

Spirituality: An Indian Christian Perspective

T.K. John SJ

Vidyajyoti, 23, Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi 110054

The term “spirituality” repels and attracts. It repels for a variety of reasons, chief among them being the tone of devaluation of the concerns of life here on earth, the secular, and an apparent over stress on the individual ‘spiritual’ concerns. Empirical pursuits and consequent reduced concern for the ‘spiritual’ have sometimes been seen in conflict. The term ‘spirituality’, on the contrary, has been exerting an enormous influence and power on peoples – always, in all traditions. After analyzing the problem, the author sees spirituality as a moral or soul force, specially in the Indian or Hindu context. All religions do provide innumerable examples. Many hold that if religion is the very meaning dimension of a culture, spirituality is the very core of religiosity. It attends to the depth dimension of the human person. To keep the balance between the legitimate concerns of the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘bodily’, has been a precarious task in religions. Vigilance over unilateral development can keep the balance. The rendering above of spirituality in terms of moral force, soul force seems to offer us such a balance. The author pleads that the two religions, Hinduism and Christianity can engage in a fruitful dialogue and interaction to serve the goal of religion as well as the deepest aspirations of the people.

Keywords: spirituality, moral force, soul force, suffering, Hindu spirituality.

Introduction

‘Spirituality’ – a magic word it has been. The word attracts and repels. Attracts for what it promises and holds. World wide, east west, travel has been taking place in search of resorts where one can quench the inner quest. A rush to India is noticeable. The word repels for a variety of reasons, chief among them being the tone of devaluation of the concerns of life here on earth, the secular, and an apparent over stress

on the individual 'spiritual' concerns. Empirical pursuits and consequent reduced concern for the 'spiritual' have sometimes been seen in conflict. The term 'spirituality', on the contrary, has been exerting an enormous influence and power on peoples – always, in all traditions. All religions do provide innumerable examples. Many hold that if religion is the very meaning dimension of a culture, spirituality is the very core of religiosity. It attends to the depth dimension of the human person.

a. Problems Before Us

Foraying into a very ancient concern, Spirituality has its perils and benefits. Is the 'spirit' in the human an ally of the body only or an integral part? Is the body a mere vehicle only, to be set aside on reaching the destination? Is 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity' still a life promoting perception or a one-time value, of relative import? Is the legitimate concern for the 'spirit' trivializing the 'secular pursuit' and highlighting 'the spiritual pursuit' at the expense of 'truly and fully human'? Can we have 'spirituality' without suppressing/bypassing 'the material, the bodily, the empirical and the historical'? What is the role of the ancient and the established insights and perspectives to honour the full human development in the light of today's ? How will the dazzle of the consumerist culture and the million progenies of the techno-culture live with the needs and demands of the 'spirit' in traditional 'spirituality'?

Treatment of the theme—Indian Christian Spirituality — calls for a dynamics in which dialogical interaction for a religious and cultural structuring and development becomes necessary. The reason is that both the 'Indian' and the 'Christian' components should be brought in for a creative interaction in view of establishing an 'Indian Christian' identity. This has to be based on a sound theological foundation. But we know 'Indian Christian' identity is much debated. It has engaged the attention of sociologists at the level of disciplines. Hindu revival groups in India have expressed their views on it rather aggressively. Even prior to that it had been a concern in the Christian communities, especially after the Church in India Seminar in the wake of the Vatican II's call for renewal. To meet these threefold demands the following method is employed in making reflections on Spirituality: Indian Christian Perspective in an interactive manner

b. Three Requirements

For a reflection on Spirituality: Indian Christian Perspective at least three requirements need to be met with, since the phrase 'Indian Christian' needs to be established.

The first requirement for such an 'Indian Christian' identity is a sound theology of creation. The phrase 'Indian Christian' contains two components: namely, 'Indian' and 'Christian'. The former needs further elucidation, for which creation theology has to be the foundation based on which the mutuality of relationship can be established. That means the Christian in India should discerningly own and internalize whatever values are found fit for the Kingdom of God in Christ.

A second requirement is clarity about the Church's stand regarding the fact and the nature of world religions. Christians do express diverse views on them and the official Church also has its own stand. What, according to the Christian teaching as held by the Church, might be the role of religions in God's plan of salvation, is the moot question. It is based on the answer that today an 'Indian Christian' perspective can be evolved. In other words, a sound theology of world religions is assumed to initiate theological reflection on the theme.

For the Church in India to become truly local and universal, a creative relationship with the religious plurality prevailing here is important.

And a third requirement is a sound theology of inter-religious dialogue. Late in origin, dialogue among religions has been a growing phenomenon among some religions, especially in Christianity. Certainly something is evolving in this regard.

These three dimensions should become integral to an 'Indian Christian perspective' and should be incorporated into the dynamics of the treatment. In following this up a new development has taken place in the Church. It has changed the face of the Church and made her a good listening friend and partner in the world of today. Therefore essentials of the growing theology of dialogue should be introduced in order to be fair to the demands of the context in the elaboration.

Why is a sound Theology of Creation required to evolve an Indian Christian perspective on spirituality? Because the creation of the world,

especially that of humankind, was planned by God's exuberant love for humankind. That plan was a comprehensive one, including the attainment of the ultimate destiny which is participation in the life of God. Of course the entire project is a gratuitous act. About the nature and solidity as well as the true worth of the human person before God the Constitution on the Church categorically states: "By an utterly free and mysterious decree of His own wisdom and goodness, the eternal Father, created the whole world. His plan was to dignify men (and women) with a participation in His own divine life" (LG 2).

2. Spirituality as a A MORAL FORCE, SOUL FORCE

If the conquest of the Indian subcontinent by the English was by the use of physical power –in the guise of trade, then guns, supported by Machiavellian tactics, pressure, threat, and blatant aggression, the liberation of the subcontinent was by means of a different power – 'MORAL FORCE', 'SOUL FORCE'. The elements for that moral, ethical weapon were drawn from Indian, and Christian sources. It was fashioned by an Indian genius, M. K. Gandhi. On this platform of MORAL FORCE, SOUL FORCE, all Indians can assemble to wage the war of liberation at a deeper level. I consider SPIRITUALITY – INDIAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE a very appropriate equivalent of the Moral Force. I am convinced that on this platform both the Christians and Hindus can converge for meeting the formidable challenges the people of India still face, in spite of sixty years of self-management. The existing walls of indifference, exclusion, antagonism and hostility could be left behind. A new era of partnership for a better India could be constructed.

a. Three Components of the 'Moral Force'

The first component was the power of truth. The new Indian weapon fashioned by Gandhi is known as Satyagraha. 'Satyagraha' meant holding on tenaciously to the power of truth to fight evil in the form of domination, repression, oppression, exploitation or other forms. Truth reigns high in the scale of ethical and moral values that adorn a human person. It is also a force, a power. Truth exerts enormous power on minds. None can resist truth. For Gandhi Truth is God. Believing and trusting in God is the practice of truth, and holding on to truth is offering

worship and honour to God. Therefore holding on to the power of truth to overcome evil, to conquer evil in the form of domination, oppression or other misadventures, is already a battle against untruth.

A second component of the Moral Force is *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means affirmation of all beings' right to live; therefore non-injury to them, and consequently, virtual, real and effective love for all living beings. This love is expressed first negatively as non-injury. But its positive and real content is Love. Love is not only a moral but also a theological virtue.

A third component is faith in God. The origin and destiny of all human beings is God. For Gandhi truth is God. Holding on to truth is holding on to God. That is faith in God. The supremacy of the Spirit of God is affirmed in all Spiritualities other than Buddhist.

A coherent integration of these elements into one gives us an integral Spirituality. For the main agents in most Spirituality are: God, God in collaboration with human beings, the 'spirit' in the humans taking hold of the human in the person as planned and executed by God. Such a process enlightens and reshapes human conduct, and through that influences the community, society, thereby raising the quality of the life of individuals, families, institutions and society in general –all these are aspects of what is originally meant by Spirituality. 'Spirituality' is the final form of the simultaneous action of the above components. It becomes a Moral Force.

Another name for moral force is **Spiritual Force**. Both the phrases were used in the course of the struggle for freedom. Human beings are primarily spiritual beings. They are distinct from other living beings because of the spirit within, the spirit that animates the human person, leading to specifically human acts.

b. Term Clarifying Process, and Entry into the Theme

The Anglo-Saxon word spirit has its equivalent, more or less, in the Indian rendering as *atman*. Spirituality in some of the Indian languages is also rendered as *adhyatmam*, *adhyatma vidya* etc. In Hinduism *atman* and *Brahman*, the Supreme Being, are often identified. One reason for this identification is that the spirit/*atman* in the human is immaterial. The Bible holds that human beings are created in the image

and likeness of God. The reason for this is that human beings participate in the very nature of God.

Given these diverse roots and sources of the phrase Moral Force, we Hindus and Christians have a beautiful ethico-spiritual platform for assembling and planning for the elimination of the negative in our society and contributing further to the freedom/liberation of the people of India. It provides us with a sound dialogue in action.

c. Source of Satyagraha

We may recall that the weapon of satyagraha was derived from different sources.

First, Henry Thoreau's elaboration of the rights of the citizen to resist bad laws from whatever source and its concrete rendering in the form of *civil disobedience* was a major inspiration for satyagraha. Civil disobedience is a non-violent peaceful resistance to the bad laws of the State. Leon Tolstoy's rendering of some religious classics and his experiments further contributed to it.

Second, the great Sermon on the Mount, which had a lasting impact on the minds of millions, especially on Gandhi, was another source. Jesus' teaching, "If any one strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also" (Lk 6:29), and "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk 6:31) made Gandhi reflect deeply on the Christian sources.

Third, respect for life, the animating power in all living beings, a key tenet of Jain-Buddhist traditions also contributed to the same.

Finally, Hindu scriptural teachings, and their elaboration through the three great acharyas, Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva, on the Supreme, as *advaita*, was the major anchorage in his life. But for Gandhi it is *advaita* in action. Action is not ritual but service of the people, especially of the least and the last.

Moral Force, Spiritual force, therefore is none other than an integration of some major spiritual ethical moral philosophical strands like these.

3. The Problem Before All: NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES, SUFFERING

A major factor for the development of a discipline like Spirituality in all religions is the question put to Yama by the *jijnasa*-filled student Naciketas:

“This doubt that there is in regard to a man deceased:

‘He exists’, say some; ‘He exists not’, say others—

This would I know...” (Katha Upanishad, I, 20).

Not a single home there was/is/will be on earth from the earliest history till its consummation where this question was not raised, directly or indirectly.

What packs this question of questions with anxiety, earnestness and poignancy? The person who was till this moment seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, deciding, loving, caring, hating, enjoying, possessing, acquiring, planning to invest — is now a mere inert, lifeless, disintegrating ‘body’ with all activities ceased! *That* which was in it, that which is *not* there now, that which has gone out of it — does it exist? Or does it not exist? Can dark Death shed light on this? For in its light one needs to organize one’s life, says wisdom. What then should be the concern of the ‘living person’?

‘*Svobhava—ephemeral things*’ Shot back the enquiring Nachiketas, when the expected answer was waved and alternatives like wealth were offered. The surprising judgment seems to resonate with some strands in the Bible too. For instance: “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,.. all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes I,1). Oriental wisdom entered the Biblical world and began to influence subsequent eras. It now concurs with the Indian insight.

A large portion of ancient humanity’s wisdom was born around this question. Equally, much of that wisdom and knowledge was devoted to this question.

Many questions like these spring up and surprise us with the topic above. It is not possible to address them within the limited scope of this short essay.

4. Within the Christian Tradition

I introduce Lily, Tulip, Mango blossom, Rose, Jasmine, tiny Grass flowers, Chrysanthemum — their kind excites eyes, stimulates nostrils, soothes even distraught hearts, and germinates poetry and paintings in the brain-imagination laboratory. The less noticed silent miracle workers behind the scene like the soil, the water, sunlight, and the human service like pruning, are not that easily present in the minds of the admirers at those moments. But the truth is that the former are the products of a well-orchestrated process that dynamically takes place through the mediation of the latter. It is all one process with slightly varied manifestations. The well planned and meticulous processing precedes the blooming and the flowering. Spirituality is a project similar to it and the product also is desired to be similar.

There are ‘flowers’ in the realm of the human species too. We recall that paradise was our birthplace. And paradise signifies abundance of resources and fulfilment. Let me pick up a bunch of ‘flowers’ and place it before us: ‘love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’ (Gal5:22). Just as the bunch above effortlessly compels adoration and exaltation, so the bunch below calls for submission, surrender and emulation. They are more precious than pearls of great value. To listen to the list is almost like scaling avidly a portrait of a well developed human person. The glow and fragrance of one ‘flower’ in the first item in the second list is, love. Love is further described in terms of its manifestation: ‘Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth’ (1Cor13:4-6). These pearl-like berries constitute a garland that decks a ‘woman/man’ – that is the expectation of true religion. Such men and women can be considered as the best flowering of the human in every one of us. One would wish that these became the cornerstone or preamble of a new society that could be constructed, to replace the existing one. Here too the processing and pruning precedes the blooming and the flowering of the human-divine mix.

A family, community or society or nation built and structured on these will shine.

The concern of these pages is to investigate who is that miracle working Agent, who the collaborators and what the process. The result expected is further clarity on 'spirituality'.

Over against these luminous figures and concepts I introduce here fifteen words that portray the opposite, forming an ugly and repelling picture, probably like thorns in the rose plant:

'Fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these' (Gal 5:20). Not a very civilizing list to be associated with human nature, but it is actual human behaviour. Someone or something is missing here. Some element in the processing chain of actions is missing. Something has gone wrong. Therefore these products of the same human material bite, prick, cut, wound, divide and even stink. If flowers spray fragrance and bees distil honey from the pollen of the flowers, the elements in the second list above waft bad odour, keep people at a distance, and generate wicked sentiments in human hearts. A culture polluted by hatred, mutual antagonism, and consequent violence is the outcome. A family, community, society built on this network will disintegrate.

We need to identify the missing agent and miss-calculated process. This is also part of the task of the process of spirituality.

Let me advance a description of Spirituality guided by the texts above. 'Spirituality can be described as that power and dynamics that transforms raw human materials, marked by properties like those in the second group, into humans marked by properties in the first list. The prime agent at work in that dynamics is the Holy Spirit, according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and heritage. The secondary agent of course is the human person freely co-operating with the Spirit. The word 'sadhana' conveys much of it, analogically. Both the Christian and Hindu traditions converge much on this point.

The philosopher Aristotle had placed the truth before us that animality is a component of the human species. Unless directed by reason it can dominate the person. The noble element in the human person, the 'image and likeness of God', is immersed in and is integrated into this dimension in the human. In the Christian vision the 'rational', which is an expression of the 'human spirit', and the Spirit of Christ

that one receives at baptism, act conjointly. The sway of the 'rational' and of the Spirit of Christ are often impeded because of the overwhelming force of the purely animal in the human. Consequently instinct-led decisions and actions dominate. And, since it is actions that shape human behaviour, it can favourably or adversely affect the individual and collective culture of the community. Untamed greed, for instance, dominates a person, and making use of social and economic power, succeeds in being a threat to the ordinary members of the society. Uncontrolled desire breeds greed, and greed-led possessions unjustly acquired create restlessness in the individual and imbalance in society too. Social and economic analysts as well as media scanners often place before us the true nature and structure of society today built up on counter-values like those above. Theologians have termed them sinful structures. Then worship of mammon and courting of hedonism prevail over the rational and the truly human.

On the contrary, when both these powers are in enlightened and mature subordination to the voice and will of God, we have a situation where both the individual and the community are in a state of tranquillity and peace. Spirituality in all religions aims at initiating a process whereby the regulatory, the 'educating' and the disciplining processes are made internal to the person that becomes aware of the inner developments. Again, Spirituality can be considered as that process (*sadhana*) in which the superior principles — the rational, and the Spirit, preside over the deliberation-decision-action components of conduct that help the 'becoming' of the person. This seems to be the prevailing consensus over the conceptualization of 'spirituality'.

Then what is missing here in the unattractive picture of the distraught person we have in Gal 5:20? In the natural process the adept human agents — the gardener, the peasant, the shepherd — dexterously combine the various elements like the soil, water, weeding etc. In the case of the human milieu that dexterous wise and generous gardener in most religions is regarded as the divine agent. The 'Spirit of God' is the name of that masterly agent in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The 'atman' is a common name in many a Hindu tradition. In Patanjali yoga terms like 'purusha' do figure. In that, Purusha is seen in a state of conflict with the blind irrational force or instinct, *prakrti*. What is common to many religions is the desire to be free of these enslaving

forces within and enjoy deep peace and harmony. Therefore Spirituality is the discipline that actively promotes the role of the reason and of the Spirit of God in human conduct.

The problem is that forgetting our spiritual nature, because of the storms that rage within a person, abiding by the needs and nature of the 'spirit' is often not possible. Vigilance, disciplining and orienting to the goal is constantly necessary.

The two groups of words introduced above are picked up from the writings of Paul (Gal 5:22, ICor 13:4—6, and again Gal 5:20, in their respective order), the second founder of Christianity as the compliment has been given to him by some historians of the Church. The words, the text, and the mind of the author are all full of the new wind blowing upon the earth following the central event in human history: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The new communities that have sprung up around the Mediterranean Sea, in West Asia in general and coastal North Africa, have been breathing this aura of the Resurrection, and inhaling the Spirit released after the Resurrection, especially at Pentecost. The Peace with which Jesus Christ greets the disciples is won after the fierce battle with the forces of evil in the hearts of men and women. This conflict is symbolized by the Cross, and God's Plan at work in human history through His intermediaries like the prophets, the men and women of goodwill and righteousness. Christian spirituality is best located in this context incorporating these two dimensions

Paul has also traced the source of these contrast pictures within man/woman: the former image emerges if the Spirit is allowed to invest richly in the human, so that the human and the divine work harmoniously. But there is tension between the forces, so that harmonious work is jeopardized. Paul's exhortation is to be aware of the Spirit — flesh conflict and he advises the Christians to be on guard:

“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want”(Gal.5,16).

More agonizingly the conflict is depicted:

“For I do not do what I want to, but I do what I do not want” (Rom.7,16)

A similar tension is found existing and operating in some of the Hindu understanding of the human situation too. Hindu spirituality begins with the efforts at discovering the roots of this tension and resolving it, so that one is in possession of the freedom and peace that is proper to the sway of the 'atmic' or 'adhyatmam'. Hindu 'sadhana' is the process aimed at this. We will revert to the Judaeo-Christian world.

In the Judaeo-Christian world the resistance to the Spirit, stemming from the realm of 'the flesh' has its own explanation. Paul introduces this to us through a language different from the ordinary: "Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned... Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses.." (Rom 5:13-14) .

The words sin and death, besides their literal interpretation and application, refer to a complex of human tragedies that mark the pathetic, the tragic and the distressing in human history: suffering (physical, mental, moral, spiritual), violence (physical, mental, economic, cultural, racial, religious, sexual), poverty (economic, social, cultural, emotional), exploitation (human, economic, racial, gender), injustice (economic, social, moral, cultural, gender), and sexual aberrations. An overall decline of values is what these amount to.

Why such a situation? Loss of grace or life divine, sway of the Satanic, worship of wealth over against yielding to the sovereign will of Yahweh, were pointed out as sources of this mega estrangement from the very nature and integrity of the human created in the image and likeness of God and called to a participation in the very life of God.

Part of prophetism in Israel was a pronounced stand against these condemned forces, expressed in some cases by a withdrawal from society and its pursuits. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha are symbols of this trend in the early days of Judaism.

With the Incarnation a deepening of this process took place. The particular life-style of Jesus provided the world with a particular model of spirituality. He was born to a poor family, in a manger, sending out a particular message for the worshippers of mammon. He took to the life of a mendicant, enjoying the freedom of a renouncer. He was

constantly in communion with the Father, thereby highlighting the primacy of being rooted in God and not in wealth or family ties and relations. He was mostly with the poor and the marginalized (the *anawim* have their hope and reliance on God and less on accumulated wealth and sufficiency of the human). More particularly Jesus called for a more radical way of living for the sake of the Kingdom.

Jesus Christ had on different occasions compared the human quest for the Kingdom to a treasure-drive, leaving behind the less valued treasures of ordinary human pursuit, to a most precious treasure, the Treasure..

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt.6, 21). Here reference is to a particular drive of the human heart from its depth which needs to be listened to and explored.

There are two brilliant and even classical descriptions of this magnetic power within the human setting it on a hunt for a priceless wisdom implied in this relentless search. We turn to that text (Mathew 13, 44):

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”.

The very next verse in the same narration contains a similar insight:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Mt.13,46).

The following elements seem at work in this hot pursuit:

One, the selling of what one has in order to purchase the One Treasure. Wealth or social status or individual attainments on which the blind human instincts dwell and enjoy, or the life of the senses as treasure, may be what is hinted at as the treasures to be sold in favour of the one of great value.

Second, giving up freely much that is treasured till the discovery of the new. In other words the first step of freeing oneself from the chords that bind one to these little treasures and creating an inner freedom for securing the Treasure.

Third, the influence of some power or attraction: certain intimation of the hidden treasure of unique quality and value in the not-yet dug up field forces her/him to sell all existing treasures or riches or acquisitions. Now it is clear that in the life of the prophets, and that of the disciples during and after the lifetime of Jesus, and in the subsequent development of spirituality in the Christian tradition, it is a decisive and exclusive option for God. The culture of renunciation in Judaic Christianity, and that of *tapas* and insistence on austerities are expressions of the 'selling of' the treasure. That done the objective becomes clear: and so one makes a prompt deal with the owner of the field to secure the one treasure of the greatest value lying under the earth. It is not an expression of negativism but a joy-filled opting for God.

Fourth, a judgment of a unique kind is involved in the exercise. A judgment against a set of values and pursuits and a judgment in favour something different, something that is unique, regarded as higher and better and soul-quenching.

Finally, there is the exercise of a particular vision or wisdom because we find the inner sense of the discoverer engaged in a comparative estimation: of what is in the hand and what is under the earth, in the given parable. In that process the dealer measures and assesses the value or the worth of the treasure far exceeding any she/he may have come across in one's lifelong business.

The three texts contain insights that have shaped the life of individuals and cultures down the ages in all religions. A visit to some of them is needed.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition what is 'sold' seems to be what pertains to and emanates from the body and its many-sided cravings which are considered as choking the deeper needs of the 'soul'.

When the Church emerged out of the era of repression and persecutions, these trends began to acquire a momentum that led to life in the desert, then the birth of monasticism and different forms of what is now termed 'religious life'. It is during these different phases of the new forms of Christian life that the word 'spirituality' began to appear prominently. Scholars who have studied the development have

put all subsequent developments into three broad schools or phases. These are the Purgative Way, the Illuminative Way and the Unitive Way.

5 The following could be considered to be some of the characteristics of Spirituality in the Christian world:

- a Pursuit of Contemplation of God as the chief concern and engagement. God in all, and everything in God to become the dominant concern in one's life. The treasure announced in the Gospels is for these seekers of the Treasure that is now the Triune God. The chief occupation of the Christian, of the 'consecrated', is declaredly this contemplation.
- b Making the affairs of the Kingdom of God the chief pursuit in one's life and activities becomes a major concern: an enthusiastic affirmation of the supremacy of the Spirit and its works, and prioritizing of the Treasure. The wise one sells all she/he has in order to purchase the treasure. God is the Treasure of treasures. He can be opted for after freeing the inner world of 'possessions', cravings and drives that keep one self-bound. This calls for taming and disciplining the self-oriented cravings, their gratifications and blind relish of earth-bound needs and wants.
- c Love and charity for all as expression of one's love for God. This is expressed through the service of God's people, especially the needy. An incarnate spirituality expresses itself in absorbing and doing what the Word Incarnate did. It was a spirituality of guileless service of the other. In serving the other you lower yourselves to be at the feet of the other, in true humility and truthfulness, as the Master did.
- d An assessment and judgment upon life pursuit as something to be relativized. Jesus gave priority to the plan of the Father, the Kingdom. To be a disciple of Christ, He demands radicalization of the values of the kingdom. Renunciation of your goods, embrace of the way of denial and the cross is a mark of this discipleship.
- e Life of renunciation: of possessions and all that attract the inner world. The culture of renunciation is given its due role in one's life and is marked by the process of what was known as 'purification of the soul', in order to achieve true freedom of the spirit.

- f Embracing a life of poverty, frugality and simplicity. This introduces a counter-cultural message for the open society, sections of which gloat over wealth and its promises.
- g Practice of asceticism and detachment from one's own self, one's relations, and possessions. This is to grow in increasing attachment to, clinging to God in contemplation.

5 Trend Tracing in Hinduism

The Hindu tradition begins with the perception of nature as the manifestation of a great Power. Every power is a god/goddess. Rgveda begins and thrives on this perception. 'Deva', 'the shining one' up in the celestial world, embodiments of the good, is a very early symbol. They are the victorious ones charged with spiritual power. Opposed to them are the *asuras*, embodiment of the evil forces

Then a gradedness of the density of the divine falls into the ken of the ancient sages and visionaries. From the external a gradual journey to the inward, to the interior, commences. The pilgrimage commences with food (*annam brahma*) as godly, and journeying through breath (*vayu brahma*), mind (*mano-maya*), and knowledge (*vijnana-maya*) as Spirit-filled, reaches the inmost world of bliss (*ananda-maya*) (Tait.Up.2).

With the thrill that is experienced at the realization of the inmost as constituted of bliss, the external world recedes, and even lapses into nothingness or only source of affliction (*ato'nyad artam* (Br. Up. 3: 4, 2; 3: 5). Deeper reflections on the *samsarik* (the empirical world) and the *saririk* (life in the embodied situation) begin to take place.

The world of suffering, nay, the world as suffering, and blocking the realization of the goal, appears at this juncture. The four key words in the Indic tradition that express this concern, drawn from different schools of Indian experience, and that could be considered as the flint that 'triggered' the quest after what now we designate as 'spirituality,' may be brought together. These are: *nitya-anitya*, (experience of permanence and impermanence, of pleasure and pain), *duhkha* (suffering in general), *kles* (afflictions, fluctuations in the mind) and *visada* (grief). It can be stated that it is the experience of suffering and

the vanishing nature of happiness, that prompted the ancients to reflect deeply over the sources of these unstable phenomena. Advaita and Buddhist spiritualities may be considered as triggered by the experience of the negative in the life of earnest seekers after freedom and peace. The well-known Yoga spirituality has its starting-point in the experience of *kles* (affliction). The countless fluctuations in the inner world moving in diverse and even opposed directions, set in motion by the multiple cravings, generate in the mind profound restlessness and distress. Analysis of the *kles*, its source, and the remedy, has become part of the Yoga spirituality.

In the Samkhya-Yoga traditions the trend to value more the needs of the 'atmic' and devalue those of the 'body' (*prakrti*, for instance, in the Patanjali yoga), is quite a pronounced one. There is a return to the dualism, exaltation of the world of the 'spirit' (*atman*, *purusha*) over against a devaluation of the empirical (the world of *prakrti*). Patanjali has his own rendering: to be free of the afflictions to be one with the Self (*kaivalya*).

Visada is another term with which the transformative experiences of Arjuna, as we have in the great *viswarupa darsana* of Bhagavad Gita, is introduced.

The galaxy of sages and visionaries (*rsis*) in India further contributed to the promotion of the concerns of the 'atman' and a devaluation of the concerns and needs of the *saririk* (*body*). The renouncer is the wise one (cfr. the *sreyas-preyas* discussion in the Kathopanisads).

We have the story of the intelligent, perceptive and ever-brooding young man of Kapilvastu to capture our imagination. He was in possession of wealth, youth, and power, on the one hand, and a heritage, on the other. His departure from these 'possessions and their grips' is preceded by a ruthless act of de-possession. This is succeeded by prolonged wanderings and disputations, to verify for oneself what he actually wanted. It was a quest. His was a bold act of despoliation in order to be on the treasure-driven journey.

And what was the result? He eventually attains to something which gives him supreme satisfaction. The millions of sculptures the world over show his face as reflecting the inner peace he attained as a result

of his illumination. It was a new treasure. What is that treasure he has not disclosed, not even to his trusted disciples. But he has suggested that each one should undertake her/his journey of search. The outcome of Sidharth's journey is now known as Buddhist spirituality

And what has been the impact on society? Buddhism has influenced a large part of Asia, and still attracts peoples from other parts of the world in many ways: non-violence, compassion for all living beings, taming one's violent nature, sobriety in living, and freedom from the many persuasions of the transient phenomenal world

The late historian Arnold J. Toynbee has in his twenty volume Study of History, traced the genesis of great civilizations to such illuminative experiences of the divine/transcendent/of God. Some of the great figures he has brought in to illustrate his central thesis are: Moses in the early dispensation, Jesus Christ in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Mohammed in the Islamic, Siddharth in the Buddhist traditions and heritages. There also are other figures that contribute still further to this trend. St Paul's experience of the fierce encounter with the divine in the desert on his way to Damascus, St Benedict's experience around Monte Cassino and its impact on Western Christian civilization, St Francis of Assisi and his influence on re-directing and re-shaping medieval Christianity, St Ignatius Loyola and his contribution in the sixteenth century, are among the outstanding leaders with profound 'spiritual' experiences in organizing individual life as well as life of the entire culture, even of the civilization. What can be perceived as common to these creative individuals is an overflow of the 'spiritual' in raising the quality of individual and communitarian life to a higher level.

Spiritual experiences are considered as leading to social transformation.

Three crucial moments are located in such experiences: the experience, the birth of a new vision, and the nature of the consequent transformation.

The significant consequences are also listed among others.

One, impact on one's own life: a disciplining and taming of the many cravings and drives, followed by a transition to a freer and elevated mode of life, at the individual level.

Second, there takes place a newer and wider conceptualization of social living. Many barriers are broken down and walls crumble and inter-relatedness increases. The individual realizes oneself as part of the wider society, discovers oneself as a social being with mutual obligations and indebtedness.

Third, affirmation of the ethical and the moral dimensions of individual and collective living and a greater esteem for the human enrich culture. This latter is concretely expressed by greater attention to the many that live on the margin of the society as a result of the high-handedness of the mighty and the powerful that operate without the ethical and the moral demands of the human. This virtually impacts on the society. A re-organization of life in the light of the new experiences takes place.

Moses' extraordinary experiences have had, according to historical counting, impact upon contemporary and succeeding generations. The prime impact was on organizing the primitive society, governed mostly by instincts interests and powers of individuals or groups, by creating a particular code of conduct. Moses is reported to have gained this transformative vision and experience while in contact with the great source: Yahweh. Human relationship and property relationship, two crucial areas in the life of any community that is so frequently prone to misguided behaviour, like exploitation, violence, rapacious greed-led accumulation and consequent violence, were organized and made subject to a disciplined code of conduct. The overall objective was for the people to become a community of mutually inter-related and mutually bound collectivity in the form of a community.

Fourthly, the emergence of a new culture and new values takes place. The quality of a culture depends upon the kind of values created disseminated and internalized by the members of the community. The liberative values ascribed to the Book of Exodus emanated from the experience.

Finally, a high degree of ethical and moral consciousness, influencing and shaping the economic and social responsibilities can be regarded as the ultimate empirical result of such experiences. The Torah is the crystallization of what Yahweh imparted to Moses in the course of the experience.

The sum total of this process is considered 'spirituality' which in many such cases becomes a socially transformative dynamics.

The Hindu Siddharth who became the Buddha (the enlightened), contributed to the emergence of the concept of *sangha*. Mosaic experience led to the creation of a community: Israel. We have in these cases a liberative spirituality.

Bhagavad Gita, a work that can be considered almost as a mini summa of much of what preceded in these areas in Hinduism, has introduced another term, namely, *visada* (grief). The analysis of *visada*, the remedy proposed, the invitation to contemplate the Lord in the very structure and manifestation of the cosmos, climaxes with the cosmic vision. Simple devotion and love for this great Lord is what is recommended. The Gita's spirituality will entail freedom from cravings and attachment to the Lord.

There is much that is common to these distinct schools where the development of particular spiritualities has been taking place. Much of these are attributed to the nature and activities of the human body. Ultimately all these are traced to nature and the role of *karma*. The argument is quite simple. Human actions determine human becoming. Since all acts do not come to fruition in one's lifetime, there was felt the need to posit rebirth, one or many, depending upon what happens when born.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the same phenomena, namely, sorrow and distress, be they physical, mental, social or structural, are explained in terms of the loss of grace and glory.

The Santi Parva of the Mahabharata contains many an insight of great value to organize the life not only of individuals but also of the wider community. The great epic is a poetic rendering of the mortal combat experienced by humanity. Every individual is subject to the

inner conflict raging fiercely, relentlessly, all in the dark, and hence the experiencing subject becomes disoriented and distressed. The struggle of every person spills over into the social fabric, leading to the formation of social groupings and structures that are pregnant with conflict potentialities leading to violence and other socially degenerative values. If the struggle in the early phase of India is personified in terms of *devas* and *asuras*, in the Upanishads between darkness and life, between death and deathlessness, in the Patanjali between two internal constitutive principles/forces, in the Mahabharata it is between two branches of one and same family or dynasty. The categories do change but the truth is maintained through succeeding ages. The humanizing and civilizing power that is the subject of the discourse is *dharma*, redefined beyond the ambit of the Mimamsa times.

The discourse of the dying Bhishma, after the great battle of Mahabharata, has exerted enormous influence in shaping the value systems in Hindu society. It is traced to the profound experience of the author of the great religious epic

Similarly, the cosmic vision (*visvarupa darsana*) of chapter 11 of the Bhagavadgita is credited with great influence in shaping society not only during the life-span of the author, but especially a wide spectrum of peoples down the centuries. Towards the end of the book there is the declaration of the outcome. The grief vanishes with the cosmic vision. Arjuna records:

“Destroyed is my delusion, I have gained knowledge through Thy grace, O Immaculate One”.

“I am firm, my doubts have fled away. I will do according to Thy word” (18, 73)

6 Some Distinctive Features of Hindu Approaches

- a Ravindranath Tagore has poetically described the overall Hindu perception of the Spirit in the world as follows:

“The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers” (Gitanjali.LXIX,p.46). This integral vision of God and the cosmos runs through the greater part of the Hindu tradition.

Jan Mason, barrister and head of the department of economics in the School of Economics in London, stated recently in an interview:

There is no conflict between worldly and spiritual life. Human beings are spiritual beings...All God asks is that we remember our spiritual nature, try to know it as well as we can and live naturally. This is possible in any lawful way of life (Times of India, January 16,2008).

- b However, confronted with the daily experiences of distress in many forms there has been a manifest trend to turn to the inner world there to discover the realm of the Spirit (*atman*). Increasing concentration upon what has been known as interiority has been another feature of Hindu spirituality. Betaking oneself to mountain resorts, places of solitude and silence to retire to engage in contemplation has become a common tradition and practice.
- c. This has in modern times been counterbalanced by combining contemplation and activities. We have the example of the spirituality of service, as advocated and put into practice by the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission, and by leaders like Gandhi. For the latter who was not a temple goer and not given to rituals, held that economic, political, cultural and other activities that contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life of people, is spirituality.
- d. If one considers the impact of Christian service upon perceptive Indian reformers as in the Ramakrishna Mission, Gandhi etc. one can hold that what we have here is Indian Christian Spirituality. For,

as a result of the silent and gradual osmosis that has been taking place in India, service has become a new component of Hindu identity. Service is authentically Christian in its origin.

- e. Conscious of the degraded human experience inflicted by the so-called upper caste upon the Dalits they have risen in open revolt. A bold repudiation of the social system and open acceptance of this identity the Dalits commit themselves to their liberation. This movement has given birth to what is known as the Dalit Spirituality. “I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me” is the voice of Yahweh (ISamuel,9:16). This is an echo of Exodus 3, 7 where Yahweh hears the cry of the people and summons Moses to go to the oppressor and register Yahweh’s protest. Mahatma Phule, B. R. Ambedkar, and others in this line have been listening to the travail of the caste-oppressed people of India. They took up their problems as their own and responded. The experiences of Moses, of Phule and Ambedkar are seen to irrupt and flow like lava after a volcano, engulfing society. Dalit Spirituality is currently growing as an authentic Christian spirituality. The two converge and become one.
- f. Land and people are central to the prophets in Israel. Toiling on the land for livelihood, and attributing to Yahweh its fruitfulness had become central to their worship. A people’s identity is thus rooted in God and in the land. Eviction of the traditional settlers in order to pave the way for multiple super-projects for the new era in industry has been unsettling the vast tribal population of India. Tribals of all walks of life have been through a massive upsurge protesting against incursion into their identity. What is sustaining them is a spirituality that is rooted in a particular understanding of the intimate relationship between land, identity, culture and religiosity. This tribal spirituality has been contributing to the spiritual wealth of India.

Conclusion

To keep the balance between the legitimate concerns of the 'spiritual' and the 'bodily', has been a precarious task in religions. Vigilance over unilateral development can keep the balance. The rendering above of spirituality in terms of moral force, soul force seems to offer us such a balance. The two religions, Hinduism and Christianity can engage in a fruitful dialogue and interaction to serve the goal of religion as well as the deepest aspirations of the people.

No of Words: 8,218
Date Received: October 15, 2007
Date Approved: December 28, 2007