is not a duty imposed by men, but an eternal and absolute duty, beyond human will, laid upon them as a manifestation of the universal Cosmic Order. Violence has become a part of the moral system in the hierarchical social organization of India.

But this seemingly rigid norm is limited by two conditions: one is that the fight, the violent act, which the warrior has to accomplish, be a just fight, a fight according to *dharma* (*dharmyaṃ yuddham* II,31), a just violence; and the other is that he must fight with a special psychological attitude.

1. The commentaries of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Dharma* literature allow us to have an idea of what was considered to be a just fight, a just violent act. Under the diversity of cases of just fight, of just violence given by the commentators and *Dharma* authors, it is possible to discover a common trend: it must be a defensive act to protect some highly esteemed value or person.

Let us quote Śaṅkara's commentary to *Bhagavad Gītā* II, 31: *tacca yuddham pṛthivījayadvāreṇa dharmārthaṃ prajāraṅkṣaṇārthaṃ ceti dharmād anapetaṃ paraṃ dharmyam*: "this fight is not-deviating from *dharma*, is supreme, is just, since through conquest of earth it is for the interest of *dharma*, it is for the protection of the people". A similar idea appears in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's commentary of the same verse, and in *Manusmṛti* and in *Viṣṇusmṛti*.

*Manusmṛti* VIII, 348-350:

*śastraṃ dvijātibhir grāhyaṃ  
dharmo yatroparudhyate /  
dvijātīnāṃ ca varṇānāṃ  
viplave kālakārite //348//  
ātmanaśca paritrāṇe  
dakṣiṇānāṃ ca saṃgare /  
strīviprābhūyupapattau ca  
ghnan dharmeṇa na duṣyati //349//*

*guruṃ vā bālavṛddhau vā  
brāhmaṇaṃ vā bahuśrutam /  
ātātāyinam āyāntaṃ  
hanyād evāvicārayan //350//*

"Twice-born men must take up arms, when *dharmā* is impeded and when a calamity produced by time occurs for the twice-born castes" (348).

"He who kills, according to *dharmā*, in his own defence, in a strife for the fees (of priests), and for the protection of women and *brāhmaṇas*, commits no sin" (349).

"One may kill without hesitation the *guru*, a child or an aged man or a *brāhmaṇa* deeply versed in the *Vedas*, who approaches with murderous intent" (350).

*Viṣṇusmṛti* III, 45-46:

*gobrāhmaṇaṇṛpamitradhanadārajīvitarakṣaṇāt ye hatās te  
svargalokabhājah //45// varṇasaṃkararakṣaṇārthaṃ ca //46//*

"Those who have been killed in protecting a cow, a *brāhmaṇa*, the King, a friend, their own property, their own wife

or their own life go to heaven (45). Like (those who have been killed) when protecting (society) from mixture of castes" (46).

On the basis of the quoted texts it can be assumed that for the *Bhagavad Gītā* a *just war* is a *defensive* war with a purpose allowed, or even prescribed, by concrete norms of the *dharma*. These texts give us examples of cases of *just* violent acts. And the whole *Mahābhārata* provides us with an instance of a *just war*.<sup>19</sup>

Although the fact that violence is considered by the *Bhagavad Gītā* as the warrior's duty and the great number and amplitude of the cases, in which it is either permitted or even ordered to have recourse to it, constitute a threat to peace and *ahiṃsā*, nevertheless, in relation to the *Rig Veda*, the position of the *Bhagavad Gītā* marks a progress. Violence is now enclosed within the frame of moral rules.

2. The second condition, the special psychological attitude with which the violent act must be carried on, consists in the detachment from and renunciation to the fruits of action, the desinterested discharge of one's own duty, the lack of personal concern for the results of what one is obliged to do. It is the well-known teaching of the *Bhagavad Gītā* called *Karmayoga*<sup>20</sup> as expressed in verses such as:

*karmaṇy evādhikāras te*  
*mā phaleṣu kadācana /*  
*mā karmaphalahetur bhūr*  
*mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi ||47||*

*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*  
*saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanamjaya /*  
*siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā*  
*samatvaṃ yoga ucyate ||48||*  
*Bhagavad Gītā II,47-48*

"On action alone be your effort; never on its fruits. Do not be one whose motive is the fruits of action; do not have attachment to inaction" (47).

"Do your actions abiding in discipline (*yoga*), abandoning attachment, O Dhanamjaya, being the same in success and failure. This sameness is called *yoga*" (48).

*tasmād asaktaḥ satataṃ  
kāryaṃ karma samācara /  
asakto hy ācāraṃ karma  
param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ //19//  
Bhagavad Gītā III,19*

"Therefore unattached perform always action that must be done; for, performing action without attachment, man attains the highest".

*etāny api tu karmāṇi  
saṅgaṃ tyaktvā phalāni ca /  
kartavyānīti me pārtha  
niścitaṃ matam uttamam //6//  
Bhagavad Gītā XVIII,6*

"However these actions must be done, abandoning attachment and fruits: this, O son of Pṛthā, is my definite highest instruction".

*kāryam ity eva yat karma  
niyataṃ kriyate 'rjuna  
saṅgaṃ tyaktvā phalaṃ caiva  
sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ //9//  
Bhagavad Gītā XVIII,9*

"When obligatory action is done, O Arjuna, only because it ought to be done, abandoning attachment and fruits - this abandonment is regarded as endowed with goodness".

While the first condition has the exogenous character of ethical norms, the second comes from within. It requires a moral transformation of the individual, who has to submit himself to a discipline (*yoga*), in order that the non-attachment attitude become his own nature. He must attain perfection before performing the violent act, in order to remain absolutely free from the sinful consequences of that act. This second condition implies a further progress not only in regard to the crude violence of the *Rig Veda*, but also in regard to the simple conception of violence as the natural duty of the warrior.

These two conditions of moral nature, when they are fulfilled, justify the violent act. The *Bhagavad Gītā* adds two more justifications of a metaphysical nature for the extreme act of violence: the killing of a living being.

3. Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to fight and to kill, proclaiming the doctrine of the eternal nature of the *ātman*, the true self of man, which cannot be destroyed with the destruction of the perishable physical body. Even if Arjuna does not put an end to the life of his enemies, their decay and their death is inevitable. And if Arjuna destroys them, he is unable to destroy their real and everlasting Self. Arjuna must lay aside his confusion and remain firm in the accomplishment of his *dharma* as a warrior.

These ideas are expressed in the well-known and beautiful verses of the *Bhagavad Gītā*:

*antavanta ime dehā  
nityasyoktāḥ śarīraṇaḥ  
anāśīno 'prameyasya  
tasmād yudhyasva bhārata //18//*

*ya enaṃ vetti hantāraṃ  
yaś cainaṃ manyate hatam  
ubhau tau na vijānīto  
nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate //19//*

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin  
 nāyaṃ bhūtvā 'bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ  
 ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo  
 na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //20//*

*vedāvināśinaṃ nityaṃ  
 ya enam aḥam avyayam  
 kathaṃ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha  
 kaṃ ghātayati hanti kam //21//*

*nainaṃ chindanti śāstrāṇi  
 nainaṃ dahati pāvakaḥ  
 na cainaṃ kledayanty āpo  
 na śoṣayati mārutaḥ //23//*

*acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam  
 akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca  
 nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇur  
 acalo 'yaṃ sanātanaḥ //24//*

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur  
 dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca  
 tasmād aparihārye 'rthe  
 na tvaṃ śocitum arhasi //27//  
 Bhagavad Gītā II,18-21,23-24,27*

"These bodies of the embodied Self, which is eternal, indestructible, unfathomable, are said to have an end. Therefore fight, O descendent of Bharata!" (18).

"Who believes this Self to be a slayer, and who thinks him to be slain, both these do not understand: he does not slay, nor is he slain" (19).

"He is not born, nor does he ever die. Nor, having come to be, will he come not to be again. Unborn, eternal, everlasting, this ancient one is not slain, when the body is slain" (20).

"That man who knows him as indestructible, eternal, unborn, imperishable, how and whom can he cause to be slain or whom can he slay?" (21).

"Swords do not cut him; fire does not burn him; water does not wet him; wind does not dry him" (23).

"He is uncuttable, he is unburnable, unwettable, undryable; eternal, all-pervading, firm, immovable; he is everlasting" (24).

"For of that which is born, death is certain; of that which dies, birth is certain. Therefore, over the unavoidable, you should not grieve" (27).

4. The second reason, of a metaphysical character, whereby Arjuna has to carry on his deadly action, even against members of his family and friends, is that Kṛṣṇa - the Lord, the incarnate God, the origin and support of beings - in his aspect or function of *Kāla*, Time and Death, has already destroyed Arjuna's enemies; Arjuna is a merely instrumental in the execution of this predetermined action. And as such is not guilty of the sin of killing.

*Bhagavad Gītā* XI,32-34 refers to this justification in the following words of Kṛṣṇa:

*kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho  
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttau  
ṛte 'pi tvā na bhaviṣyanti sarve  
ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyānīkeṣu yodhāḥ //32//*

*tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva  
jitvā śatrūn bhunṅsva rājyaṃ samṛddham  
mayāivaite nihataḥ pūrvam eva  
nimittamātraṃ bhava savyasācin //33//*

*droṇaṃ ca bhīṣmaṃ ca jayadrathaṃ ca  
kaṛṇaṃ tathā 'nyān api yodhavīrān  
mayā hatāms tvam jāhi mā vyathiṣṭhā  
yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān //34//  
*Bhagavad Gītā* XI,32-34*

"I am Time (Death), matured doer of the worlds' destruction, set out to annihilate the worlds here; even without you, all shall cease to exist, the warriors that are arrayed in the opposing ranks" (32).

"Therefore, stand up, win glory; conquering your enemies, enjoy a prosperous kingdom; by Me Myself they have been slain long since; be the mere instrument, left-handed archer" (33).

"Slay Droṇa, Bhīṣma and Jayadratha, Karna too and the other warrior-heroes as well, already slain by me; do not hesitate; fight; you will conquer your rivals in the battle" (34).

The racial, religious and cultural justifications of the *Rig Veda* for the violent act have been superseded by moral and metaphysical justifications.

#### *Buddhist attitude towards violence*

*Ahiṃsā*, refraining from killing or injury, constitutes one of the fundamental norms of Buddhism through out its long history. It inspires numerous prescriptions, some of which we mention.

1. The first of the ten *sikkhāpadas* or rules of morality (*Khuddakapāṭha*, *Khuddakanikāya*, *Nālandā* I, p.1 = PTS I, pp. 1-2) to be adopted by anybody entering the Buddhist community as a lay or as a monk is *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*, abstaining from destruction of life.

2. It is also the first element of Buddhist ethical discipline (*dasasīla* or *pañcasīla*), whose transgression is condemnation to hell (*Samyuttanikāya*, *Nālandā* III, pp.300-301 = PTS IV, pp.342-343; *Nālandā* II, pp.58-59 = PTS II, pp.68-69):

*pāṇātipātamaṃ cāhaṃ, gāmaṇi, jānāmi, pāṇātipātassa ca vipākamaṃ, yathāpaṭipanno ca pāṇātipātī kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātamaṃ nirayaṃ upapajjati tam ca pajānāmi.*

3.The first quality that a *bhikkhu* must possess is also refraining from violence (*Dīghanikāya*, Nālandā I, p.55 = PTS I, p.63):

*kathaṃ ca, mahārāja, bhikkhu sīlasampanno hoti? Idha, mahārāja, bhikkhu pāṇātipātamaṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti / nihitadaṇḍo nihitasattho lajjī dayāpanno sabbapāṇabhūtahitānukampī viharati.*

4.According to the *Pāṭimokkha*, murder is a *pārājika* offence i.e. one of the gravest faults that a monk can commit and the punishment for which is expulsion from the Order, immediate and life-long. To engage a person to kill, to praise death and to persuade to commit suicide are also considered as *pārājika* offences (*Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Pārājika*, Nālandā III, p.90 = PTS *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Suttavibhaṅga*, p.73):

*"yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca manussaviggamaṃ jīvitā voropeyya satthahāraṃ vāssa pariyeseyya maraṇavaṇṇamaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya maraṇāya vā samādapeyya -`ambho purisa, kiṃ tuyhiminā pāpakena dujjīvitena, mataṃ te jīvitā seyyo' ti, iti cittaṃmano cittaṃsaṅkappo anekapariyāyena maraṇavaṇṇamaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya, maraṇāya vā samādapeyya, ayaṃ pi pārājiko hoti asaṃvāso" ti.*

5.*Aniṅguttaranikāya*, Nālandā III, pp.344-345 = PTS IV, p.246, indicates the great benefits that are produced for the person who takes the vow to submit himself to the rules of the Buddhist ethical code (*pañcasīla*, the first

five precepts of the *dasāsīla*). The first of these rules is, as already said, the abstention from killing. The text runs as follows:

*idha, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti / pāṇātipātā paṭivirato, bhikkhave, ariyasāvako aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ deti, averaṃ deti, abyāpajjhaṃ deti / aparimāṇānaṃ sattānaṃ abhayaṃ datvā averaṃ datvā abyāpajjhaṃ datvā aparimāṇassa abhayaṃ averassa abyāpajjhassa bhāgī hoti / idaṃ, bhikkhave, paṭhamaṃ dānaṃ mahādānaṃ aggaññaṃ rattaññaṃ vaṃsaññaṃ porāṇaṃ asaṅkiṇṇaṃ asaṅkiṇṇapubbaṃ, na saṅkiyati na saṅkiyissati, appaṭikuṭṭhaṃ samaṇehi brāhmaṇehi viññūhi / ayaṃ, bhikkhave, catuttho puññābhisaṅgā kusalābhisaṅgā sukhassāhāro sovaggiko sukhavipāko saggasaṃvattaniko, iṭṭhāya kāntāya manāpāya hitāya sukhāya saṃvattati.*

"Herein, O monks, a noble disciple, giving up destruction of life, abstains from destruction of life. Abstaining from destruction of life, O monks, the noble disciple to infinite beings gives absence of fear, gives absence of hatred, gives absence of ill-will. To infinite beings having given absence of fear, having given absence of hatred, having given absence of ill-will, he partakes infinite absence of fear, absence of hatred, absence of ill-will. This, monks, is the first gift, the great gift, primeval, of long standing, known by tradition, ancient, not adulterated, not adulterated in the past, it is not adulterated, it will not be adulterated, not despised by discerning *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*. This, O monks, is the fourth result in merit and goodness, the food of happiness, celestial, resulting in happiness, leading to heaven; it leads to what is pleasant, lovely, charming, beneficial and happy".

6.The *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, in the beginning of *bhūmi* II (= pp. 37-38, Ryūkō Kondō ed.), enumerates the ten meritorious ways of acting (*karmapatha*), with which the *bodhisattva* must be endowed. The first is precisely the abstention from *prāṇātipāta*, and the *sūtra* points out that the *bodhisattva* does not make any harm to a living being even in thought: *sa saṃkalpair api prāṇivihimsāṇ na karoti*.

7.The *Fan wang king (Brahmājālasūtra)*<sup>21</sup> (*Taishō*, Vol. XXIV, 1484) locates the destruction of life as the first of the grave faults (*pārājika*): if a *bhikkhu* personally commits a murder or causes other to kill or praises murder as convenient or enjoys seeing a murder being committed or kills a person through magic or destroys intentionally any form of life, he incurs in a grave sin whose punishment is expulsion from the Saṅgha (*Taishō*, Vol. XXIV, 1484, p.1004 b, lines 16-20). The same text prohibits the *bhikkhu* to store arms as knives, staffs, bows, arrows, spears, axes or any instrument to provoke death as nets or traps. If he does so he commits a light sin. It is the tenth *prāyaścittika* (*pātayantika* or *pāyattika* = pāli *pācittiya*) offense (*ibidem*, p.1005 c, lines 14-19).

8.In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* attributed to Nāgārjuna it is declared that murder is the gravest of all sins and (agreeing with the text of the *Abhidharmakośa* we shall quote afterwards) that one has to sacrifice his own life instead of killing a living being (*Taishō*, Vol. XXV, 1509, p. 155 b, lines 21-22, and p.156 a, line 7 = É. Lamotte's translation, Tome II, p.790 and p. 794 respectively).<sup>22</sup>

9.The great Emperor Aśoka (reigned *circa* 272-231 B.C.), who made the Buddhist *dharma* the inspiration of his internal and external policy, in several of his inscriptions refers to the moral duty of refraining from killing

living beings. *Rock Edict I* (Girnar) (Schneider ed. p. 21): *[i]dha na kiṃci jīvaṃ ārabhitpā prajūhitavyaṃ*. “Here no life (= living being) is to be killed and offered in sacrifice”. *Rock Edict III* (Girnar) (Schneider ed. p. 29): *prāṇānaṃ* (var. lect. *jīvesu*, Dhauli) *sādhū anāraṃbho*: “Not killing living beings is good”. *Rock Edict IV* (Girnar) (Schneider ed. pp. 32-33): *yārise bahūhi v[āsa]satehi na bhūtapuve tārise aja vadhite devānāṃpriyasa priyadasino rāṇo dhammānusaṣṭiyā anāraṃ[bh]o prāṇānaṃ avihīsā bhūtānaṃ*. “What during many hundreds of years did not take place, that is now being promoted by the *Dharma* instructions of King Priyadarśin, Beloved of the gods: the non-killing of living beings, the non-injuring of beings”. Cf. *Rock Edict XI*.

10. Some texts deal with war, armies, arms and soldiers from the viewpoint of *ahiṃsā*.<sup>23</sup> Buddha, in the *Yodhājīvasutta* (*Saṃyuttanikāya*, Nālandā III, pp. 274-275 = PTS IV, pp. 308-309), declares that the good warrior, who has been imbued with the idea that his enemies must be killed, bound, annihilated, destroyed, when he dies fighting, is condemned to hell instead of being reborn in heaven, as the traditional teachers affirm. And Buddha adds that the man who holds that idea is possessed of a perverted view and for that man one of two paths is open: either hell or rebirth as an animal:

*'yo so, gāmaṇi, yodhājīvo saṅgāme ussahati vāyamati, tassa taṃ cittaṃ pubbe gahitaṃ dukkaṭaṃ duppaṇihitaṃ -`ime sattā haññantu vā bajjhantu vā ucchijjantu vā vinassantu vā mā vā ahesuṃ iti vā' ti / tam enaṃ ussahantaṃ vāyamantaṃ pare hananti pariyāpādentī; so kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā parajito nāma nirayo tattha upapajjati ti / sace kho paṇassa evaṃ diṭṭhi hoti -`yo so yodhājīvo saṅgāme ussahati vāyamati, tam enaṃ ussahantaṃ vāyamantaṃ pare hananti*

*pariyāpādentī, so kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā parajitānaṃ (var. lect. PTS: sarañjitānaṃ) devānaṃ saḥabyataṃ upapajjati' ti, sāssa hoti micchādīṭṭhi / micchādīṭṭhikassa kho panāhaṃ, gāmaṇi, purisapuggalassa dvinnaṃ gatīnaṃ aññataraṃ gatiṃ vadāmi – nirayaṃ vā tiracchānayoṇiṃ vā" ti.*

11. Some rules of the *Pāṭimokkha* have the purpose of maintaining the *bhikkhu* far from any contact with an army or with military activities, obviously with the intention to prevent the forthcoming in the *bhikkhu* of warlike or violent feelings or tendencies: *yo pana bhikkhu uyyuttaṃ senaṃ dassanāya gaccheyya, aññatra tathārūpappaccayā, pācittiyaṃ (Vinaya Piṭaka, Pācittiya 48, Nālandā Vol. III, p.145 = PTS Vinaya Piṭaka III, Suttavibhaṅga, p.105):*

*siyā ca tassa bhikkhuno kocid eva paccayo senaṃ gamanāya, dirattatirattaṃ tena bhikkhunā senāya vasitabbaṃ / tato ce uttariṃ vaseyya, pācittiyaṃ (ibidem 49, p.146 = p.106); dirattatirattaṃ ce bhikkhu senāya vasamāno uyyodhikaṃ vā balaggaṃ vā senābyūhaṃ vā anīkadassanaṃ vā gaccheyya, pācittiyaṃ (ibidem 50, p.148 = p.107).*

"If a *bhikkhu* goes to see an army drawn up in battle-array, without a cause thereto sufficient - that is a fault requiring expiation" (48). "And if there be any cause for that *bhikkhu* to go to the army, that *bhikkhu* may remain in the army for two or three nights. If he remains longer than that - that is a fault requiring expiation" (49). "If, while remaining in the army for two or three nights, the *bhikkhu* goes to the battle-array or to the numbering of the forces or to the formation of troops or to see reviews of soldiers - that is a fault requiring expiation" (50).

12. According to *Majjhimasīla* (*Dīghanikāya*, Nālandā I, p.57 and p.58 = PTS I, p.65 and p.66) the *bhikkhu* must abstain from a series of shows, which imply violence, and also from attending the shows constituted by the military activities (*uyyodhikaṃ balaggaṃ senābyūhaṃ anīkadassanaṃ*) mentioned in *Pāṭimokkha* 50; likewise he must abstain from talks about armies and battles (*senākathaṃ...yuddhakathaṃ*). The *Mahāsīla* (*Dīghanikāya*, Nālandā I, p.60 = PTS, I, p.68) indicates wrong means of livelihood which the *bhikkhu* must avoid and among them enumerates soothsayings about victories (*jaya*) and defeats (*parājaya*).

13. He who merely participates in an action whose purpose is destruction of life - war, hunting, assault - is as guilty as he who actually accomplishes the act of killing. If he is obliged by force to join the army, he is equally guilty, unless he takes the firm resolution not to destroy any living being, even for his own life's sake. So asserts *Abhidharmakośa* IV, 72 c-d (Bauddha Bharati Series):

*yat senāpātamaṅgayāvaskandheṣu pareṣāṃ vadhārthaṃ bahavaḥ  
samagrāḥ patanti, ekaś ca prāṇātipātaṃ karoti, kas tena samanvāgato  
bhavati?*

*senādiṣvekakāryatvāt sarve kartṛvad anvitāḥ /*

*...arthato hi te'nyonyam prayoktāro bhavanti. Yas tarhi balān nīyate,  
so'pi samanvāgato bhavati? Anyatra ya evaṃ niścītya yāyāt - 'yāvaj  
jīvitahetor api prāṇīnaṃ na haniṣyāmi' iti.*

14. For Buddhism a king must possess ten qualities (*dasarājadhamma*), among which there is *avihiṃsā*, non-violence (cf. *Jātaka* III, p.274 Fausboll ed.):

*dānaṃ sīlaṃ pariccāgaṃ  
ajjavaṃ maddavaṃ tapāṃ /  
akkodhaṃ avihimsā ca  
khantī ca avirodhaṃ //*

The inclusion by Buddhism of *avihimsā* among the king's duties means the suppression of the duty of fighting imposed on him by tradition.

15. The *Fan wang king* (*Taishō*, Vol. XXIV, 1484) has also some rules that have relation with war or military actions: the Bodhisattva should not act as messenger for an army, provoking in this way the death of many people, nor should he participate in a rebellion (eleventh light fault) (p.1005 c, lines 20-23), nor should he behold a battle or an army in battle-array (thirty three light fault) (p.1007 b, lines 14-20).

16. In *Rock Edict XIII* (*Shāhbāzgarhī*) (Schneider ed. pp.69-80), after describing the evils that his conquest of Kalinga has produced, Aśoka expresses his remorse and condemns the wars of conquest, because of all the suffering that they have as sequel:

*avijitaṃ [hi vi]jīnamano yo tat[r]a vadha va maraṇaṃ va apavaho va  
janasa taṃ baḍhaṃ v[e]dani[ya]ma[taṃ] gurumata[ṃ] ca devanaṃ  
priyasa (ibidem p.71).*

"Indeed, when one conquers an unconquered<sup>24</sup> country, the slaughter, death and deportation of people (that take place) then, are considered by the Beloved of the gods extremely painful and oppressive".

*Modern Buddhist opinions concerning violence*

The position adopted by these ancient texts towards violence is the same as the one assumed by modern propounders of Buddhism. Walpola Rahula, the well known scholar-monk from Sri Lanka, says in his authoritative book *What the Buddha taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), p. 84:

*"It is too well known to be repeated here that Buddhism advocates and preaches non-violence and peace as its universal message, and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. According to Buddhism there is nothing that can be called a 'just war' - which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence and massacre. Who decides what is just or unjust? The mighty and the victorious are 'just', and the weak and the defeated are 'unjust'. Our war is always 'just', and your war is always 'unjust'. Buddhism does not accept this position".*

And H.H. Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, proclaims, as Buddha twenty-five centuries ago, the moral principle of absolute non-violence, and, as in the case of Emperor Aśoka, his action - his struggle for Tibetan rights - is guided by that same principle, carried unto its last consequences:

*"Because violence can only breed more violence and suffering, our struggle must remain non-violent and free of hatred. We are trying to end the suffering of our people, not to inflict suffering upon others" (The Nobel Peace Prize and the Dalai Lama, Ithaca, USA: Snow Lion Publications, 1990, p. 25) and "I am serving our cause with the motivation of service to humankind, not for reasons of power, not out of hatred. Not just as a Tibetan but as a human being, I think it is*

*worthwhile to preserve that culture, that nation, to contribute to world society"* (*Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, Ithaca, USA: Snow Lion Publications, 1988, p.63).

### *Exceptions to the fundamental rules?*

The Buddhist masters examined whether there are instances in which it is allowed not to comply with the absolute norm prohibiting to kill a living being.

The *Ta fang pien fo pao ngen king*, *Taishō*, Vol. III, 156, p.161 b, line 10 – p.162 a, line 16 (*Sūtra of the benefits granted by Buddha through skillful means*) presents a Bodhisattva who travels in company of 500 persons; they reach a road infested by robbers. The robbers send one of them to spy the group. The robber recognizes the Bodhisattva as one of his relatives and as such informs him about the danger that threatens the caravan and urges him to escape without informing his travel companions. The Bodhisattva wants to inform the other travelers, but at the same time he fears that, if he informs them who the man is, his travel-fellows will kill him; and thus will commit a great sin for which they will sink in the three evil destinies (*gatī*) (hells, hungry ghosts, animals) and will endure infinite sufferings. He also considers that, if he keeps silence, the robbers will kill his travel-fellows; and in this case it is they who will suffer the same bad consequences. Thus, after a thorough reflection on all the aspects of the situation and in order to benefit the other beings and save them from committing a sinful action, and from the consequent punishment, full of compassion, and not thinking in himself, he decides to kill the robber and to willingly assume for himself the evil retribution and the punishment in hell which will be the consequence of that murder.

Asaṅga, *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, pp.165-166 (Wogihara ed.) has dealt with a theme very similar to that of the *sūtra* just quoted. A Bodhisattva sees a

robber who is prepared to kill a great number of persons, among which are *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas* and *bodhisattvas*. He reflects:

*"If I kill this robber, I shall be reborn in hell; if this robber commits a murder, he will be condemned to hell".*

Thus in order to save the robber from this evil destiny, the Bodhisattva, horrified for the crime he is about to perform and full of compassion for the robber, kills the robber when he sees him having a good thought or a neutral thought from moral point of view. Asaṅga concludes that the Bodhisattva not only does not commit an offense (punishable with the expulsion from the Saṅgha), but on the contrary he accumulates merit:

*asti ca kiṃ-cit prakṛti-sāvadyam api yad bodhisattvas tad-rūpeṇôpāyau-  
kauśalena samudācarati, yenân-āpattikaś ca bhavati bahu ca puṇyaṃ  
prasūyate. yathā 'pi tad bodhisattvaḥ coraṃ taskaraṃ prabhūtānāṃ  
prāṇi-sātānāṃ mah'ātmanāṃ śrāvaka-pratyeka-buddhabodhisattvānāṃ  
vadhāyôdyatam āmiṣa-kiṃcitka-hetoḥ prabhūt'ānantarya-karma-kriyā-  
prayuktaṃ paśyati. dṛṣṭvā ca punar evaṃ cetasā cittam abhisamṣkaroti.  
yady apy aham enaṃ prāṇinaṃ jīvitād vyaparopya  
narakeṣūpapadyeya. kāmaṃ bhavatu me narakôpapattiḥ. eṣa ca sattva  
ānantaryaṃ karma kṛtvā mā bhūn naraka-parāyaṇa iti. evam-āśayo  
bodhisattvas taṃ prāṇinaṃ kuśala-citto 'vyākṛta-citto (var. lect.:  
kuśala-cittam a-vyākṛta-cittaṃ) vā veditvā ṛṭyamānaḥ anukampā-  
cittam ev' āyatyām upādāya jīvitād vyaparopayati. an-āpattiko bhavati  
bahu ca puṇyaṃ prasūyate.*

In the *Upāyakausālyajñānottarabodhisattvapariṣcchā*, preserved in three Chinese translations [*Taishō*, Vol. XI, 310 (38) (*Ta tch'eng fang pien houe*), and Vol. XII, 345 (*Houe*), and Vol. XII, 345 (*Houe*)], and

Vol. XII, 346 (*Ta fang houang chan k'iao fang pien king*)], and in two Tibetan translations: *Tōhoku* 261 (*Hphags-pa thabs mkhas-pa shes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-poḥi mdo / Ārya-Upāyakaśālyā-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra*, translated from the Chinese translation *Taishō* 345), and *Tōhoku* 82 [*Hphags-pa sañs rgyas thams-cad-kyi gsañ chen thabs-la-mkhas-pa byañ-chub-sems-dpañ ye śes dam-pas shus-paḥi leḥu shes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-poḥi mdo / Ārya-Sarvabuddhamahārahasyopāyakaśālyā-Jñānottarabodhisattvapari-prcchā-parivarta-nāma-mahāyānasūtra*, that corresponds to the Chinese translation *Taishō* 310 (38)] is found a story similar to that previous ones, in which the Bodhisattva is presented as the captain of a ship who kills a robber that had the intention to kill the merchants traveling in the ship.

It could be said that the doctrine of these two texts is the following one: the absolute norm of *ahiṃsā* may be discarded when several conditions are complied with: 1. the purpose of the violent action (and this is the only purpose admitted) must be to prevent the victim from committing an action which entails a very grave moral fault and which consequently gives rise to a severe punishment as karmic retribution. It is not even a self defensive act; in reality it is an act whose aim is to defend another being from doing to himself a great moral harm; 2. the agent of the violent act must not harbour in his mind any feeling of hatred or anger against his victim; on the contrary he must act impelled only by a great compassion for his victim and the desire to save him from a bad destiny; 3. the agent of the violent act is conscious that he is performing an action that is contrary to the moral Order, and that he will be punished for doing it. He assumes a bad *karman* in order to liberate his victim from it. The action itself does not loose in any moment its negative character of a *bad action*, notwithstanding the compassionate intention of the agent of the violent act. If the agent harvest some merit from his action, it is not as an effect of his violent act, but as an effect of his feelings of compassion and his will to benefit his victim; 4. the agent of the violent

action must choose, for carrying on his crime, the moment in which his victim is experiencing feelings and thoughts more propitious to ensure him a good *post-mortem* destiny<sup>25</sup>.

### *Final remarks*

It is interesting to confront the Buddhist position towards violence and its justification, with those of the *Rig Veda* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

For the violence of the Aryan invasion of India and its justification as found in the *Rig Veda*, Buddhism can only have a total and absolute rejection. Buddhism can not accept a war of conquest, inspired in greediness and ambition, and which provoked massacres, arson, robbery and all the other evils which the *Rig Veda* poets enjoy describing. So the history of India begins with an act of violence, but it is worthy of admiration that it is precisely the culture of the same India which has brought to its highest level the ideal of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). And it is the culture of India which gave birth to three great champions of peace, Buddha, Aśoka, Gandhi - to whom we must add H.H. the XIV<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama: inspired in the teachings of the great Buddhist masters, Indian and Tibetan, and in the teachings of Gandhi, the Dalai Lama has become in the present days the proclaimer of peaceful methods to solve international conflicts.

The confrontation of Buddhism and *Bhagavad Gītā* is much more complex. The *Bhagavad Gītā* enjoins violence as a moral duty (*svadharma*) for the warrior with two restrictions. One has to do with the aim or purpose of violence (the defense of several values or beings); the other with the mental attitude that must possess the agent of the violent act (detachment). In this way - as we have said - violence has been introduced in the moral system. And, as a moral act, the act of violence carried on in the frame of the indicated restrictions has a reward: heaven. Buddhism, centered around the notion of *ahiṃsā*, proclaims a universal moral system (*dharma*) which in absolute terms rejects the violent act, which in all cases remains an act

contrary to moral and as such subject to karmic punishment. Violence cannot ever be justified. Concerning violence, the Buddhist position marks a progress in relation to *Bhagavad Gītā* and represents the culmination of the non-violence feeling in India.

According to Buddhist systematization, the violent act can be performed by means of three channels: body, speech and mind (or thought or intention). In the preceding pages we have limited ourselves to violence through bodily action (*kāyena*) inflicted on human beings, and to the moral norms that prohibit it. In order to have a more complete idea of Buddhist position towards violence, it would be necessary to examine violence through words (*vācā*) and violence through mind (*manasā*), and also the norms that intend to provoke or to promote those feelings or attitudes, such as *maitrī* (Pāli: *mettā*), *karuṇā*, *mārdava* (*maddava*), *avaira* (*avera*), *avyābadhya* (*avyāpajjha*), etc., which hinder the forthcoming of violence in any of its aspects. It would also be necessary to study the application of the precept of *ahiṃsā* not only to *all* human beings but also to animals<sup>26</sup> and even to the whole insentient nature, like plants, mountains, rivers<sup>27</sup>. Such a study would reveal the same rejection of violence that we have found in the quoted texts.

Although repudiation of violence is a feature common to many cultures and religions in the West and in the East, it seems to us that what characterizes Buddhism is, on one side, the intensity and profundity of the awareness of the extreme necessity to eliminate violence from human conduct<sup>28</sup> and, on the other side, the great extension of the feeling of compassion has reached in it, encompassing all forms of being.

## FOOT NOTES

1 Cf. F.Tola and C.Dragonetti, "Historia y Violencia" in *Philosophia Pacis, Homenaje a Raimon Panikkar*, edited by M. Siguan, Madrid: Símbolo Editorial, 1989, pp.247-259.

2 Cf. H.Zimmer, *Altindisches Leben, Die Cultur der Vedischen Arier nach den Samhitā dargestellt*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1879. Reprint: Hildesheim-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973, Erstes Buch, Kapitel IV; A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967 (Reprint of the 1912 edition), *sub* Dasyu, Dāsa, Sūdra; S. Piggot, *Prehistoric India*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1981, Chapter VI (Reprint of the 1950 edition); Buddha Prakash, *Ṛgveda and the Indus Valley Civilization*, Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Institute, 1966, pp.83-84; M. Wheeler, *Civilizations of the Indus Valley and Beyond*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, pp.78-83; M. Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968 (3rd. edition).

3 According to context, a designation of the *dasyus* (aborigines).

4 Indra.

5 Name of a non-Aryan people.

6 Probably an Aryan chiftain.

7 This expression designates pregnant black women or, metaphorically, the citadels where the black *dasyus* dwell.

8 Indra.

9 Father of the Aryan race.

10 A *dasyu*.

11 A *dasyu*.

12 A *dasyu*.

13 Name of a place.

14 Two *dasyus*.

15 Aryan King.

16 Aryan King.

17 Aryan chieftain, patron of the poet.

18 An impressive description of the crimes of the Spanish conquest of Latin America can be found in Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevísima descripción de la destrucción de las Indias*, 1552 (many editions); Juan C. Vedoya, *La expoliación de América*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Bastilla, 1973; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o el oro en las Indias, siglo XVI*, Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, 1989, and in Ricardo Herren, *La conquista erótica de las Indias*, Barcelona (Spain): Planeta, 1991. Henry Méchoulán's book *Le sang de l'autre ou l'honneur de Dieu*, Paris: Editions Fayard, 1979, contains an exposition of the different theories maintained by the Spanish

ideologists at the time of the conquest of Latin America in order to justify it. The treatise written in Latin in the XVIth century by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Dialogum de justis belli causis apud indos* (edited with Spanish translation by M. Menéndez y Pelayo and a study by Manuel García-Pelayo, under the title *Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra contra los Indios*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1979) constitutes, under its Aristotelian garb, a disgusting defence and justification based on God's will of violence, war, conquest and slavery. Cf. of the same Sepúlveda, *De rebus hispanorum ad novum terrarum orbem Mexicumque gestis (De orbe novo)*, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1993, I §§12 and 13 where he reaffirms his doctrinary position about the right of Christians to submit the countries of the "barbarians" and to convert them to Christian religion. In the following paragraphs Sepúlveda describes the cruelties committed by the Spaniards against the "barbarians".

A treatise similar to that of Sepúlveda could have been written by any Assyrian theologian or ideologist reproducing the ideas expressed in the Assyrian inscriptions as gathered and analyzed by Bustenay Oded, in his book *War, Peace and Empire, Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992.

Another case of violence and its justification (though beyond the limits of a war of conquest) is given by the "peculiar institution" of slavery in the United States of America. Africans captured in Africa were brought by force to the United States of America in order to be sold as slaves: this "institution" lasted during two centuries at least, it had its fervent defensors who based their arguments in the Bible, in race and in culture, and it only finished thanks to a bloody war of five years, that caused immense suffering, and to whose arising contributed in a not small measure the authoress of *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, to whom Abraham Lincoln called "*the little lady who made this big war*". From the enormous

literature existent on the subject let us mention the excellent book of James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire. The Civil War and Reconstruction*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992, 2nd. edition.

It could be possible, in a general way and for humanity's shame, to write a treatise on the justification of violence in the history of the world.

19 The Pāṇḍavas had the right to fight against the Kauravas and to destroy them because the Kauravas were *ātatayinas* (*Bhagavad Gītā* I,36) evil-doers, felons, would-be murderers who committed many crimes against the Pāṇḍavas: the Kauravas had set fire to the house of the Pāṇḍavas, they had given poison to Bhīma, they had deprived them of their property and kingdom, they had insulted Draupadī, their wife, in open royal court, and they were planning to launch an armed attack on them. And they did not accept a peaceful settlement of the conflict by granting to the Pāṇḍavas even five hamlets. Cf. K.N. Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgītā*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971, p.527. In *Mahābhārata* VIII (*Karṇaparvan*), 67,1 ff. (Poona critical edition), when Karṇa requests Arjuna to stop fighting according to the prescriptions of Dharma (because he has gone down from his chariot which has sunk in the earth), Kṛṣṇa asks him "where had Dharma gone" (*dharmah kva te gataḥ*) when he and the Kauravas insulted Draupadī, cheated the Pāṇḍavas and killed Abhimanyu, the young son of Arjuna.

20 Cf. É. Lamotte, *Notes sur la Bhagavadgītā*, Paris: P. Geuthner, 1929, pp. 93-115.

21 This sūtra is not to be confounded with the first *sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. It is a most important text in the history of Chinese Buddhism. It contains the general principles that regulate monastic life. According to tradition it was translated in 406 A.D. by Kumārajīva from Sanskrit into

Chinese, but nothing is known of the Indian original. Probably it is an apocryphal work composed in China. Cf. Ch. Elliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, III, pp.322-324, and in R.E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, the article of Paul Groner on the *Fan-wang ching*, pp.251-290. It was translated into French by J.J.M. de Groot, *Le Code du Mahāyāna en Chine, son influence sur la vie monacale et sur le monde laïque*, Amsterdam: J.Müller, 1893.

22 É. Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1949 (Reprint 1967).

23 Cf. P. Demiéville, "Le Bouddhisme et la guerre", in *Choix d'Études Bouddhiques 1929-1970*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1977, pp. 261-299.

24 Free, independent.

25 The importance of *ahiṃsā* is also seen in the fact that one of the reasons why theft is prohibited is that it inflicts harm and pain to the person that has been robbed. Cf.M. Hofinger, "Le Vol dans la Morale Bouddhique", in *Indianisme et Bouddhisme, Mélanges offerts à Mgr.Étienne Lamotte*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1980, pp.183-184 (Spanish translation in *Revista de Estudios Budistas* N° 5, México-Buenos Aires, 1993, pp.49-66).

26 On violence against animals and vegetarianism cf. Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, pp.199-201; and on the same theme and on animal

sacrifices J.P. McDermott, "Animals and Humans in Early Buddhism", in *Indo Iranian Journal* 32, N° 4, 1989, pp.271-275.

27 Cf.L.Schmithausen, "Buddhismus und Natur", in *Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, edited by R.Panikkar and W.Strolz, Freiburg: Herder, 1985, pp.100-133; "Buddhism and Nature", in *International Symposium on the occasion of Expo' 90 "Buddhism and Nature"*, Osaka, 1990, published as *Proceedings of the Symposium* by The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, Tokyo, 1991 (Spanish translation of the last article in *Revista de Estudios Budistas* N° 1, México-Buenos Aires, 1991, pp.63-85).

28 The primordial experience of the founder of Buddhism, which gave rise to his Teaching, was the discovery of suffering as an essential dimension of human nature, and his efforts were directed to find a way out from it. Thus, being violence one of the most important causes of suffering for living beings, that special awareness had to have a noteworthy development in Buddhism.