

SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY IN INDIAN THOUGHT

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1.0 Introduction

Indian society is an inter-religious multicultural pluralistic society, where almost all the world religions are lived and professed. According to the census of 1991, of the total 812.3 millions of Indian population about 82.4 % are Hindus, 11.7 % Muslims, 2.3 % Christians, 2% Sikhs, .8% Buddhists, .4% Jains and .4% people of other religions and those who do not profess any religion.¹ Today, however, Indian population is about one billion. All these religions have their own Spiritual Theology, which differs from each other, in doctrine, tradition and practice even essentially. When we speak of Indian Spiritual Theology, we have to take into account the Indian reality and specially the diversity of these religions. In this given context however, with the limited time and space allotted to this paper, it is practically impossible to deal with the Spiritual Theologies of all religions and all the aspects of Indian reality. I will be concentrating mainly on Hindu Spiritual Theology as an existential context for our spirituality.

Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, and Hindu Spiritual Theology is essentially based on Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas* and especially the *Upanishads*. Besides, there are also other scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Epics and the *Purānas*, the Scriptures of *aivism* and *Vainavism*. Though some of these scriptures, especially the *Upanishads* are accepted by all, there is a lot of difference in their interpretation. This has given origin to different schools of thought (*darśanas*). There are six classical schools of thought (*darśanas*). All these concern themselves principally with the nature of human self (*ātman*), the divine self (*Brhman*) and

¹ Cf. *Census of India 1991*, series 1, Part 4, B (I), New Delhi, 1996

their interrelation. Thus the spiritual theology of Hindu thought concerns itself with God-man relation and the ways and means of promoting this relation. Hindus generally believe that human liberation and transformation is attained in perfect relation with God. This perfect relationship, however, is interpreted in different ways, mainly in dualistic and non-dualistic stand points. In India, Indian Philosophy, Indian Theology and Indian Spiritual Theology are all same. They all depend on Hindu scriptures and concern themselves with the liberation of man (*mokṣa*)

All these schools of thought *darśanas* may be also called by a more familiar name, *yoga*. The word 'yoga' has many meanings. Yoga is a school of Indian Philosophy called *Astanga Yoga*, founded by *Pātānjali* in about 1500 BC. Coming from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' similar to the Latin 'jugum', it implies union. Thus, yoga can mean union between self and God (*ātman* and *Brahman*), the way or the means of union, which implies psycho-somatic, moral and spiritual discipline.² The whole of Indian thought may be conveniently classified into three main schools of yoga, namely *Gnana Yoga* or the Way of Knowledge, *Bhakti Yoga* or the Way of Devotion and *Karma Yoga* or the Way of Action. There is, besides, an Integral Way, known as the *Integral yoga* of the *Bhagavad Gīta*, the Song of the Lord.

2.0 Methodology of Indian Spiritual Theology

Indian approach to Spiritual Theology is existential and experiential. Existential because it addresses the most existential problem, namely the problem of evil, pain and suffering. This approach comes from the general outlook of reality in the Indian thought. Whereas Aristotalian logic begins with universal and concludes with the particular, Indian logic begins with the particular, and ends with particular through universal. This approach is more in keeping with reality itself, because universal is a mental abstraction while particular is existential, experiential and objective. In this sense Indian approach seems to be more realistic. The same principle is applied also to Indian Spiritual Theology.

² GREGORY D'SOUZA, *Teresian Mysticism and Yoga*, Mangalore, 1981, p. 183.

3.0 Content of Indian Spiritual Theology

Spiritual Theology in India concerns itself with the transformation of man. Seen from a spiritual point of view, today the humanity is influenced by illusion (*māyā*) to a very great extent, and because of this, we get attached to creatures, forgetting our final goal in life. This attachment to creatures brings about in us moral guilt (*karma*) which in turn leads us to bondage and the cycle of birth- death and rebirth (*punarjanma* through *karma samsāra*). If this problem is not solved by eradicating illusion and evil, human person will go from bad to worse, from generation to generation through the cycle of birth and rebirth. It is necessary therefore, that the flux of birth and rebirth be stopped and man be brought back to his pristine condition of freedom from all forms of illusion and bondage.

Indian Spiritual Theology concerns itself with the understanding of the pristine condition of the human person, his condition in the state of bondage, in the flux of birth and rebirth (*punarjanma*) under the influence of illusion (*māyā*) and guilt (*karma*). Indian Spiritual Theology concerns itself with the transformation and liberation of man from this state of bondage by showing him adequate ways and means to overcome bondage. But this liberation and transformation is to be brought about by reinstating him in his original state in relation to, and in conformity with, the ultimate Reality or God.

4.0 Man in Indian Spiritual Theology

The understanding about the human person or the self (*ātman, purusha*) differs from school to school in Indian Spiritual Theology. There are schools like *Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Vedānta* and also the religion of Jainism which see the human being in terms of knowledge and consciousness. According to them in the original state, the human self is not only endowed with perfect consciousness but *is essentially* pure consciousness itself. But under the influence of *māyā*, which implies negatively ignorance (*avidya*), positively misrepresentation of truth (*āvarana*), we become unaware of our true nature and destiny, and get attached to creatures. As a result we incur moral guilt and impurity called (*karma*) and come under bondage losing our liberty in the flux of birth and rebirth (*karma samsāra*). The way

to liberation and transformation is the way of knowledge, not perceptual or conceptual knowledge but unqualified, mystical knowledge of pure contemplation.

There are other schools of Indian Spirituality which see man as created by God and destined to be united with God. They also see him in a state of bondage due to ignorance (*māyā*) and moral guilt (*karma*), which take away his liberty and confine him to the process of birth and rebirth (*karma-samsāra*). The way to liberation shown by them is the way of love and devotion, the way of detached action and service.

5.0 God in Indian Spiritual Theology

In understanding the nature of God also, there is no unanimity in Indian thought. God is seen as the ultimate metaphysical impersonal being called Brahman who is ineffable (*anirvacanīya*) and unqualified (*nirguna*). He is better known through a negative way (*neti marga – via negativa*) than through rational thought. *Brh* means to evolve because from *Brahman* everything is evolved. *Chāndōgya Upanishad* calls it '*Tajjalan*'³ meaning that (*tat*) from which the world arises (*ja*) into which it returns (*la*) and by which it is supported and it lives (*an*). In *Taittirīya Upanishad* *Brahman* is seen as that from which all beings are born, by which they live, and into which they are reabsorbed.⁴ The *Brahman* or the God of whom we speak is the *Saguna Brahman* or the qualified *Brahman*.

The same *Taittirīya Upanishad* speaks of the manifestation of the *Brahman* in five planes or sheaths (*kośas*) namely, in the form of inorganic matter (*annamaya kośa*), form of biological life both vegetative and animal (*prānamaya kośa*), in the form of mind and perceptual consciousness (*manómaya kośa*), in the form of reflexive self-consciousness (*vijñānamaya kośa*) and finally in the highest state, in the form of non-dual contemplative mystical bliss (*ānandamaya kośa*). The *Brahman* pervades them all and is immanent inner controller of all (*antaryāmin*)⁵

³ Cf. *Chāndōgya Upanishad*, III, 14.

⁴ Cf. *Taittirīya Upanishad*, III, 1. CHANDRADAR SHARMA, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24.

⁵ Cf. *Taittirīya Upanishad*, II, 1-5; Cf. CHANDRADAR SHARMA, *Op. Cit.* p.24-25.

There is also a *trinitarian* concept of God in Hinduism as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva but this is not the same as the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity.

Hinduism has also personal concept of God (*Iśwara*). He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Man owes him submission and surrender. This God, *Iśwara* rewards the just and punishes the unjust. Further, when non-righteousness prevails over righteousness, God takes a visible form (*avatāra*) from time to time to punish the non righteous and to protect the righteous. Sri Rama and Krishna are considered as the two major divine incarnations (*avatāra*).

6.0 Man in the World of Today

Indian Spiritual Theology takes into account the actual situation of the humanity today. Pain and suffering constitute the universal condition of man today. Liberation and transformation must take into account this actual situation of man and must show him the way to overcome this problem. Though all the Indian religions take into account this problem of pain and suffering, Buddhism has scientifically elaborated this problem and has annunciated it in terms of the following four noble truths (*xrya satya*).⁶

6.1. Existence of Pain (*duhkha*)

One of the most common experiences in human life today, is the experience of pain. Pain and sufferings have become a part of human life, yet they do not constitute an integral part of our life and therefore, they can be overcome and there must be a way to overcome this problem. This problem of suffering and pain call for an explanation and human life yearns for liberation from it. Spiritual Theology is meant to address this universal problem of suffering and show us the way to overcome it.

⁶ Cf. CHANDRADAR SHARMA, *Op. Cit.* p. 71

6.2. The cause of pain (*duhkha samudāya*)

Pain and suffering are the result of sin. The problem of physical pain is only a tip of an iceberg, which is the problem of evil. What is immediately felt and experienced is the problem of pain and suffering that too physical pain rising from weakness, sickness, old age and death. But pain and suffering result from the problem of evil, the evil of sin which is called *karma*. And *karma* itself is the result of an illusion called *māyā*. It is sin or *karma* which is the cause of every form of pain and suffering. Illusion, sin and suffering are essentially interrelated.

The Ultimate Being, God is Truth itself. When we ignore this Ultimate truth of the eternal Being, and get attached to temporal realities, as it were eternal, we get plunged into the darkness of illusion, commit sin, and incur *karma* which brings about pain and suffering in our life. (The deceiver Satan asked Eve to disobey God saying, "when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil".⁷)

6.3. There is Cessation of Pain and Suffering (*Duhkha-nirodha*)

Man is meant for joy and bliss but he is in pain and anguish. Everything calls for a cause and therefore our pain and suffering also must have a cause. When the cause of pain is removed, the effect of suffering also must cease. Sin (*karma*) committed due to illusion (*māyā*) is the cause of our pain and suffering. Spiritual Theology shows the cause, namely sin, due to which pain and suffering have entered human life.

6.4. The Way Leading to the Cessation of Pain (*duhkha-nirodha-gamini pratipāt*)

There are ways and means to overcome pain and suffering in human life. Spiritual Theology is essentially concerned with showing these ways (*mārgās / yoga*) to overcome pain and the problem of evil and come to the final liberation. They are mainly, the way of knowledge (*Gñāna marga / yoga*), the way of devo-

⁷ Gn.3:5.

tion (*Bhakti marga / yoga*), the way of action (*Karma marga / yoga*), the Royal Way which is also known as the eight-fold way (*Astāṅga yoga* of *Patañjali*) and the Integral way of the *Bhagavad Gīta*, the Song of the Lord.

7.0 Liberation of Man

The liberation of man consists in returning to the original pristine condition of perfect consciousness, free from every form of illusion (*māyā*), sin and attachment (*karma*), pain and suffering. It is seen in terms of man's perfect relationship with God (*Brahman* and *ātman* relationship). But this relationship is seen in different ways in different schools of Indian Spirituality. The Non-dualistic School of *Advaita Vedānta* of *Sankara* sees the Ultimate Reality as the only reality without a second (*Ekam evam advitīyam*) and all other things as neither identical with, nor separate from, that one reality. The whole of reality is non-dual. The qualified non-dualism, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* of *Ramānuja* sees the Ultimate Reality as an organic unity, an identity which is qualified with diversity. God or the Absolute is this whole. He is immanent, and the inner controller of everything. But the dualistic school *Dvaita Vedānta* of *Mādhva* sees the Ultimate Reality, souls and matter as absolutely real though the latter two are essentially dependant on God, the Ultimate Reality. There are other schools of spirituality in India like the school of *Sankhya-yoga*, *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* which see the human person essentially as consciousness, and the school of Integral yoga of the *Bhagavad Gīta* consider man as entrusted with duty proper to him. It is through the fulfillment of one's duty in detachment, that one can attain transformation and liberation of oneself.

It should be clear that when we formulate Christian spirituality in India, we are not doing it as it were to write on a blank board. We are in a context where a lot of search is already done. We have to take into account their findings and try to formulate Christian spirituality using Indian categories as far as possible. No doubt, there are certain concepts concerning God, man and the world which are alien to Christian doctrine like impersonality of God, man as pure consciousness and the theory of reincarnation.

8.0 The Ways of Liberation

The way to liberation would depend on the understanding of the relationship one has with the Ultimate Reality, God. As we have already pointed out, different schools of spirituality in India have different ways of understanding of God-man relationship. As a result there are different ways to perfect liberation and consequently different schools of spirituality. The most important among them are the Way of Knowledge (*Gñāna Mārga*), the Way of Devotion (*Bhakti Mārga*) and the Way of Action (*Karma Mārga*). These ways are called *mārga* or *yoga*.

8.1. The Way of Knowledge (*Gñāna mārga*)

The Schools of Spirituality like *Sāṅkhya*, *Vaiśeṣika* and *Vedānta* see the human person essentially as consciousness. But today, he is under illusion (*māyā*) and as a result, he is not able to see his own original nature and the nature of things. They therefore emphasize, the absolute need of knowledge for one's liberation (*mokṣa*). This way of knowledge is called *Gñāna mārga* or *Gñāna yoga*. But the knowledge they speak of, is not the perceptual knowledge of senses, nor the conceptual knowledge of the intellect. It is the perfect knowledge of mystical contemplation.

8.1.1. Sāṅkhya Theology

Sāṅkhya is one of the oldest, if not the oldest school of spirituality in India. It was founded by Kapila before 1500 B.C. *Sāṅkhya* literally means numbers. This school is called *Sāṅkhya* because it tries to explain the human person in terms of numbers and evolution. Man in his original state is *puruṣa* and is endowed with pure consciousness. But when *puruṣa* comes in contact with another principle called *prakṛiti* he comes under illusion. It is this illusion that leads him from bad to worse and as a result, he identifies himself with his name and form, percepts and concepts, pride and pleasure. The self, which was essentially pure consciousness, now puts on the limitations of subject - object contrast. In a process of degeneration he comes under bondage and undergoes more and more pain and suffering.

8.1.2. Astānga Yoga / Rāja Yoga

In order to reverse this process of degeneration and to come to the fullness of liberation in pristine perfect consciousness, *Pātānjali* teaches a psycho-somatic, moral and spiritual discipline, known as the *Astānga Yoga* which is also called *Rāja Yoga* or Royal Way. He sees the human person as an integrated whole, mind – body complex with moral and spiritual dimension. We will not be able to undertake any transformative discipline unless we have a moral aptitude. *Pātānjali* therefore proposes a moral discipline of *Yama* and *Niyama* or certain abstentions and observances, as the basic steps towards our transformation.

8.1.2.1. Yama (Abstentions)

Yama means abstention. In the world of today and in our own life there exists violence, falsehood, greed, lust, selfishness and many other kinds of disorders. If we are to be liberated and be fully transformed, we need to abstain from all this. *Astānga Yoga* points out five capital vices which gradually destroy the very fabric of human life and society. In order to overcome these vices, we need to practise five abstentions and which constitute five vows in Jainism. They are:

1. *Ahimsa* or non violence. *Ahimsa* calls for abstention from all forms of violence in thought, word and deed, against every form of life, and not merely against human beings. The world of today seems to be a world of violence and violence becomes the culture of today. We cannot arrive at liberation unless we give up violence altogether.

2. *Satya*, or abstention from falsehood . We are given the power of speech to reveal the truth as it is known to us and not to hide or distort the truth; to communicate truthfully and not to deceive others. But we see a lot of falsehood and deception today. Hence it is necessary to abstain from every form of falsehood and always bear witness to truth.

3. *Asteya* or not to steal. There is a lot of injustice, dishonesty, exploitation, discrimination and even oppression in the world of today. Sometimes all this is perpetuated in the name of religion. It is absolutely necessary that those who want to be liberated and transformed must abstain completely from every form of dishonesty and stealing.

4. *Brahmacharya* or abstention is from lust. Often our life is guided and vitiated by lust. There is lust of flesh and blood and there is lust of eyes. Lust can blind us. It is therefore necessary

that one must be free from lust in order to arrive at liberation and transformation.

5. *Aaparigraha* or avarice. Man is often moved and led by greed, namely greed for wealth and power, name and fame. Greed does not allow us to be content and satisfied. Greed can blind us and lead us to commit a number of crimes. A greedy person cannot walk on the way to liberation. However wealthy, happiness always baffles him. He must be free from avarice.

8.1.2.2. Niyama (Observances)

Since there is some disorder in the world and in our life, abstentions are necessary. However, spiritual life does not consist of abstentions and taboos. Spiritual life is something positive and is to be fostered and promoted through the practice of virtues. The *Astānga Yoga* gives a rule of fivefold observances which are called *niyamas*. They are:

1. *Shaucha* or cleanliness. Cleanliness is next to godliness. Purification has been a part of rituals practically in all religions. But the purification of hands and feet, or of pans and pots alone will not suffice. One must purify one's mind and heart, soul and spirit in order to arrive at the final and perfect liberation. There has to be an all-round cleanliness.

2. *Santśa* or contentment is another disposition necessary for liberation. Human life has a number of limitations but there are many more reasons to be happy and content. God blesses a cheerful given. Contentment in life is necessary for liberation.

3. *Tapas* or the practice of austerity is another basic requirement. Left to our natural tendency there is no limit to the cravings of human heart. In our natural tendency we are inclined to evil. Therefore a certain degree of austerity is to be introduced in our spiritual life.

4. *Svadhyaya* or the study of scriptures is the fourth step of *niyama* or observances. The knowledge perceived by our own intellect is limited and sometimes, is even vitiated by passions and prejudices. The word of God or the sacred scriptures, is a perennial source of perfect enlightenment. It is therefore necessary to read and meditate on the sacred scriptures every day.

5. *Iśvarapranidhāna* or devotion to God is the most important *niyama*. In all our undertakings, the whole life must be inclined to God in true devotion and love. It is this love and devotion that will ultimately unite us with God and bring about our liberation

8.1.2.3. Asanas (Postures)

The five *yamas* and the *niyamas* help us to attune our body and mind to create in us a moral disposition for liberation. Those who take yoga as a liberative discipline have to practise these *yamas* and *niyamas*. However, those who practise yoga only as a physical discipline pay little or no attention to this moral disposition. In its integral approach to liberation *astanga yoga* takes into account also our body which is made of flexible muscles. These muscles can be voluntary or involuntary. All our muscles are to be kept healthy and vibrant because the health of the soul depends also on the health of the body. The voluntary muscles, namely the external muscles, which can be freely manipulated, are kept healthy through different postures (*asana*). Through the practice of different postures our body is made healthy and flexible.

8.1.2.4. Prāṇayāma (Breathing Exercise)

Breathing is one of the most vital aspect of our life. In many cultures breath is identified with life. Through regulated breathing (*prāṇayāma*) we are able to promote not only the health of our respiratory system but also of the other systems like circulatory, digestive, glandular, nervous, purificative and involuntary muscular system, though indirectly. Through the practice of *asanas* (postures) and *prāṇayāma* (regulated breathing) we can also keep ourselves healthy, our mind alert, and our thoughts well controlled and oriented to the proposed goal.

8.1.2.5. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of senses)

Our senses are, so to say, the windows of our soul. They are compared to horses which pull the chariot, namely our body to the objects (roads). Mind is the reins, intellect is the charioteer, ego is the enjoyer or Atman, the Lord who rides on the chariot. The horses (senses) are to be controlled with reins (mind) by the charioteer (intellect) otherwise they will ruin both the chariot and charioteer.⁸ This control of senses called *pratyahara* is necessary because senses are the only door-way to human knowledge. Without the control of senses our mind will always remain restless.

⁸ Cf. *Katha* 2, 3-4.

8.1.2.6. Dhāraṇa (Concentration)

There is restlessness in our body and mind. Our mind is often dissipated and distracted. In this condition we cannot be transformed and liberated. The control of senses helps us to attain concentration (*dhāraṇa*) which is absolutely necessary for human transformation. This school of yoga suggests a number of techniques for the practice of concentration, like converging our sight at the mid-point of our eye brows, and concentrating on our breath. One of the greatest problems we face in our mental, moral and spiritual life, especially in prayer and meditation is distraction and dissipation. Concentration (*dhāraṇa*) is a way to overcome this problem and help ourselves in the practice of meditation.

8.1.2.7. Dhyāna (Meditation)

Meditation is one of the most important practices in Indian Spirituality. In the classical four stages of human life, called *Varnāśrama dharma*, the third stage called *vānaprastha* is exclusively dedicated to the life of meditation, when a person leaves his family and his belongings and goes to a forest where he spends his time in meditation. The third part of the *Vedas* called *Aranyakas* is a compilation of meditative reflections. Vedic sages and the great *Risīs* of ancient times are held in great respect and veneration, precisely because they were given to meditation. Even today when a Hindu builds his house he builds also a room for meditation and worship, where he spends some time everyday in meditation.

8.1.2.8. Samādhi (Contemplation /Identification)

Meditative consciousness, though developed, is yet imperfect and limited. It is limited above all, by subject-object contrast, with a distinction between the knower, the known and the knowledge. When a person gives himself to the life of meditation supported with other exercises, of moral, physical and mental discipline, his consciousness gradually gets refined and finally it becomes contemplation (*samādhi*) where the consciousness becomes so pure that subject-object duality disappears. This contemplative consciousness is neither perceptual nor conceptual; it is trans-perceptual and trans-conceptual. It is the direct experience of the Absolute Who is truth Itself. Seen from empirical and rational points of view it is comparable to darkness and unconsciousness. In fact it is pure consciousness. This is the

state in which the self (*purusha*) initially was, and to that state he finally arrives. What ultimately brings about this final liberation of man is contemplative pure consciousness and not his actions because all our actions done with our ordinary knowledge have an element of selfishness. They result from a dual consciousness. This view on human liberation through perfect contemplative consciousness is held by *Sāṅkhya*, *Vaiśeṣika* and especially in the *Vedāntic* Theology of Sankaracharya.

The purpose of *Patāñjali's Rāja Yoga* is to bring about the cessation of the modification of mind (*yogashchittavrttinirōdhah*). Our mind can have five kinds of modifications in the order of progressive spiritual transformation, namely, restless mind (*ksipta*), torpid mind (*mudha*), distracted mind (*vikṣipta*), concentrated mind (*ekāgra*) and restricted or transformed mind (*niruddha*). It is mainly through concentration, meditation and contemplation that we can attain an integrated mind, and get ourselves transformed.⁹

In formulating spiritual theology in India we need to have a holistic approach. We need to see how the whole human person (his body, senses, mind, soul and spirit) and not merely his soul, is to be transformed. Today when empirical sciences have progressed so much, the role of our body in our spiritual transformation is also to be taken into account. The attuning of our body for our spiritual life is better seen in Indian traditions than in many other schools of spirituality.

8.1.3. Vedāntic Theology

The *Vedāntic* Theology of Śankara is non-dualistic (*Advaita*) which means that reality is non dual. But unfortunately some scholars called it monistic. There are those who argue that *Vedāntic* thought is to be understood in the sense of strict metaphysical monism. While others argue that this thought is to be understood in a mystical sense. We know that non-dualism is different from monism. Śankara argues that the ultimate being (*Brahman*) is beyond all names and forms, percepts and concepts. He is best known in contemplative darkness. God the Ultimate Being, and creatures are not separate from each other. God is the necessary being and creatures are contingent.

⁹ CHANDRADAR SHARMA, *Op. Cit.* pp. 170-171.

Contingent beings have no independent existence. If they exist, they do so, in and with the Necessary Being, God, because the reality is non-dual. Though contingent beings are one with the Necessary Being, this oneness / identity is experienced only in mystical contemplation.

In non-mystical states and practical knowledge (*vyavahārica gñāna*) everything is seen not only distinct but also separate from each other. But this dual consciousness is the result of an illusion (*māyā*). Ultimately Brhman or God alone is real and all other things are unreal (*brhama satyam jagam emitya jivo brhamiva nāpara*) When a person acts under the influence of illusion, one incurs guilt (*karma*). Under the influence of *māyā* and *karma* one not only cannot see one's oneness with God but also sets in motion the cycle of birth and rebirth according to the nature of his *karma*. Hence if we want to be liberated we need to dispel the illusion of *māyā* and undo our guilt *karma*. But all this can be done only through the pursuit of contemplative knowledge. The *Vedāntic* school shows the way to this liberating knowledge which can be classified into three preliminary and three classical stages.

8.1.3.1. Three Preliminary Steps to Contemplative Knowledge

The *Vedāntic* school of Śankara teaches a transformative discipline which has three preliminary stages and three classical stages. The preliminary stages are the following.

8.1.3.1.1 Discernment of the Real from the Unreal (*Nityānitya vastu vivēka*)

Under the influence of illusion we fail to discern between what is real and unreal, eternal and temporal, necessary and contingent, being and becoming. Hence the very first step to contemplative knowledge consists in true discernment between what is real and unreal.

8.1.3.1.2. Detachment (*mumukṣa*)

True knowledge does not consist in mere mental exercise. We must live according to this discernment, that is, we must be detached from what is unreal and love and be attached to, the real.

8.1.3.1.3. Practice of Virtues (*Samadāma*)

Discernment between what is real and unreal and the practice of detachment gives us the serenity of mind and heart and enables us to practise six necessary virtues, namely, 1. control of mind (*sāma*), 2. control of senses (*dāma*), 3. withdrawal of the mind or cessation of distractions (*upārati*), 4. fortitude (*titikṣa*), 5. faith in the scriptures and the word of the guru (*śraddha*) and constant concentration on God the Brahman (*samādhāna*). These three preliminary stages enable a person to embark on the path of liberative wisdom which comes not from human intelligence but from divine revelation.

8.1.3.2. Three Classical Steps to Liberating Knowledge

The following are the three classical steps of the discipline taught by the *Vedāntic* school to arrive at spiritual transformation.

8.1.3.2.1. Sravana (Listening)

In order to arrive at perfect liberative contemplation one must listen attentively to the sacred scriptures, the teaching of an enlightened guide (*guru*) and to the voice of the Dweller in the cave of one's heart (*Antaryāmin*). For this mere academic study is not enough, we must take to meditation.¹⁰

8.1.3.2.2. Manana (Meditation)

Though scriptures, the voice of the divine Indweller in the cave of our heart (*Antaryāmin*) and the teaching of an enlightened guide (*guru*), are great sources of knowledge, we are called to reflect and meditate on them day and night, so that we get convinced of them and these truths become motivating and guiding factors in our life so as to bring about a change and transformation in us.

8.1.3.2.3. Nididhyāsana (Contemplation)

Constant meditation on the scriptures, on the voice of the Indweller and on the teaching of the liberated guide will lead us to contemplative experience, which is a direct non-perceptual and non-conceptual consciousness, which can neither be gathered nor grasped by our senses or intellect, and which does not

¹⁰ Cf. HIRIYANNA M. *Outline of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay, 1973, p. 380.

have subject - object duality. It is pure consciousness and dispels every shadow of illusion and the consequent guilt (*karma*) and arrests the cycle of birth and rebirth (*karma-samsāra*) bringing total liberation of man. It is note worthy that special emphasis is given to the contemplative experience in human transformation.

The way of knowledge taught by these schools of spirituality is not of perceptual knowledge gathered in the senses, nor of conceptual knowledge of the intellect. It is contemplative liberating experience which is direct and brings about the transformation of human being. In order to differentiate this contemplative consciousness from ordinary knowledge, they classify human knowledge into four categories. The first kind of human knowledge is comparable to the knowledge in the waken state and is called *jāgrt* which is the lowest kind of knowledge and is dependent on extra-mental objects. The second kind of knowledge, called *svapna* is comparable to dreams which is dependent on intra mental impressions. The third kind of knowledge is called *su_pti* and is comparable to the consciousness of dreamless sleep where there is no contrast between subject and object. The fourth and the highest kind of knowledge which cannot be compared to anything is called *tur_ya*. This is pure consciousness without any subject and object contrast and is at the same time perfect being- bliss- consciousness. This is mystical contemplative enlightenment.

A deep study of this school of spirituality will show us that it is close to the teaching of St. John of the Cross and that of St. Teresa. John of the Cross emphasizes the absolute need of faith for perfect mystical contemplation because all our perceptual and conceptual knowledge is limited and therefore cannot bring about a complete transformation of man. It is only the knowledge of faith that can give us the direct experience of the mystery of God, though this experience may be empirically felt as darkness.

8.2. The Way of Devotion (*Bhakti Mārga*)

The most popular way of Hindu Spirituality is the way of devotion. In Hindu scriptures, the Vedas especially in *Rig Veda* and also in some of the *Upanishads*, specially in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* devotion is emphasized as a way to liberation and spiritual transformation. Moreover in *Vaishnava* tradition where

the Lord Vishnu is believed to have taken visible forms (*avatāras*) a number of times, and also in *Śaiva* tradition, love and devotion to *Vishnu* and *Śiva* is much emphasized. *Bhakti yoga* is advocated also in *Puranic* literature, especially in the *Bhagavata Purāna*, the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Bhakti Sūtras* of Narada, in the teachings of Chaitanya, Ramdas, Tukaram, Kabir and Vallabha. The way of devotion is the easiest and the most popular way that is accessible to all alike, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. This way of devotion is expressed in different ways like prayer, rituals, gestures, sacrifice and pilgrimage.

Progress of our love and devotion (*bhakti*) to God may be felt in the following four progressive ways: At the first stage we feel that we are in the divine sphere (*sālōkya*); at the second, we experience the closeness to God (*samīpya*), at the third, we put on the likeness of God (*sarīpya*) and in the fourth and the final stage we experience an intimate union with God (*sayūjya*). This final union is often expressed in terms of spousal union. "When devotion is perfect then the individual and his God become suffused into one spiritual ecstasy".¹¹

"O son of Kunti!" says Sree Krishna, "whatever be the work, whatever be thine eating, thy rituals of sacrifice, thy charities, thy austerities, make thou it an offering to me".¹²

There are nine principal expressions of true devotion. They are: listening to God (*Shravanam*), singing his praises (*kārtanam*), meditation on him (*smaranam*), worship of his feet (*pāda sēvanam*), ritual worship (*archanam*), obeisance (*van-danam*), personal service (*dasyam*), friendship (*sakhyam*) and self-surrender (*ātma nivēdanam*).

When our devotion becomes intense and passionate it consumes all our imperfections and is sometimes accompanied with some signs of pure love (*sāttvika bhāva*) namely, stupor (*stambha*), perspiration (*svēda*), hair-raising (*rōmāncha*), difficulty in speaking (*svara bhanga*), trembling (*kampa*) change of complexion (*vaivarnya*) tears (*ashru*) and even fainting (*pralaya*)¹³.

¹¹ CHANDRADAR SHARMA, *op. cit.* p. 37

¹² *Bhagavad Gīta* IX 27

¹³ Cf. DANIELOU, A., *Method of Reintegration*, Christopher Johnson, 1940, p. 107

God is love and the way of union with Him is the way of love. John of the Cross and St. Teresa show not only the importance of love in spirituality but emphasise that love becomes a passion in the mystical contemplation.

8.3. The Way of Action and Service (*Karma Mārga*)

There is yet another way to liberation, namely the way of action, or *Karma Mārga*. Karma means action. Action can be ordinary action or religious ritual action. Ordinary action consists in the fulfilment of our duty or what we do by way of service. Religious action is rituals and sacrifice.

Hinduism gives much importance to rituals in religious service. These rituals are accompanied with recitations from Veda and other scriptures recited in Sanskrit by the priest (*poojāri*) who performs rituals. As was in the Judaic tradition of the *Old Testament*, in the past in Hinduism, only the priestly class of *Brahmins* could perform formal and public ritual worship and mostly they used to study Sanskrit.

Formal ritual worship is always accompanied with the recitation of mantras or vedic texts in Sanskrit. There is a strong belief that the efficacy of worship depends on the way of performing rituals and the recitation of *mantras* with perfect Sanskrit accent. There is a strong belief that, the rituals performed correctly, will be always efficacious even *opere operato* rather than *opere operantis*.

Importance given to ritual worship in and around sixth century B. C. was so exaggerated, that it brought about a religious revolt in Hinduism. The result of this was the birth of Buddhism and the revival of Jainism. Ritual worship which was very complicated, was considered as an exclusive privilege of the Brahmins caste. They believed that they could control even kings and gods with their ritual worship. This clericalism while exaggerating their importance, despised the ordinary people. While exaggerating rituals, ethical life was totally neglected. As a reaction to this practice, Gauthama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism emphasized the importance of ethical life. As a result came the birth of the new religion of Buddhism.

India is a developing country where there is a lot of poverty. The spirituality to be formulated for India should lead the country to development. Our spirituality must respond to the needs

of a common man in the street and not merely to the needs of those in the sanctuary, namely priests and religious.

9.0 The Bhagavad Gita

The most popular teaching on Indian Spiritual Theology is found in the *Bhagavad Gita* which literally means *the Song of the Lord*. The *Bhagavad Gita* is an interpolation in the epic of *Mahābhārata*. The eighteen chapters of the *Gita* form chapters 23 to 40 of the *Bishmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. It was most probably written by Vyasa in around 3rd century before Christ. This is the most popular and familiar doctrine known practically to every Hindu and now a days further popularised through films telecast in national channels. This epic deals with a conflict or war between righteousness and unrighteousness represented by the children of two brothers of the same family known as the Pandavas and the Kauravas respectively. It is in the form of a poetic dialogue between Arjuna the greatest warrior of the Pandavas and his charioteer Sri Krishna who is said to be a divine incarnation (*avatāra*). This doctrine, taught by Sri Krishna to Arjuna, is meant for the whole human race.

There is another reason why the *Bhagavad Gita* presents an integrated approach. The earlier Indian schools of spirituality namely, the Way of Knowledge (*Gnana Mārga*) or Way of Devotion (*Bhakti Mārga*) or the Way of Action (*Karma Mārga*) had unduly emphasized their own approach to human transformation at the neglect of the other ways.

This had created a sectarian feeling and had resulted in some confusion among people. In order to overcome this confusion, to unite people and to respond to temperamental needs of all, the *Bhagavad Gita* adopted an integrated approach which has become today the most popular and classical way to spiritual transformation.

The whole teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* may be summed up in two words '*nirkama karma*' detached action. The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches us an Integrated Way to transformation that is called *Integral Yoga*. Human nature has three main aspects namely, cognitive for knowledge, affective for love and devotion and conative for action and service. The Integral Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita* responds to these three dimensions. It shows us a way which is at the same time, a way of knowledge, a way of

love and devotion and a way of action and service. These three aspects are so to say three strands of the one rope that binds us to God.

Human mind is clouded with illusion. Man gives more importance to the illusory than the real, to the temporal rather than the eternal, to the matter than to the spirit, to the body than to the soul. He needs to understand that matter and body are temporal and are doomed to death and corruption. Whereas the soul or the self shall never die. Our sense knowledge essentially related to matter, generates desire, pleasure and attachment, and as a result, it brings about bondage. Our intellectual knowledge is essentially dependent on our sense knowledge and it consequently brings about the same results. It is therefore necessary to rise above these forms of knowledge and see with the inner eye of contemplation. In the knowledge of pure contemplation, we can see the truth directly as it is, rather than as coloured by our senses, intellect and passions. With the knowledge of the senses and the intellect we tend to identify ourselves with our bodies, our names and forms. In contemplative knowledge we are enabled to see our inner self, as immortal and eternal. It is necessary therefore to pay attention to the eternal soul, rather than be unduly concerned about the body that perishes.

Through the way of love and devotion to God, the need of our affective life is taken care. Sri Krishna, who in this Song, is seen as God (Vishnu) incarnate, is the object of devotion. Emphasizing devotion for transformation, he says, "never does my devotee perish".¹⁴ And again "The doer of good never comes to grief."¹⁵ Further, "Even if a very ill-conducted man worships me, not worshipping anything else, he must certainly be deemed to be good. For he has well resolved. He soon becomes devout of heart and obtains lasting tranquillity. O Arjuna, know firmly that my devotee is never ruined. He who does my work, who yields himself up to me, who is devoted to me, void of attachment, without hatred to anyone, O Arjuna, comes to me"¹⁶ Again Krishna exhorts, "Merge thy mind in me, be my devotee, prostrate thyself before me, thou shall come up to me. I pledge thee my word; thou art dear to me...I will liberate thee from all

¹⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*. IX 31, *na me bhaktah pranashyati*.

¹⁵ VI, 40.

¹⁶ IX, 30,31,34.

sins.”¹⁷ These and other texts from the *Bhagavad Gita* teach us the need of love and devotion for our total liberation and transformation.

Another essential dimension of human life is action. Action is needed for health and integrity of oneself and of the society (*loka-sangraha*). But our actions are conditioned by our knowledge. The actions flowing from sensory and intellectual knowledge imply a lot of selfishness and attachment, but the actions flowing from contemplative knowledge performed with pure devotion to God are detached. It is this kind of detached actions (*niškama karma*) that bring about the final and definitive transformation and liberation. Detached actions imply renunciation even from the fruit of our actions whether victory or defeat, success or failure, fame or shame. One has to renounce everything in action and hold on only to one's duty (*dharma*) and do it in pure devotion to God without further considerations. Only with contemplative wisdom can we perform such detached actions.

The way of knowledge, devotion and action, are not three distinct and separate ways. They are intrinsically interrelated. Mystical enlightenment as the way of knowledge gives us the right insight as regards the ultimate Truth, the way of devotion consecrates us to that Truth and the way of action and service enables us to produce the fruit of the mystical enlightenment, and unswerving love and devotion. These three aspects of the dynamics of liberation make the surest way to salvation.

In formulating spirituality in the Indian context, we take into account, different aspects of human life. The cognitive aspect is taken care of through *lectio divina*, the study of sacred scripture, meditation and contemplation of the mystery of God, through our response/obedience in faith to divine revelation.

The transformation of our affective dimension is brought about through our formation in love and interpersonal relationship. The connative aspect of our life is taken care of through a formation in meaningful apostolate and service.

We have in India *āśram* way of life, which has minimum of structures and where one can go from time to time and spend a few days in search of God under the guidance of a charismatic guide who may be called *guru* (dispeller of darkness).

There are in India a number of non-Christian *āśrams* where

¹⁷ XVIII, 65-66.

many Europeans and Americans go. But unfortunately, many of these *āśrams* are commercial centers. It is therefore necessary to formulate a spirituality that suits well to the Indian temperament. It is necessary to have genuine Christian *āśrams* where all have access to the experience of God through the Indian methods.

10.0 Conclusion

We the Carmelites in India, with our long and deep Carmelite tradition, are called to interpret, our rich tradition in the contemporary categories of Indian culture, philosophy and spirituality. This is a specific Carmelite mission in India-to discover the convergence of Carmelite tradition especially that of St. Teresa and St. John of the cross and Indian search for truth through meditation and contemplation. At mystical level Indian spirituality is closer to Carmelite spirituality, than perhaps any other schools of spirituality in the Church.

Indian Spiritual Theology, which is one of the most ancient systematic Spiritual Theologies in the world, has something special to offer. It is concerned with human person and his actual problem of pain and suffering, the problem of evil. Not content with the proximate means to overcome human suffering, it attempts to find out the radical cause of suffering, namely sin. Not being able to find an answer to the problem why an innocent man should suffer, it has recourse to a postulate namely, the theory of rebirth and *karma-samsāra*.

Indian Spiritual Theology recognizes that the radical cause of suffering is the illusion which is inherent in our life today. It is due to this illusion that man commits sin and comes under bondage. In order to reverse this condition of bondage and to arrive at perfect liberation, both the grace of God and our own efforts are necessary. We must strive to overcome illusion through knowledge. But all forms of human knowledge have their inherent limitations, and therefore they cannot be totally free from illusion.

It is only the contemplative mystical consciousness, which surpasses all human capacities, and is the direct and immediate consciousness of the Being, without any limitations, without even the subject-object contrast, can totally dispel the darkness of illusion and enable us to be fully united with God in perfect

love and devotion. Contemplation can enable us to express our love and devotion to God in detached service to our fellow-human beings, rendered as our duty or *dharma*. Hence the deep groaning of the ancient Indian mystic sages:

<i>Asatoma satgamaya,</i>	Lead me from falsehood to truth
<i>Tamasoma jyothir gamaya</i>	Darkness to light
<i>Mrtiyuma amrtam gamaya</i>	Death to life
<i>Om Shanti...Shanti....Shanti</i>	Lord grant me peace...Peace... Peace.

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