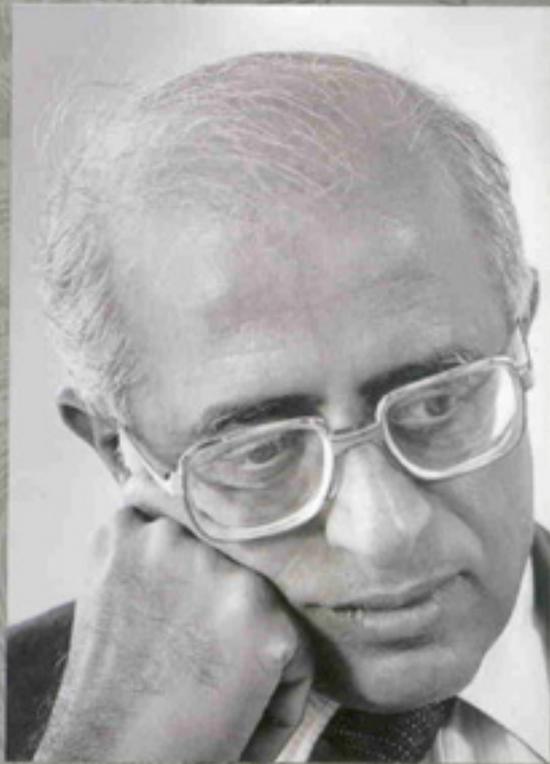


# Sharing Wisdom in Search of Inner and Outer Peace



Dr Shantilal K Somaiya

**Sharing Wisdom in Search of  
Inner and Outer Peace**

**Speeches Delivered by  
Dr. Shantilal K Somaiya**

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2011 Somaiya Publications Pvt Ltd

**Registered Office:**

172, Mumbai Marathi Granthsangrahalaya Marg,  
Dadar (East), Mumbai 400014  
Email: info@somaiyapublications.com  
Website: www.somaiyapublications.com

**Branch:**

6th Floor, Bank of Baroda Building,  
Parliament Street, New Delhi 110 001  
Email: Somaiya@ndf.vsnl.net.in

**Cover:** Harinakshi

**Published by:**

Somaiya Publications Pvt Ltd,  
Mumbai 400 014

**E-Book Digital Conversion by:**

red temptation - the design studio

Printed at The Book Centre Ltd,  
LIC Building, 1st floor, Ranade Road,  
Dadar (West), Mumbai 400 028  
Email: bookcentre@somaiya.com

**ISBN: 978-81-7039-280-4**

# Our Father

**O**ur father late Dr. Shantilal K Somaiya was a multi-faceted personality - an Industrialist, an Educationist, a Philanthropist, and above all a Spiritual Person. He contributed a lot to the field of sugar-cane-research, sugar and ethanol manufacturing, and ethanol - based chemistry. He led the Somaiya Trust and was the Vice President of Somaiya Vidyavihar. He devoted much of his time and resources for promoting the cause of Religion and Interfaith Dialogue.

It is our proud privilege to present a compendium of speeches on religion and spirituality delivered by our father, Dr S K Somaiya. These speeches were delivered by him over the span of a decade at various places such as Italy, Vatican, Kazakhstan, USA, Switzerland, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and different places in India. The fora he addressed ranged from local to global. He shared his views on various topics of special interest to him such as the significance of religion in modern times, the need for an Interfaith Dialogue among the separate religious groups, and the universality of the essence of various religions.

In the modern era dominated by Materialism and Rationalism, the role and rule of Religion is being obliterated from social, political and professional life. Consequently the spiritual aspect of life is also being relegated behind one's worldly pursuits. However, it is true that man does not live by bread alone. He hears the inner call and remains restless until his spiritual aspiration is realized. Therefore he takes up the quest for finding his religious and philosophical roots. English poet John Milton in his poem "Il Penseroso" has while expressing this feeling says:

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale,  
And love the high embowed roof,  
With antique pillars massy proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,

Casting a dim religious light,  
There let the pealing organ blow,  
To the full-voiced quire below,  
In service high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into ecstasies.

Our father was staunch follower of the Sanatana Dharma (सनातनधर्म). He firmly believed that one must first know one's own religion thoroughly for a better understanding of others' faith.

Nowadays we see people following different faiths rubbing shoulders with each other. In this situation we need to widen our religious perspective. We must understand and appreciate the richness of other religions. The time has come to accustom ourselves to fresh ways of thinking and understanding. This was best exemplified when our father started organizing and participating in Interreligious Dialogue meetings; few around him could understand why he spent so much time and resources on such activities. However, it was his personal conviction that there was a pressing need for Interreligious Dialogue that would eventually promote peace and harmony amongst people.

He welcomed the followers of different religious traditions as his friends; he was humble enough to approach others so that he could learn something from them. We have experienced and realized how dear to his heart the cause of Interreligious Dialogue was! It had become the prime mission for him. All the love and dedication he infused in this activity came back to him in a surge of respect and affection from people all over the world; transcending the boundaries of race, region and religion, throughout his life.

Like Rabindranath Tagore he always believed:

My home is everywhere;  
I am in search of it;  
My country is in all countries;  
I will struggle to attain it.

His participation in Interreligious Dialogue activities strengthened his belief. He was disturbed by the lack of knowledge of the authentic fundamental principles of religion amongst the young generation of India. The lacuna according to him was in the modern Indian education system. Hence in 1989 he established the K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, to promote the profound study of Vedic religion, in which he had an

unshakable faith. His interest in the study of other religions then prompted him to start the Centre for studies in Buddhism which was inaugurated by H H Dalai Lama in 1993, and the Centre for Studies in Jainism which was inaugurated at the hands of H H Acharya Mahaprajna in 2002.

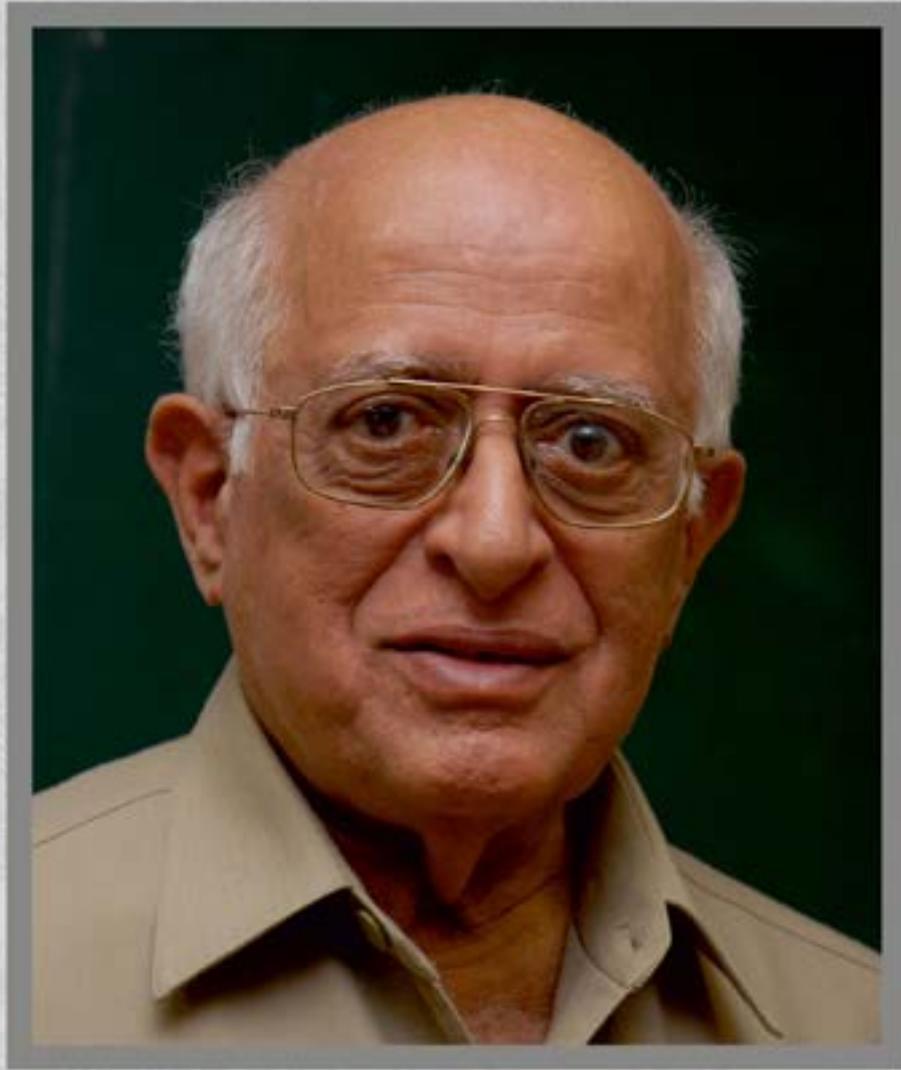
Our father's association with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at Vatican, continued and sustained for more than decade. He felt privileged when he was invited to present Hinduism at the Pontification of H H Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005.

Our father has left behind a wonderful legacy of using an integrated approach to life and work, whether in business, education, religion or philosophy; one that includes rather than divides, one that encompasses all, capturing the true spirit of Hindu heritage and tradition.

The publication of this volume is a joint effort by the members of the Somaiya Sanskriti Vihar. We must express our gratitude to Honorable Justice B N Srikrishna for his erudite foreword. And we hope that our father's words would reach those who did not have an opportunity to listen to him in person and inspire them to think seriously about their own religion and about the urgent need to maintain a dialogue with those coming from other faiths. May these speeches bring a desirable change in the world!

Samir Somaiya

Harinakshi Somaiya



**Dr Shantilal Karamshi Somaiya**

29 • 12 • 1927 - 01 • 01 • 2010

# Dharma

*Delivered in* : the 'Dharma Based Cultures' Meet', an International Summit

*organized by* : Dharma Sanskriti Sangam

at Varanasi, India

25-26 November 2006

# Dharma

**W**E are going to discuss matters connected with Dharma (धर्म) and Culture. I appreciate the use of the word Dharma (धर्म) or Dhamma (धम्म) in lieu of religion which is not its accurate rendering. However, for all practical purposes we generally use the word religion as an equivalent of Dharma (धर्म) and I have kept up the same practice for the sake of convenience.

In this age of science, technology and computers; material progress resulting in consumerism has gained utmost but undue importance. Too much exploitation of nature has endangered the ecological balance. Unwholesome and therefore unwanted results of too much of industrialization have come to the fore. Consequently the value of Dharma (धर्म) or Dhamma (धम्म), whatever term one may use, is cast into oblivion.

More often the so-called rationalists not only deride the idea of Dharma (धर्म) but also ridicule those who sincerely follow the norms of Dharma (धर्म). According to these people Dharma (धर्म) has no place in this civilized world where man has all amenities and comforts at his command. The main objection against Dharma (धर्म) is that it is erected on the shaky foundation of God or some divine power. Science, however, does not accept the validity of any transcendental or supernatural power as it cannot be proved by any rational or logical argument.

The notion of Dharma (धर्म), as it is pointed out, has its genesis in the limitations of human beings who were ignorant, in ancient days, of the mysteries of nature. Alongwith the scientific progress man has successfully unravelled so many riddles of nature. He is enabled to launch space-crafts and reach even the distant satellite like the moon. Moreover most of the time-honoured traditions and rituals such as worship, sacrifices, prayers, etc. have become outdated and meaningless. Dharma (धर्म), according to these people, gives importance to transcendental things like salvation, heaven etc. and totally neglects the present life. Life after death and not the present life is a matter of concern for Dharma (धर्म). Lastly, if we peep through the pages of history we notice that many battles and wars were waged on the issue of Dharma (धर्म) which has thus proved to be the source of

hindrance in man's progress.

I am not going to say outright that all these allegations levelled against Dharma (धर्म) are unfounded and baseless. I do admit that the progress made by science is significant and has added to the happiness of mankind. But I want to put a question at this juncture. Just think a while. Are we happy with all the material gain that man has to his credit? On one hand we claim that due to the progress of science the world has come very close; but on the other hand we find that the human hearts have failed to come closer in harmony. Out of sheer selfishness and insatiable greed man is hankering after amassing wealth by means, fair or foul. The Mahabharata (महाभारत) has rightly said, "The lust or greed is not appeased by enjoying the objects of pleasure in the least, but just as fire with the oblation of ghee, it flares up all the more."<sup>1</sup> Corrupt practices are rampant. Fissiparous and pernicious tendencies detrimental to mankind have made their ugly appearance felt. Extremists are recklessly indulging in terrorism. In addition, the constant threat of devastating nuclear weapons has placed the world on the verge of peril. To quote the words of Wordsworth: "What man has made of man himself!"

Well, science has no solution for all these problems; science cannot solve the riddle of the universe conclusively. That is why, after realizing the deficiency of science, scientists now tend to accept the existence of some spiritual power. Sir James Jeans says, "We cannot claim to have seen more than a very faint glimmer of light at the best... Science should leave making pronouncements." Arnold Toynbee, a great historian says, "It is on the spiritual plane that we can hope to solve these problems." The great scientist Albert Einstein clearly remarks: "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind." The supremacy of nature over man's capacity is amply testified by unpredictable occurrence of Tsunami, earthquakes and destructive tempests and tornadoes. One has to accept that there are still some secrets which remain hidden from the intellectual flights of man. It is perhaps in this context that one of our Upanishadic seers says, "This final truth is not within the scope of any logical thinking."<sup>2</sup> It has been also said, "One should not apply rules of logic to those things which are inscrutable."<sup>3</sup>

Friends, what the world needs today urgently is peace, mental satisfaction and harmonious coexistence. And the solution or the panacea, so to say, is Dharma (धर्म). This fact has been brought to our notice long back by Sage Vyasa. He says in the concluding part of the Mahabharata (महाभारत), "With my arms raised up I am shouting; but nobody listens to me. Wealth and desires can be accomplished through Dharma (धर्म); then why is it not practised?"<sup>4</sup>

Here I do not want to specify any particular religion since we all know that the fundamental principles of all religions are almost the same.

Much has been said about the word Dharma (धर्म). I would like to mention here only a few points. This word is frequently found as Dharman (धर्मन्) (neuter) in the Rigve-

da<sup>5</sup> (ऋग्वेद) and used in the sense of cosmic order, ethical rules, rituals, etc. In the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) it has the sense of moral rules, moral code of conduct and so on, for example, it is said in the Taittiriya Upanishad (तैत्तिरीय-उपनिषद्), “Practice Dharma (धर्म), one should never deviate from Dharma (धर्म).”<sup>6</sup> In the Mahabharata (महाभारत), which belongs to the post-Vedic period, Dharma (धर्म) is defined as that which sustains the world.<sup>7</sup> Even Buddhism and Jainism have adopted this word mainly in the sense of Achara Dharma (आचारधर्म) – code of conduct. It is particularly in this sense that we want to revive or revitalize Dharma (धर्म) in the modern world.

At this stage I wish to point out how the objections launched against Dharma (धर्म) are faulty if not fatuous. Even the so-called rationalists cannot claim to be rational all the while at all levels, as exemplified in many cases. Those who do not believe in God or any such supreme power are noticed to succumb to the will, whims and fancies of their superiors. They ingratiate themselves before the unqualified, uncultured and uneducated leaders or dignitaries to win their favour. Is this behaviour rational or justifiable? A devotee believing in God and following Dharma (धर्म) faithfully is far superior to such a hypocrite.

The contention that Dharma (धर्म) gives rise to baseless traditions, blind faith and unwelcome conventions or superstitions is also not tenable as it originates from sheer misunderstanding. All these really speaking are not the essence of Dharma (धर्म). They may have relevance in a particular time, in a particular situation.

I do accept that many worn out traditions have to be uprooted as they give rise to misconceptions about Dharma (धर्म). There are traditionalists who adamantly stick to the age-old, obsolete practices and oppose to the advent of new reforms. These are diehards and should not be encouraged. But we should remember that there are visionaries, social reformers and saints who bring out the correct significance of Dharma (धर्म). It is also not wholly true to say that wars and battles are fought because of religious friction. The reasons appear to be mostly personal such as lust or greed for power, supremacy or mere fanaticism. Those who accuse Dharma (धर्म) as dogmatic conveniently forget that the modern ‘isms’ have also been turned into dogmas by their henchmen.

I have already mentioned and I repeat here that I do not want to plead the case of any particular religion, since all religions aim at the spiritual and moral progress of human beings. Vivekananda used to say, “If one religion be true, then all the others also must be true.”<sup>8</sup> Religion, according to him, is the manifestation of spiritual and divine power inherent in man.

Dharma (धर्म) can be considered from two angles. One is theoretical and the other is its practical side. Theoretically all religions lead us to the highest spiritual and divine level. Practically there are various means to achieve the goal. They can be (i) Path of knowledge, (ii) Path of devotion and (iii) Path of action. But the diversity does not bewilder the followers as all paths lead to the same destination.

Dharma (धर्म) is broad enough to accommodate any person of any creed, caste or sect provided he has a devot-

ed mind. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) says, “Even those devotees of other gods who worship them with faith, they also indirectly worship Me [Shri Krishna], O Arjuna, though not according to proper rites.”<sup>9</sup>

It is also not correct to say that Dharma (धर्म) is confined to spiritual or divine life and neglects worldly life altogether. Our ancestors were wise enough to take into account both the aspects. The great seer Kanada, the author of the Vaisheshika Sutra (वैशेषिकसूत्र) in his very first aphorism declares, “Dharma (धर्म) is that by means of which one can achieve worldly and other-worldly happiness.”<sup>10</sup>

Similarly the concept of four Purushartha-s (पुरुषार्थ), the fourfold aim of human life, which is a remarkable contribution of Indian culture, gives equal weightage to both these aspects. The Mahabharata (महाभारत) clearly lays down, “Dharma (धर्म) – duty or righteousness, Artha (अर्थ) – worldly prosperity and Kama (काम) – sensual and other enjoyments (Moksha (मोक्ष) – liberation included in Dharma (धर्म) ) are to be experienced in an equal proportion.” Even the system of four Ashrama-s (आश्रम), the stages of life, namely, that of a Brahmachari (ब्रह्मचारी) – student, Grihastha (गृहस्थ) – householder, Vanaprastha (वानप्रस्थ) – retired from household duties and living in a forest, and Sannyasi (संन्यासी) – mendicant, is designed in such a way as to suit the fulfillment of both these goals. The Hindu ethical life consisted of the prescribed caste-duties and the specific duties of the different stages of life. These are collectively known as Varnashrama-Dharma (वर्णाश्रमधर्म). All human needs were taken care of through the socio-ethical institution of Varna (वर्ण) and Ashrama (आश्रम). The caste system in India has been often criticized and the intellectuals in society want to find out the rationale behind its origin. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) says that God Himself has created the fourfold division of Varna-s (वर्ण) based on characteristic qualities and particular duties. The duties and responsibilities of each of the Varna-s (वर्ण) are described exclusively in the Law books (Smriti-s स्मृति). This division of the society based on the Varna-s (वर्ण) in the past was meant for sharing the duties and for bringing out the best in man based on his upbringing. Thus the member of a particular caste by performing his duty benefits the entire society. Today in spite of the fact that law does not allow the discrimination on the basis of castes, privileges given to the members of some of the castes either in the past or in the present have caused discontent in society. Social reformers have worked on the problem for a long time, still a lot of serious efforts are needed to bring equality in the real sense.

Dharma (धर्म) has two dimensions, namely, vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension guides the individual progress and the other one guides the mutual relations between an individual and the society. The principles and the practices on which these relations subsist form the bed-rock of Dharma (धर्म). Indeed our ancient seers have astutely formulated a moral paradigm for common man which they call Samanya Dharma (सामान्यधर्म) or Sadharana Dharma (साधारणधर्म), that is, common moral code of conduct.

Kautilya in his Arthashastra (अर्थशास्त्र) says, “Non-violence, truth, purity, absence of envy and wickedness are the general moral rules meant for all.”<sup>11</sup> This according to him is the crux of Dharma (धर्म). The Mahabharata (महाभारत), particularly the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), the Smriti (स्मृति) literature such as Manusmriti (मनुस्मृति) and several

Purana-s (पुराण) like Bhagavata (भागवत) reiterate virtually the same list of moral virtues.

Manu mentions courage (Dhairya धैर्य), forgiveness (Kshama क्षमा), self-control (Dama दम), non-stealing (Chauryabhava चौर्याभाव), purity (Shaucha शौच), control on sense-organs (Indriya-nigraha इन्द्रियनिग्रह), wisdom (Dhi धी), learning (Vidya विद्या), truthfulness (Satya सत्य) and control of anger (Akrodha अक्रोध) as constituents of Sadharana Dharma (साधारण धर्म) which is also called as Samanya Dharma (सामान्यधर्म).<sup>12</sup> Prashastapada enumerates faith in religious duties (Dharma-shraddha धर्मश्रद्धा), non-injury (Ahimsa DeeEnmee), doing good to living beings (Bhutahitvatva भूतहितत्व), truthfulness (Satyavachana सत्यवचन), non-stealing (Asteya अस्तेय), sex-continence (Brahmacharya ब्रह्मचर्य), sincerity of mind (Anupadha अनूपधा), control of anger (Krodhavarjana क्रोधवर्जन), cleanliness and ablutions (Abhishechana अभिषेचन), intake of pure food (Shuchi-dravya-sevana शुचिद्रव्यसेवन), devotion to Vedic gods (Vishishta-devata-bhakti विशिष्टदेवताभक्ति), and watchfulness in avoiding transgressions (Apramada अप्रमाद) as Samanya Dharma (सामान्यधर्म). It is meant for the well-being of the humankind.<sup>13</sup>

I do not think that a follower of any religion will have any objection on the practice of Sadharana Dharma (साधारणधर्म).

The Ashtangayoga (अष्टाङ्गयोग) of Patanjali is on similar lines. I want to draw your attention to the first two constituents, namely, restraints (Yama यम) and observances (Niyama नियम). The Yama-s (यम) are: non-violence (Ahimsa अहिंसा), truth (Satya सत्य), non-stealing (Asteya Demles<sup>3</sup>e), control of carnal desires and passions (Brahmacharya ब्रह्मचर्य) and non-accumulation of unnecessary objects (Aparigraha अपरिग्रह). The Niyama-s (नियम) are: purification (Shaucha शौच), contentedness (Santosha सन्तोष), penance (Tapas तपस्), study (Svadyaya स्वाध्याय) and resignation to God (Ishvarapranidhana ईश्वरप्रणिधान).

Buddhism and Jainism, the two major Dharma-s (धर्म) besides Hinduism almost prescribe similar moral code. The Panchashila (पञ्चशील) of Lord Buddha and the Pancha-mahavrata-s (पञ्चमहाव्रत) of Lord Mahavir are in no way different from the aforesaid moral code.

Yes, the world wants today 'Buddha' and not 'Yuddha' (युद्ध) – war. And the best means for this is to create awareness about observing 'Samanya Dharma' (सामान्यधर्म).

I have pointed out that today's world is the world of consumerist glamour, world of science and technology, world of computer. But fortunately our Bharata Mata (भारतमाता) has left for us a very rich legacy of spirituality and morality, both being subsumed in Dharma (धर्म). We have had also a number of eminent exponents of Dharma (धर्म).

It is a proper time to inspire the educationists to introduce Dharma (धर्म) as a subject in the school syllabus. Indeed Dharma (धर्म) will protect us provided we guard it carefully.<sup>14</sup> The following words of Gandhiji will throw light on what I want to propose:

“If India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held at least as necessary as secular instruction; for a moral life without religion is like a house built on sand, and religion divorced from morality is like sounding brass, good only for making a noise and breaking heads.”<sup>15</sup>

I conclude with the prayer of saint-poet Jnaneshvar from Maharashtra who prays for peace and fraternity in the world through righteousness:

“Now may the omnipresent Divinity that permeates the entire universe be pleased with these words offered as a sacrifice and confer on me this grace.

May the wicked give up their crooked ways and may their fondness for good deeds increase and may all beings cherish friendship for one another.

May the darkness of evil in the world vanish and may the universe behold the Sun of righteousness. May each and every being gain the fulfillment of desires.”<sup>16</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 न जातु काम : कामानाम् उपभोगेन शाम्यति ।  
हविषा कृष्णवर्त्मैव भूय एवाभिवर्धते ।।  
na jatu kamah kamanam upabhogena shamyati/  
havisha krishnavartmeva bhuya evabhivardhate// Mahabharata Adiparva 75.50
- 2 नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया ।  
naisha tarkena matirapaneya/ Katha Upanishad I.2.9
- 3 अचिन्त्या : खलु ये भावा न तांस्तर्केण साधयेत् ।  
achintyah khalu ye bhava na tamstarkena sadhayet/ Mahabharata Bhishmaparva 6.11
- 4 ऊर्ध्वबाहुर्विरौम्येष न च कश्चिच्छृणोति मे ।  
धर्मादर्थश्च कामश्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ।।

urdhvabahurviraumyasha na cha kashchit shrinoti me/  
dharmadarthashcha kamashcha sa kimartham na sevyate//  
Mahabharata Svargarohanaparva 5.62

5 Rigveda I.22.18

6 धर्मं चर । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यम् ।  
dharmam chara / dharmanna pramaditavyam / Taittiriya Upanishad I.11.1

7 लोकयात्रार्थमेवेह धर्मस्य नियमः कृतः ।  
धारणाद् धर्ममित्याहुर्धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः ॥  
lokayatrarthameveha dharmasya niyamah kritah/  
dharanad dharmamityahurdharmo dharayate prajah// Mahabharata Karnaparva 69.58

8 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, Introduction, p. X

9 येऽप्यन्यदेवताभक्ता यजन्ते श्रद्धयाऽन्विताः ।  
तेऽपि मामेव कौन्तेय यजन्त्यविधिपूर्वकम् ॥  
ye'pyanyadevatabhakta yajante shraddhaya'nvitah/  
te'pi mameva kaunteya yajantyavidhipurvakam// Bhagavadgita IX.23

10 यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः ।  
yato'bhyudayanihshreyasasiddhih sa dharmah/ Vaisheshika Sutra I.1.2

11 सर्वेषाम् अहिंसा सत्यं शौचम् अनसूया आनृशंस्यं च ।  
sarvesham ahimsa satyam shaucham anasuya anrishamsyam cha/ Kautiliya Arthashastra I.3.13

12 धृतिः क्षमा दमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।  
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥  
dhritih kshama damo'steyam shauchamindriyanigraha/  
dhirvidya satyamakrodho dashakam dharmalakshanam// Manusmriti VI.92

13 Prashastapada-bhashya, Shrinivas Shastri (ed.), Indo-vision Pvt. Ltd., Gaziabad, 1984, p. 203

14 धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

dharmo rakshati rakshitah/ Manusmriti VIII.15

15 Young India 25.8.1927

16 आता विश्वात्मके देवे, येणे वाग्यज्ञे तोषावे ।

तोषोनि मज द्यावे, पसायदान हे ।।

जे खळांची व्यंकटी सांडो, तया सत्कर्मी रति वाढो ।

भूतां परस्परे पडो, मैत्र जीवाचे ।।

दुरितांचे तिमिर जावो, विश्व स्वधर्मसूर्ये पाहो ।

जो जे वांछील तो ते लाहो, प्राणिजात ।।

ata vishvatmake deve, yene vagyajne toshave/

toshoni maja dyave pasayadana he//

je khalanchi vyankati sando, taya satkarmi rati vadho/

bhuta paraspere pado, maitra jivache//

duritanche timira javo, vishva svadharmasurye paho/

jo je vanchhila to te laho, pranjata//

Jnaneshvari XVIII.1793-1795, Dandekar S. V. (ed.), Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1992

# **The Hindu Faith: a Few Glimpses**

*Delivered in* : the First International Congress of World and Traditional National Religions

*organized by* : H E Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

at Astana, Kazakhstan

23-24 September 2003

# The Hindu Faith: a Few Glimpses

HINDUISM is one of the oldest surviving religions of the world. It has survived over many millennia manifesting its robust capacity to assimilate, adopt and absorb new ideas and noble thoughts. Its strength lies in flexibility and acceptance with adaptation.

Hinduism always welcomed new breeze, new light and good thoughts from every corner of the world. The seer of the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) prays, “Let noble thoughts come to us from every corner of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Hinduism emphasizes the spirit of tolerance. Different religions and sects arose and prospered in India one after another. Sometimes it appeared that they would shake the very foundations of Hinduism. But just as the waves of the ocean recede after a high tide, these religions and various sects were sucked in, absorbed and assimilated enriching Hinduism in the process. Hinduism considers all the religions equally true and holds that they all are as though different paths to reach the goal. This has been beautifully expressed in the famous hymn ‘Shiva Mahimna Stotra’ (शिवमहिम्नस्तोत्र). It says, “As the different streams having their sources in different places, all mingle their waters in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various do they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”<sup>2</sup>

On the value of Vedic literature, the source of Hinduism, I would like to quote the great German Indologist Max Muller with special reference to the currents of thought which had their beginning in the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद).

“If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life again I should point to India.”<sup>3</sup>

No nation has produced a succession of more subtle or logical thinkers than India. The thinking and imagination of Vedic seers is unique and unparalleled. Vyasa, Panini, and Patanjali represent the zenith of achievement of the human intellect. There has been a galaxy of modern thinkers such as Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Shri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

India has a rich, profound and varied heritage of philosophical thinking. The ultimate aim is to attain peace, happiness and liberation by realizing that the individual soul is manifestation of the Supreme Divinity. Vivekananda says, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more or all of these – and be free."<sup>4</sup>

The noble ideal of tolerance and universal brotherhood so strongly and repeatedly emphasized in Hinduism is rooted in its basic philosophy that speaks of the omnipresence of the same Supreme Divinity in the entire creation including human beings, other sentient beings, plants, rivers, hills, rocks and everything else in the nature. The whole world is therefore considered as one family.<sup>5</sup> Nature is respected and treated with care and consideration. The Vedic belief that planting and watering plants and trees propitiate gods ensures ecological balance. Likewise worship of trees and rivers develops a positive attitude towards the environment.

Hinduism is unique in its nature due to the authority of multiple scriptures and spirit of unity in diversity. The fundamental scriptures of Hinduism are the Veda-s (वेद) which are the oldest literature of the mankind, still extant. They are eternal truths revealed to the great Rishi-s (ऋषि Seers) of yore who serve as channels for their transmission to humanity. These seers experienced the truths. Thus the Vedic truths are discovered, not produced; revealed, not manufactured. These scriptures offer a number of prayers to seek union with the Divinity, the Ultimate Reality. The Veda-s (वेद) constitute a rich spiritual heritage, profound with its illuminating wisdom, life-sustaining moral values and splendid aesthetic expressions. The values cherished in the Veda-s (वेद) are eternal and of universal applicability. The idea of universal brotherhood and fellowship is preached in the Veda-s (वेद) time and again.

The Veda-s (वेद) proclaim the harmony of religions and declare that all religions are only different paths to the same God, the Ultimate Reality. Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) presents this doctrine in a striking manner. "Truth, which to the seers means the Ultimate Reality is one, the wise call it by various names."<sup>6</sup>

Likewise the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), an important book of the Hindus, declares that in whatsoever form or manner a devotee desires to worship God, God strengthens the faith of the devotee in that worship and provides fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most respected personalities and the Father of modern India, was fond of the prayer which synthesized the Hindu prayer to Ishvara (ईश्वर God) and the Islamic prayer to Allah (अल्ला) in the

following manner:

“Ishvara (ईश्वर) and Allah (अल्ला) are names of the same God. Oh God, grant wisdom to all of us.”<sup>8</sup>

When followers of Zoroastrian religion sought refuge on the West Coast of India around the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., the local ruler welcomed them and allowed to settle in India and practice their religion and culture without any restrictions. Against this long background of harmony among different faiths in India, a few isolated instances of extremism represent an aberration caused by externally induced terrorism. It is hoped that both, the terrorism and extremism, would soon end. I would, therefore, like this distinguished gathering to appreciate the basic Indian spirit of tolerance.

I now proceed to highlight some major aspects of Hinduism. The ancient Indian Vedic and moral code is based on a philosophical system. Its essential elements are:

1. The Soul (Atman आत्मन्) – The Soul is eternal. Even when the body dies, the soul does not die.
2. Universal Supreme Reality – There is one Ultimate Reality, the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) which manifests itself as the Soul. Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is transcendent, immanent and all pervading. Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) not only created the world but also entered into it. It lives in the hearts of all creatures as their ‘Antaryamin’ (अन्तर्यामिन्), the inner controller of their personality.
3. The law of cause and effect (Karma कर्म) - All actions and thoughts produce some effect sooner or later.
4. Transmigration of the Soul – When any being dies, the soul takes the form of another living being. This could be in a lower or higher order depending on its Karma (कर्म).
5. There are five orders of beings in an ascending scale of consciousness in this world, namely,
  - (a) Material objects
  - (b) Living plants
  - (c) Animals, birds, etc.
  - (d) Men
  - (e) Gods

Man possesses intellect or reason, which animals do not possess. The more he has spiritual qualities such as love, goodness and mercy, the nearer he is to God and the more he has brutal qualities such as greed, lust and cruelty, the farther is he from God.

The ancient Indian sages have stated that man should possess the following virtues:-

1. Ahimsa (अहिंसा) – Non-violence
2. Satya (सत्य) – Truthfulness

3. Asteya (अस्तेय) – Non-stealing
4. Brahmacharya (ब्रह्मचर्य) – Abstinence from sensual pleasures
5. Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह) – Non-accumulation of unnecessary objects

In Hinduism non-violence (Ahimsa अहिंसा) is regarded as the highest virtue.<sup>9</sup> Hinduism believes in non-violence in thought, word and deed. According to Hinduism, all forms of life and matter are but different manifestations of the Supreme Reality; the universe has been created by the same Supreme Lord; the same Lord which is in my body as Self is also present in other bodies, therefore one should not be indifferent to the sufferings of others. Injury to any living being is sin against all the creation. Hinduism preaches that one must not use one's God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever. When sage Vyasa was asked to summarise in a nutshell the message of the scriptures, he said, "If you assist and help others, you earn merit. On the other hand, if you trouble or harm others, you commit a sin."<sup>10</sup>

True Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is life of non-violence but not of inaction, tolerance but not fearfulness, love but not attachment, strength but not ill-will, peace but not cowardice. It is total freedom from greed, hatred, anger and enmity. According to Mahatma Gandhi observance of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is heroism of the highest type with no room therein for cowardice or weakness. He fought successfully the struggle for India's independence with the weapons of truth and non-violence as he was convinced that the solution of the problems of the entire human race lies in the practice of truth and non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi extended the application of non-violence from the conduct of individual to the conduct of communities and nations. He followed the principle: Hate the sin, not the sinner. In his opinion non-cooperation was not directed against the English or the West but against material civilization and its attendant greed and exploitation of the weak.

Truth is another important value cherished in Hinduism. Truth does not change with time and space. In the sense of normal value of conduct, truth is truthfulness, integrity, and is known as Satya (सत्य), but in the metaphysical sense, it symbolizes the Supreme Reality which is an object of realization and vision and is known as Sat (सत्). The Shatapatha Brahmana (शतपथ-ब्राह्मण) and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) state that truth should be meditated upon as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).<sup>11</sup> The Taittiriya Aranyaka (तैत्तिरीय-आरण्यक) declares truth as the Self of an individual. The Mundaka Upanishad (मुण्डक-उपनिषद्) states that one realizes the Self by the means of truth.<sup>12</sup>

As a value of conduct, the Hindu sages have emphasized that truth must be practised in thought, speech and action. The Taittiriya Upanishad (तैत्तिरीय-उपनिषद्) exhorts that one should not swerve from truth.<sup>13</sup>

The seer in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) prays,

“From falsehood, lead me to truth, from darkness (of ignorance), lead me to light (of enlightenment), from death lead me to immortality.”<sup>14</sup>

According to the Ramayana (रामायण), the society is polluted by those who are not truthful. Manu makes it clear that one should speak pleasing truth but should not speak falsehood to please others.<sup>15</sup> The same is reiterated in the Mahabharata (महाभारत) and the Vishnupurana (विष्णु-पुराण). The Ramayana (रामायण), the Mahabharata (महाभारत) and other scriptures describe the rewards of speaking truth, namely, worldly gains, such as, fame, success, wealth, happiness in this world and happiness in the other world.

The Harivamsha (हरिवंश) states that the three virtues, righteousness, penance and truth unfailingly lead to victory.<sup>16</sup>

The best and the surest way to realize the Ultimate Reality is to be truthful in thought, word and action. Harishchandra, the famous king is regarded as a great hero because he donated his kingdom to Sage Vishvamitra to keep his promise that he had given in dream.

In short, Hinduism emphasizes that truthfulness leads to true knowledge and bliss. Mahatma Gandhi who was a staunch supporter and devotee of truth, explains this beautifully, “Where there is no truth (Sat सत्), there cannot be true knowledge. That is why the word Chit (चित्) or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (Ananda आनन्द). Sorrow has no place there. And even as Truth is eternal, so is bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as Sat-Chit-Ananda (सत्-चित्-आनन्द), one who combines in Himself, Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.”<sup>17</sup>

Peace has been the foremost and eternal quest of mankind from times immemorial. In spite of this, conflicts and warfare have persisted and endangered human life and brought the world to the threshold of disaster and ruin. Hatred and violence smother the spirit of love so much so that the efforts of prophets, saints and thinkers such as Lord Buddha, Bhagavan Mahavir, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Mahatma Gandhi and others are eclipsed over and again. Science has become an instrument of destruction, which can be avoided with the help of spirituality alone. Hinduism has spiritual potential. It offers ray of hope for the war-afflicted and strife-torn humanity. Indian thinking has influenced the world. More and more people are assimilating the Vedanta (वेदान्त) world-view and Yoga (योग) practices.

It is well known that India has stood for self-sacrifice and peace through ages. It has never given any regard for oppressors. Even in modern times, people such as Idi Ameen were criticized and peace makers such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela were praised and honoured. Any terrorist activity in any part of the world has been strongly condemned. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was a staunch supporter of peace in the whole world.

Peace is the very core of Hinduism because of its spiritual temperament. Peace can reign in the world when people cultivate and develop friendly attitude and a sense of fraternity with all living beings. The seer of the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) expresses this desire while he says, “May all living beings look at me with the eye of a friend;

may I look at all living beings with the eye of a friend; may we look at each other with the eye of a friend.”<sup>18</sup>

Peace should be maintained within a family, between friends, between nations and in the entire universe. For maintaining peace among nations, the spirit of good understanding should be the foundation of relationships and differences of opinions should be tolerated. The ancient Vedic seer prays for peace and seeks peace from all that which is pervaded by God. He says, “Peaceful be the heaven, peaceful be the earth, peaceful the broad space between. Peaceful be for us the running water, peaceful the plants and herbs. Peaceful be all the Gods, peaceful be the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), peaceful be the entire universe. May all be peaceful and may peace prevail and may that peace come unto me. Aum (ॐ) Peace, Peace, Peace.”<sup>19</sup>

Hinduism is a living example of unity in diversity. Sir Monier Williams emphasized<sup>20</sup>, “A characteristic of Hindu religion is its receptivity and all-comprehensiveness. It claims to be the one religion of humanity, of human nature, of the entire world. It cares not to oppose the progress of any other system. For it has no difficulty in including all other religions within its all-embracing arms and ever-widening fold. Hinduism has developed the most liberal way of life, a way of tolerance for each and every shade of thought. Followers of different religious faiths came here for refuge and lived a life of comfort, freedom and coexistence on this land.”

Thus one finds in Hinduism polytheism and monotheism, idol worship and rituals for the common man, pantheism for the large-hearted and monotheism for the spiritually inclined. It is this adaptive and variegated approach, which has sustained Hinduism through ages.

Devotion to a deity or to an incarnation of the Divine has always been the mainstay of Hinduism. The wealth of imagery, symbolism and iconography has produced a beautiful array of images and idols which often baffles non-Hindus. But it must be understood that in these idols the same all-pervasive divinity is mirrored in a thousand different ways. A popular saying very aptly explains the spirit behind idol worship. It is said, “God does not exist in the idols made of wood, stone or clay. He dwells in the devotional disposition of mind. Therefore, the sentiment of devotion is the chief means of God-realization.”<sup>21</sup>

Hinduism teaches assimilation and not destruction; peace and harmony and not dissension. One should live a life full of activity but the activity should not be self-centred. It should be directed towards the well-being of the world. The Ishavasya Upanishad (ईशावास्य-उपनिषद्) lays stress on renunciation, that is, Tyaga (त्याग). “All this – whatsoever moves on the earth – is enveloped by the Lord. Enjoy the objects of senses in a detached manner. Do not covet anybody’s wealth.”<sup>22</sup>

Hinduism has compassion for the whole humanity. Hence a noble minded Hindu prays, “Let all living beings be happy. Let all living beings be free from diseases. Let all attain well-being. Nobody should suffer.”<sup>23</sup>

The finest example of compassion is distinctly found in the prayer: “O Lord, I do not long for the attainment of Kingdom, neither for the heaven and nor for the salvation. What I yearn for is the removal of suffering in all

sentient beings.”<sup>24</sup>

Man is not an isolated island. He is part and parcel of the entire world around him. The Hindu view perceives the whole world as one family. Hence sharing with others is considered as an important aspect of life. That is why the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) says, “Go together, speak together. Let your minds agree in thought just as the ancient gods enjoy their share, respecting each other. Common be the counsel of these, common be your assembly, common your mind, common your thought. I utter a common prayer for you. I offer a sacrifice with a common oblation for you. May your resolve be alike; may your hearts be alike; may your mind be one, so that you live happily in harmony.”<sup>25</sup>

Before I end, on behalf of the Indian Delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to express our gratitude to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for this bold and timely initiative taken by him. I would also like to emphasize that constant dialogue and interaction among leaders of different faiths is the most effective way to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. We therefore strongly feel that this Interreligious Congress is a big step in the right direction. We have to build relations based on the discussions in the Congress so that there is a permanent mechanism for frequent interaction among leaders of different faiths. This, I am sure, would lead over a period of time to mutual understanding, tolerance and respect and in turn would promote the spirit of harmony and peace among people of different faiths.

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Endnotes:

- 1 आ नो भद्रा : क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।  
a no bhadrah kratavo yantu vishvatah / Rigveda I.89.1
- 2 रुचीनां वैचित्र्याद्रिजुकुटिलनानापथजुषाम्  
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ।  
ruchinam vaichitryadrijukutilananapathajusham/  
nrinameko gamyastvamasi payasamarnava iva// Shiva Mahimna Stotra VII.2
- 3 Friedrich Max Muller, ‘India, What Can It Teach Us?’, London, 1883, p. 6
- 4 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 124

- 5 वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ।  
vasudhaiva kutumbakam/ Laghuyogavasishta V.2.62
- 6 एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।  
ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti/ Rigveda I.164.46
- 7 यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयाऽर्चितुमिच्छति ।  
तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥  
yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktah shraddhaya'rchitumichchhati /  
tasya tasyachalam shraddham tameva vidadhamyaham // Bhagavadgita VII.21
- 8 ईश्वर अल्ला तेरो नाम ।  
सबको सन्मति दे भगवान् ॥  
ishvara allah tero nam/  
sabako sanmati de bhagavan//
- 9 अहिंसा परमो धर्मः ।  
ahimsa paramo dharmah/ Mahabharata Anushasanaparva 116.38
- 10 परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम् ।  
paropakarah punyaya papaya parapidanam/
- 11 ... सत्यं ह्येव ब्रह्म ।  
...satyam hyeva brahma/  
Shatapatha Brahmana X.4.5.3; cf. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad V.4.1
- 12 सत्येन लभ्यः तपसा ह्येष आत्मा ।  
satyena labhyah tapasa hyesha atma/ Mundaka Upanishad III.1.5
- 13 सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । satyanna pramaditavyam/ Taittiriya Upanishad I.11.1
- 14 असतो मा सद् गमय ।  
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।  
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ॥  
asato ma sad gamaya/

tamaso ma jyotirgamaya/  
mrityorma amritam gamaya// Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.3.28

- 15 सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम् ।  
प्रियं च नानृतम् ब्रूयात् एष धर्मः सनातनः ॥  
satyam bruyat priyam bruyat na bruyat satyamapriyam/  
priyam cha nanritam bruyat esha dharmah sanatanah// Manusmriti IV. 138
- 16 धर्मस्तपश्च सत्यं च यत्र तत्र जयो ध्रुवम् ।  
dharmastapashcha satyam cha yatra tatra jayo dhruvam/ Harivamsha II.94.41
- 17 Young India, September 17, 1925
- 18 मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम् ।  
मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे ।  
मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे ॥  
mitrasya ma chakshusha sarvani bhutani samikshantam/  
mitrasyaham chakshusha sarvani bhutani samikshe/  
mitrasya chakshusha samikshamahe// Shukla Yajurveda XXXVI.18, XXVI.2
- 19 द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः ।  
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥  
dyauh shantirantariksham shantih prithivi shantirapah shantiroshadhayah shantih/  
vanaspatayah shantirvishvedevah shantirbrahma shantih sarvam shantih shantireva shantih sa ma shantiredhi//  
Shukla Yajurveda XXXVI.17, Atharvaveda XIX.9.94
- 20 <http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/Biblio/Papers/Jeffery%20Long,%20anekfinta%20vendfinta.html>
- 21 न काष्ठे विद्यते देवो न पाषाणे न मृण्मये ।  
भावेषु विद्यते देवस्तस्माद्भावो हि कारणम् ॥  
na kashthe vidyate devo na pashane na mrinmaye/  
bhaveshu vidyate devastasmadbhavo hi karanam// Chanakya Rajaniti Shastra VI. 42
- 22 ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥

ishavasyamidam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat/  
tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasyasviddhanam// Ishavasya Upanishad 1

- 23 सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चित् दुःखमाप्नुयात् ॥  
sarve bhavantu sukhinah sarve santu niramayah/  
sarve bhadrani pashyantantu ma kashchit duhkhamapnuyat//
- 24 न त्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।  
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥  
na tvaham kamaye rajyam na svargam napunarbhavam /  
kamaye duhkhataptanam praninamartinashanam //
- 25 सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।  
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे संजानाना उपासते ॥  
समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम् ।  
समानं मन्त्रमभि मन्त्रये वः समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि ॥  
समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः ।  
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति ॥  
sam gachchhadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manamsi janatam /  
deva bhagam yatha purve sanjanana upasate //  
samano mantrah samitih samani samanam manah saha chittamesham /  
samanam mantramabhi mantraye vah samanena vo havisha juhomi //  
samani va akutih samana hridayani vah /  
samanamastu vo mano yatha vah susahasati // Rigveda X.191

# Universality of the Hindu Tenets

*Delivered in* : L N Gumilyov Eurasian National University on the occasion of receiving Honorary Professorship

at Astana, Kazakhstan

14 April 2008

# Universality of the Hindu Tenets

I deem it a great honour to speak before this august gathering on 'Universality of the Hindu Tenets' in the premises of the Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan. I had the proud privilege of leading the Hindu delegation to the Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional National Religions held in the years 2003 and 2006. These Congresses were convened through the historical initiative of H. E. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan.

All of us are deeply concerned about the hatred and the violence that take place in the name of religion in some parts of the world by some misguided fanatics. In this situation interfaith dialogue and religious harmony have assumed enormous importance. The Honorable President of Kazakhstan has indeed taken a major initiative by convening religious conferences providing an important platform for the voices of reason and moderation.

## **Dharma – Its Meaning and Scope**

Hinduism is also known as Vaidika Dharma (वैदिकधर्म) and Sanatana Dharma (सनातनधर्म). The former alludes to the literary source of the religion, the Veda-s (वेद), which are the authoritative scriptures of the religion, while the latter to the antiquity and eternal nature of Hinduism.

Dharma (धर्म) rendered as religion in English has several connotations. According to

William James, religions signify “the feelings, acts and experience of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.”

Max Muller defines religion as “a disposition which enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names and varying guises.”

In the opinion of Herbert Spencer, “Religion is the recognition that all things are manifestation of a power which transcends our knowledge.”

The word Dharma (धर्म) basically has two meanings, one at the cosmic level and the other at the individual level. At the cosmic level Dharma (धर्म) means the cosmic or natural order (Rita ऋत), whereas at the individual level it means desirable qualities such as truth and duties to be discharged by an individual.

As far as the individual aspect of the term Dharma (धर्म) is concerned, it can be noticed that there are at least two distinct connotations of the term accepted by tradition. Dharma (धर्म), from one point of view is not far from what we understand by the term religion, when it refers to gods and goddesses, worship, prayers and liturgy offered to them. It embodies dogmas and rituals based on scriptural authenticity. It also comprises various types of institutionalized sects.

The other connotation has a wider meaning. It deals with the lofty and sublime ideals of human life by providing it a code of conduct. The code includes moral precepts, rules and norms, those eternal principles which remain unchanged by the passage of time. These can be neglected by mankind only at its own peril. Every religion preaches love and not hatred, truth and not falsehood, honesty and not dishonesty or corrupt living. This dimension of Dharma (धर्म), that is, its ethical character strikes a balance between individual and social needs, thereby ensuring proper use of resources subordinating the individual needs in the interest of social welfare. This aspect of Dharma (धर्म) disciplines the whole being of man and makes him spiritual. It is secular, hence universal in its nature. Hinduism is rich and versatile in both these aspects.

The concept of Dharma (धर्म) is not confined only to spiritual or divine life. It also encompasses the worldly life, for it enjoins do's and don'ts obligatory for an individual to practise. This is the crux of 'Svadharmā' (स्वधर्म), that is, individual Dharma (धर्म). The Mahabharata (महाभारत), the great epic, particularly the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), an important book of the Hindus, the Smriti (स्मृति) literature such as Manusmriti (मनुस्मृति)

and several Purana-s (पुराण) like the Bhagavata (भागवत) prescribe almost the same set of moral virtues.

### **Sources of Hinduism**

The Veda-s (वेद) are the fountainhead of Hinduism. They are called Shruti (श्रुति that which is heard) and are considered to be divine revelations. The sublime value of Vedic scriptures has been accepted equally by Hindus and Western scholars.

The rest of the sacred writings are known as Smriti (स्मृति that which is restored in the memory of the sages). These are regarded secondary. The truths revealed in the Veda-s (वेद) are elaborated in these texts for the benefit of mankind. In addition to these, the Purana-s (पुराण), the Ramayana (रामायण) and the Mahabharata (महाभारत) are also very important sources of Hinduism. In a way the modern Hinduism rests on the three pillars, namely, Shruti-Smriti-Purana-s (श्रुति-स्मृति-पुराण).

### **Eclectic Outlook of Hinduism**

Hinduism does not stand so much for doctrinal conformity or ceremonial piety as for the transformation of human nature, the discovery of real nature of man.

To discover the true nature, different pathways have been described by the scriptures. Since Hinduism accepts multiplicity of pathways for the realization of the Supreme, it has the capacity to overcome conflicts, disputations or controversies.

Hinduism has retained a unique position among the world religions because of its long continuity for more than 4,000 years and its assimilative character. Roots of this Indo-Aryan religion go far beyond the times of the well-known old civilizations such as the Egyptian Civilization (circa 5000 B.C.) and the Mesopotamian Civilization comprising the Sumerian (circa 5000 B.C.), the Babylonian (2200 B.C.), the Assyrian (1250 B.C.), the Chaldean (612 B.C.); the Greek Civilization (4000 B.C.) and the Chinese Civilization (1760 B.C.). Hinduism continues to be a living tradition in the third millennium.

In India, in due course, Hinduism saw Buddhism, now a world religion and also Jainism grow and prosper to their present form, sharing some distinct features in mythology, ritual and dogma. In last two thousand years, followers of many other faiths sought shelter in India. In the year 52 A.D. St. Thomas, the Apostle came to India. Jews (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.),

Zoroastrians (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and the followers of Islam (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) came to India. Out of these people following different faiths some settled here for the security of their trade interest while others found their sanctuary after they had fled from their persecutors. In India their faiths prospered and did not perish. Their followers were granted not only asylum but also freedom to follow their religious practices and social customs.

It is only because of this eclecticism that the Hindu religion became a model for tolerance that generates harmony and peace. Hindus form around 85% population of India and the remaining represent followers of many other faiths including some that are extinct in other parts of the world. India with a majority population of Hindus is an ideal model of interreligious harmony. However, extremism and conflicts imported from outside occasionally disturb the peace of the land.

Hinduism looks upon well-being of mankind and not the well-being of a particular community as the end. It looks for fellowship among people in the world. Hence the prayer:

“May all living beings look at me with the eye of a friend,  
May I look at all living beings with the eye of a friend,  
May we look at each other with the eye of a friend.”<sup>1</sup>

The concept of well-being to all is also found in Buddhism. The corollary of the aforesaid prayer found in the Sutta Nipata (सुत्तनिपात) is as follows:

“May all be happy and safe!  
May all beings gain inner joy –  
All living beings whatever  
Without exception, weak or strong,  
Whether long or high  
Middling or small, subtle or gross,  
Seen or unseen,  
Dwelling afar or near,  
Born or yet unborn –  
May all beings gain inner joy.”<sup>2</sup>

The Hindu view perceives the whole world as one single family. The Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद)

says, “The entire world becomes one small nest here.”<sup>3</sup> Hence sharing with others is considered as an important aspect of life.

### **One Reality**

Hinduism believes in ‘One Reality’ manifested variously. The Vedic seers described it with different names and the Upanishadic thinkers envisaged it as the Ultimate Truth veiled by many appearances. The mystic saints of medieval India experienced it as God manifesting Himself in each and every thing that surrounded them. Savata Mali, the mystic saint saw his Lord in plants, in the vegetables and in the field he tilled.

Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, “The fundamental idea of all Indian religions is one common to the highest human thinking everywhere. The supreme truth of all that is a Being or an existence beyond the mental and physical appearances we contact here. Beyond mind, life and body there is a Spirit and Self containing all that is finite and infinite, surpassing all that is relative, a supreme Absolute, originating and supporting all that is transient, a one Eternal. A one transcendent, universal, original and sempiternal Divinity or divine Essence, Consciousness, Force and Bliss is the fount and continent and inhabitant of things. Soul, nature, life are only a manifestation or partial phenomenon of this self-aware Eternity and this conscious Eternal... It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to their degree of capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life. This Truth was to be lived and even to be made the governing idea of thought and life and action. This recognition and pursuit of something or someone Supreme behind all forms is the one universal credo of Indian religion, and if it has taken a hundred shapes, it was precisely because it was so much alive.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Tenets**

The varied nature of Hinduism allows diversity in practice. Still some basic tenets of Hinduism are common. In fact, they are the essence of Hinduism. I shall mention some of them in brief.

There is but one Ultimate Reality, called Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). It is the cosmic principle which is infinite and eternal. It illumines all that exists in the world. The world emanates from Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), sustains on account of it and merges into it. Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is present

in all living beings as Atman (आत्मन्), the Self. It is believed that the Self (Atman आत्मन्) is one; it is eternal, immanent as well as transcendent and does not perish even though the body of a living being perishes.

The law of Karma (कर्म) occupies an important place in Hinduism. The birth of a living being depends upon his actions, his Karma (कर्म). As he sows, so he reaps. It is said in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) that one becomes virtuous by good actions and sinful by evil actions.<sup>5</sup> This belief is called the law of Karma (कर्म).

### The Three Debts

Rinatraya (ऋणत्रय), a great ethical concept of the three debts which every individual is expected to repay during his life, is of great significance to Hinduism. First, there is the debt which he owes to God; this debt may be redeemed by offering worship to Him. The second debt is that which he owes to the Seers, those who have been the witnesses of the truths revealed in the Veda-s (वेद) and this debt can be repaid by studying the scriptures and preserving the rich heritage handed down by them from age to age. Man owes his third debt to his ancestors, and this he repays by procreating good progeny, maintaining a family and thereby ensuring the continuity of religious and social traditions.

In addition to these three debts the later scriptures mentioned two more debts, namely, debt to fellow human beings, and debt to other living beings. To his fellow human beings, man has to offer charity and hospitality. Compassion and loving care offered to other living beings make him free from the last debt.

### Divine Qualities

Hindu Ethics invariably deals with the divine qualities which have the potential of becoming universal Dharma (धर्म).

Patanjali, the propounder of the Yoga (योग) philosophy, has enumerated these moral virtues as Yama-s (यम).<sup>6</sup> The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) emphasizes on Daivi Sampad (दैवी-सम्पद्). Jainism enjoins the same ethical code as the vows to be practised by a pious layman (Anuvrata-s अणुव्रत) as also by a monk (Mahavrata-s महाव्रत).

Divine qualities such as non-violence (Ahimsa अहिंसा) and truth (Satya सत्य) are regarded as the prime virtues in Hinduism. Non-violence is the statement of common good. Right

from the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) which admonishes, 'Do not kill living beings' ample references to non-violence are found in Indian Literature. The Mahabharata (महाभारत) equates practice of non-violence with great austerity, sacrifice, strength, so on and so forth.

One should not be tempted to possess that, which does not rightfully belong to oneself. Coveting other's possession amounts to stealing on the mental level. Not only physical action of theft is to be avoided, even the thought of it is to be shunned. This is described as Asteya (अस्तेय). The unauthorized appropriation of things is the root cause of social inequality. By curbing this tendency one attains individual purification as well as the social good.

The sense organs almost compel a person to run after the objects through which he can have sensual pleasures. This thirst for enjoyment is represented by sexual pleasure, hence continence (Brahmacharya ब्रह्मचर्य) is of immense importance. In the wider sense this virtue implies abstinence from all kinds of sensual pleasures.

Accumulation of objects is undesirable. One should control one's needs. Even gifts should be refused because once we accept them we get attached to them. Sometimes the sense of possession may drive us to harm others. Even in modern times we see some people have more than what they need while some others lack the resources for even their minimum basic needs. The spirit of non-acquisitiveness (Aparigraha अपरिग्रह) can purify the soul and also promote social justice. The universality, the vitality and the appeal of Hinduism throughout its passage from the pre-historic Vedic ages to the present time is founded on such lofty thoughts.

### **New Trends in Hinduism**

Hinduism is not static, it has evolved with time; new ideas have emerged and have enriched the Indian thought. New trends have rendered Hinduism its present form. In early phases, the concept of Moksha (मोक्ष) – liberation was not explicit, but it gained prominence after Upanishadic times. It became the summum bonum of life. Knowledge was seen as the means to attain liberation. The path of selfless action was also considered as the means to liberation. The mystic path of meditation and contemplation was also regarded as a way to liberation. With the rise of theistic cults, devotion became popular. It gradually became stronger than the other means.

Devotion is a bridge between the devotee and his God. It is a beautiful intimate relationship.

It is total surrender (Prapatti प्रपत्ति) to Him. It is experiencing Him everywhere. Separation from Him cannot be borne by the devotee. It is just unbearable for him. The young ones of birds whose wings are not yet strong enough to make them fly are eager to see their mother. The hungry calves wait for their mother. The same is the intensity of the devotee aspiring for the vision of the Lord. The devotee is like a child, a friend, a beloved or a servant to Lord.

According to Narada, Bhakti (भक्ति) (devotion) means intensive and supreme love for God.<sup>7</sup> There are nine ways of devotion – Navavidha Bhakti (नवविधा-भक्ति). They are: Hearing about God (Shravanam श्रवणम्), singing songs about Him (Kirtanam कीर्तनम्), remembering Him (Smaranam स्मरणम्), serving Him (Padasevanam पादसेवनम्), worshipping Him (Archanam अर्चनम्), saluting Him (Vandanam वन्दनम्), being His slave (Dasyam दास्यम्), being His friend (Sakhyam सख्यम्), and surrendering oneself and one's own possessions to Him while declaring oneself as 'belonging to Him' (Atmanivedanam आत्मनिवेदनम्).<sup>8</sup>

The concept of Moksha (मोक्ष) is described as immortality (Amritatva अमृतत्व). Dasgupta interprets the concept aptly in the following words. "The concept of Immortality cannot be applied to our bodies or the sensuous and intellectual elements of the mind, but only to the spirit which reveals its nature through an inner intuitive enlightenment. It lies deep in the cavern of the heart self-revealed through his own radiance but unrevealed by the ordinary cognitive ways. In this aspect its subsistence is mystical, its concrete reality is directly experienced and felt. Thus, belief in Immortality means only the awakening in man of his true nature as spirit; for it is the spirit alone that has no content in itself, except so far as it may reveal itself through the content of our personality. All seeming changes in the spirit occur only through its association with the personality. The immortal nature can only be realized through the intuitive awakening of spiritual reality."<sup>9</sup>

The concept of Jivanmukta (जीवन्मुक्त) – one who is liberated while alive – is also one of the important concepts that came into existence at a later stage. There was a great debate on the issue whether liberation can be achieved in the present birth while living. The Absolute Monist school of Vedanta (वेदान्त) believes in the identity between individual soul and Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). It says that the body, after attaining liberation while alive may survive to enjoy the fruit of one's previous ripened action (Prarabdha Karma प्रारब्धकर्म). In this state the actions cannot bind the aspirant, nor can the temptation allure him. The Jivanmukta (जीवन्मुक्त), owing to destruction of ignorance is free from all bondage and becomes established in Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) says that one who

has attained spiritual equanimity conquers the cycle of birth and death here in this birth.<sup>10</sup>

In the Yoga (योग) system it is believed that when a Yogi (योगी) reaches the state of Dharmamegha Samadhi (धर्ममेघसमाधि) all the roots of ignorance and other afflictions are completely destroyed and the Yogi (योगी) becomes emancipated (Vimukta विमुक्त) while alive.

## **Peace**

Modern science and technology have made great advances that are conducive to empowerment of mankind. They have helped us to overcome many of our drawbacks in the fields of health and hygiene, agriculture and industry, trade and communication. Thus they have improved the quality of life for major part of the humanity. However, the misuse of science and technology for vested interests of some perverse individuals has put humanity in great danger. This can be overcome with the help of spirituality alone. Hinduism has spiritual potential. For the war-afflicted and strife-torn humanity, a spiritual as distinct from a dogmatic view of life is needed. Saints, martyrs and social reformers have given their lives to prevent conflict and war and strived to build societies of justice and peace amidst the harsh realities of injustice, violence, terrorism and war.

## **A New Paradigm for Peace**

The declaration of the First Congress held in Kazakhstan has kindled a new ray of hope to realize the ideal of peaceful coexistence of followers of different religions by 'recognizing the right of each human person freely to choose, express and practice his/her religion'. In present times under the pretext of security the world has been inflicted with high degree of violence and conflict, in fact it has been rendered more insecure. A new paradigm has to be created for the safety and survival of all the faiths of the world.

In order to achieve the expected universal peace and harmony one would have to resort to mutual dialogue and not strife. Broader visions would have to be built up to overlook constitutional or legal technicalities. The religious institutions that serve people should be saved from being uprooted by the forces of intolerance. The policy-makers should at their level give a great fillip to religious harmony. This will facilitate healthy conditions for all the faiths in the world to bloom and blossom without fear or favour. All faiths, it is known, aspire and strive for attaining the ultimate peace. For this the basic tenets of all the religions will have to be culled through deeper study of religions and their

comparative analysis.

Here I would like to add a few words. The Eastern religions, such as the Vedic, the Buddhist, the Confucian and the Jain have spread their message over the length and breadth of Asia through a process of dialogue and discussion. People have been persuaded to accept new religious traditions on the basis of debate and reasoning and not through coercion.

On the other hand the spread of other religions has taken place through force and violence. People were prohibited from following their traditional religions and coerced into accepting a new religion. This has resulted in tremendous hatred and bloodshed generated in the name of religion. When the world is witnessing the phenomenon of terrorism, the time has come for all of us to accept the paradigm of respect for all religions and freedom to religious belief. Dialogue and discussions should replace destruction in the name of religion.

In this context, Kazakhstan can be viewed as a role model of religious harmony and peace. Sometimes multireligious societies are threatened by possible disintegration. However, in Kazakhstan diverse religions, namely, Islam, Christianity – Protestant and Catholic, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism have coexisted and provided the strong bedrock of harmony. I would, therefore, take this occasion to commend the example of Kazakhstan to other nations.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Yajurveda XXXVI.18, XXVI.2
- 2 Sutta Nipata Mettasutta
- 3 यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम्।  
yatra vishvam bhavatyekanidam // Yajurveda XXXII. 8
- 4 Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 14, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 125-126

- 5 पुण्यो वै पुण्येन कर्मणा भवति पापः पापेन ।।  
punyo vai punyena karmana bhavati papah papena / Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4.5
- 6 अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः ।  
ahimsasatyasteyabrahmacharyaparigraha yamah / Patanjala Yogasutra II.30
- 7 सा त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा ।  
sa tvasmin paramapremarupa / Narada Bhakti Sutra 2
- 8 श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।  
अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ।।  
shravanam kirtanam vishnoh smaranam padasevanam /  
archanam vandanam dasyam sakhyamatmanivedanam / Bhagavata Purana VII.5.23
- 9 Dasgupta Surendranath, Philosophical Essays, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p. 380
- 10 इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां साम्ये स्थितं मनः ।  
ihaiva tairjिताh sargo yesham samye sthitam manah/ Bhagavadgita V.19

# **Some Glimpses on the Veda-s**

*Delivered in* : the National Vedic Sammelan

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

10 January 2005

## Some Glimpses on the Veda-s

**C**ONFRONTED with the insoluble mystery of the universe, his mind overwhelmed by the sheer loveliness and the ineffable beauty of Nature, his questioning soul yearning to probe into the secrets hidden from his sight, the early Aryan (around 6,000 B.C.) let his insatiated spirit break forth into a paean of praise, of wonder, of dedication, to that unknown and unknowable power, which he beheld on all sides of him. His simple soul, untouched by any trace of worldly contamination, spoke of his untiring curiosity as also of his self-confessed inability to fathom the inscrutable Reality of the mighty equations that encompassed him. And so with awe and wonder, with the undying glow of mind bent upon seeking, searching and finding he broke out into poetry roused by the vision splendid. And thus came into being the Veda-s (वेद), the earliest document of human being, inspired speech, the first words of the inquiring genius of some millennia ago, questioning but never doubting, launching out into realms beyond his ken, unafraid, and hopeful.

The Veda-s (वेद) are known as Shruti (श्रुति). The Indian tradition believes that they are revealed and were received through the auditory sense organ. The direct experience of the Divine Reality was narrated by the Rishi-s (ऋषि), the 'seers', to their disciples.

Prof. R. D. Ranade explains exclusively the meaning of the term 'revealed literature'. He says, "The Veda-s (वेद), the Brahmana-s (ब्राह्मण) and the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) have all of them been recognized from times immemorial as Shruti (श्रुति) or Revelation. Let us try to find out what real meaning of this expression is. It has been customary among all religions to regard their basal works as being revealed to them by God. Some regard their

religious works as having been revealed to them in the midst of light and thunder, either from without or within. Others regard them as having been delivered to them in the form of significant sounds. In this way have the Bible (बायबल) and the Qur'an (कुराण), like the Veda-s (वेद) and the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्), been regarded as revelations of God to man. The real meaning of Revelation seems to present writer to be not any external message delivered to man from without, but a divine afflatus springing from within, the result of inspiration through god-intoxication. It was for this reason that St. Paul said that it was not he but God that spoke through him. It was for this reason that Jesus Christ advised his disciples to take no thought as to what they were going to speak, but that they should speak straight-way and then God would speak through them.”<sup>1</sup>

The Veda-s (वेद), four in number, are the world's oldest scriptures and are regarded with deserving reverence by mankind. Of these, the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) is the most ancient and speaks of Indra, Agni, Varuna, Savita, Marut, Usha and other deities in hymns called Sukta-s (सूक्त). These are set in a solemn metre and have a tone that is dipped in praise. Shakala (शाकल) and Bashkala (बाष्कल) are the two branches into which the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) is divided.

The Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) which comes next, slightly differs from its predecessor, for it contains formulae and expressions in prose and dwells on the ritualistic aspect. There are Yajus (यजुस्) prayers (where the number of letters in a particular line is not definite) as also rituals which are required to be performed at varied times of the day, that is, dawn, morning, evening; then there are some for the days when the moon is full or crescent; rituals to be observed at other times, accompanied by sacrifices, also find some mention here. This Veda (वेद), like the former one, is also divided into two sections – the Black (Krishna कृष्ण) and the White (Shukla शुक्ल).

The Samaveda (सामवेद) seems sequential to the ones that have preceded as apart from the 75 stanzas that are added, the remaining 1474 are reproduced from the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद). The prayers are clearly meant for being sung, for the accents suggest such an intention, and this is further corroborated by its name Saman (सामन्) which means “singing”, and this made it possible to introduce music into the rituals and hence the Soma (सोम)-sacrifices came to be performed with the accompaniment of song. Like the other Veda-s (वेद), the Samaveda (सामवेद) is divided into two parts – the Purvarchika (पूर्वार्चिक) and the Uttararchika (उत्तरार्चिक). The fourth and last of the Veda-s (वेद), the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद) is dissimilar to the others in some areas. It has three branches – the Ranayaniya (राणायनीय), the Kauthuma (कौथुम) and the Jaiminiya (जैमिनीय). Originally known as

Atharvangirasa (अथर्वङ्गिरस), (and also called Brahmaveda ब्रह्मवेद) it is a collection of sacred prayers designed to appease, to bless, to cure. These are recited on occasions of birth, marriage and similar auspicious occasions. Ayurveda (आयुर्वेद) derives its origin from here and this is owing to the fact that this Veda (वेद) prescribes remedies for various diseases. It sows seeds of physical sciences that flourished in near future. One also finds a trace of occultism in the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद). This Veda (वेद) too, is split into two branches – the Pippalada (पिप्पलाद) and the Shaunaka (शौनक). The fourfold division of the Veda-s (वेद) is a broad one.

The Veda-s (वेद) proclaim that there is one Ultimate Reality called by different names. The Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) presents this doctrine in a striking manner. “Truth, which to the seers means the Ultimate Reality; is one. The wise call it by various names.”<sup>2</sup>

The Nasadiya Sukta (नासदीय-सूक्त) of the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) is an excellent expression of the philosophical speculation. About creation it says:

“Then there was either Aught nor Nought, no air nor sky beyond.  
What covered all? Where rested all? In water profound?  
Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor division of night and day.  
That One breathed calmly, self-sustained, nought else beyond it lay...  
Who knows, who ever told, from whence this manifold creation rose?  
No gods had then been born – who then knows whence this arose?  
Whence sprang this world, and whether created by the divine or no.  
Its Lord in heaven alone can say, if even he doth know.”<sup>3</sup>

The last Sukta (सूक्त) of the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) gives an invaluable message of unity, harmony and peace to mankind. The Bhumisukta (भूमिसूक्त) of the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद), a rare eulogy of Mother Earth, is rich with respect and reverence towards the nation:

“Pleasant be thy hills, O Earth,  
thy snow-clad mountains and thy woods!...  
on this Earth I stand, unvanquished, unslain, unhurt.  
Set me, O Earth, amidst what is thy centre and thy navel,  
and vitalising forces that emanated from thy body.  
Purify us from all sides. Earth is my mother, her son am I;

and Rain my father: may he fill us with plenty.  
Whatever I dig from thee, Earth,  
may that have quick growth again.  
O purifier, may we not injure thy vitals or thy heart.”<sup>4</sup>

### Sacrifice

Yajna (यज्ञ) derived from the root yaj (यज्) can be described as offering oblation to gods. It is a religious activity to propitiate gods while chanting the related Vedic incantations. The Chamaka (चमक) of the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) is replete with such demands that are all material in their nature. It is the prototype of Sakama Bhakti (सकामभक्ति). The Brahmana (ब्राह्मण) texts deal with the Yajna-s (यज्ञ) exclusively. The Yajna (यज्ञ) occupies a very important place in the Mimamsa (मीमांसा). It is considered as a means to fulfill various desires.

The ceremonial of sacrifice was created by the Vedic seers as a meeting centre for immortal heavenly deities and mortal men. This made the sacrificial pavilion a centre for propagation of Vedic culture, focal point of all major social processes. In fact it provided a niche for the Vedic man who could attain his major goals in life, namely, acquisition of wealth, longevity of healthy life through the favour of Gods and becoming immortal through progeny. Sacrifice was considered as instrumental cause for all creation, really the womb of all creation, of all worlds, including gods and sages, domesticated as well as wild animals.

It is indeed significant to note that Yajna (यज्ञ) is tantamount to microcosm and has a great similarity with macrocosm. The two affect and influence each other. The performance is based really on Shraddha (श्रद्धा), that is, faith which helps to remove not only the deficiency in respect of means but also at times their total lack. Another significant cause for the continuity of the Vedic Karma-kanda (कर्मकाण्ड) is its commendable flexibility; the credit for using this must go to Yajnavalkya, the great Vedic thinker who placed his unmistakable finger on the spirit of sacrifice and ignored the idea of blindly following the intricate rules and regulations laid down in the Brahmana-s (ब्राह्मण).

The concept of Yajna (यज्ञ) had been very much developed in the Indo-Iranian period. The Vedic Agnishtoma Yajna (अग्निष्टोमयज्ञ) and the Yasna (यस्न) ceremony of the Parsis are similar to some extent. The Homa (होम) in Japanese Buddhism is called as Goma (गोम). Important Vedic Yajna-s (यज्ञ) are Darsha-purnamasa (दर्शपूर्णमास), Chaturmasya

(चातुर्मास्य), Ashvamedha (अश्वमेध), Rajasuya (राजसूय), Agnihotra (अग्निहोत्र), Agnishtoma (अग्निष्टोम), etc. For the people of ancient India the means through which sacrifice must pass is fire. Therefore Agni is prayed first of all in the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद). God Agni is directly connected with Yajna-s (यज्ञ). He is considered as a mediator between men and gods. He is also the instrument by which sacrifice is performed. He carries the human offering to the divine world so that it is accepted. He also acts as the vehicle through which gods descend among men to enjoy the offering and bless them. His food is wood and his beverage is ghee or melted butter. He is the mouth by which gods eat the sacrifice. He is produced by friction from two fire sticks, which are said to be his parents. He is also described as the son of heaven and earth. He is the centre of the Yajna (यज्ञ) so he is often called Ritvij (ऋत्विज्). He is also called the Purohita (पुरोहित) – the domestic priest, Hota<sup>5</sup> (होता) and Adhvaryu<sup>6</sup> (अध्वर्यु). The oblation reaches to the deities only through him. He is also addressed as Angirasa. He is a ruler of sacrifices and a household deity.

Besides Agni, the Aryans worshiped many deities which were personifications of natural phenomena. These were of three categories:

1. Terrestrial gods such as Prithivi, Soma, Agni, etc.
2. Atmospheric gods such as Indra, Vayu, Marut, etc.
3. Heavenly gods such as Surya, Mitra, Pushan, Varuna, etc.

Various types of sacrifices were performed by Aryans which could be performed by ordinary persons while some others could be performed by wealthy people and kings. For example, only kings could perform Rajasuya (राजसूय) and Ashvamedha (अश्वमेध) sacrifices. These sacrifices served many purposes. They had their religious aspect as the main purpose but they had the political, social and recreational aspects also. They provided a platform for meeting together and enjoying the festivity. All the people belonging to the community were benefitted by sacrifice. When ghee (melted butter), twigs of holy trees, etc. were offered in the fire, the whole atmosphere got purified. However, one cannot overlook the fact that these sacrifices were meant for material gains.

By the passage of time, the Shrauta Yajna-s (श्रौतयज्ञ) – those enjoined by the Shruti-s (श्रुति) – became very difficult. Every man could not afford to perform them. So the five Mahayajna-s (महायज्ञ) were prescribed in the Smriti-s (स्मृति) because these were easier. In these five Yajna-s (यज्ञ) chief agent is the householder himself and there is no need of a professional priest who is essential in Shrauta Yajna (श्रौतयज्ञ). The conception of five sacrifices called Pancha Mahayajna-s (पञ्चमहायज्ञ) is morally and spiritually progressive

and ennobling. The first among them is Brahma Yajna (ब्रह्मयज्ञ), that is, Svadhyaya (स्वाध्याय self study of the scriptures). The second is Deva Yajna (देवयज्ञ) – the worship of God. The third is Pitri Yajna (पितृयज्ञ) – prayers and offerings to the ancestors. The fourth one is Nri Yajna (नृयज्ञ) or Atithi Yajna (अतिथियज्ञ) – the hospitality. The fifth one is Bhuta Yajna (भूतयज्ञ) – offering food to animals, the reverent relationship with each and every creature on the earth.

The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) gives a very wide meaning to sacrifice. It proclaims that any action performed in the spirit of dedication to the Divine is Yajna (यज्ञ). The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) glorifies Yajna (यज्ञ). It says, “From food beings become; from rain food is produced; from Yajna (यज्ञ) rain proceeds; Yajna (यज्ञ) is born of Karma (कर्म), the ritual. Karma (कर्म) has risen from the Veda (वेद), and the Veda (वेद) from the Imperishable. The all-pervading Veda (वेद) is, therefore, ever centered in Yajna (यज्ञ).”<sup>7</sup>

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) gave a twist to the concept of Yajna (यज्ञ). His mind stimulated by the imponderables on all sides of him, his imagination stirred by the unknowables that confronted him, our ancestor of ages ago went on his quest of discovery, asking questions that transcended the limits of human thought and passed beyond the reach of the intellect. His curiosity, his mental effort, his sense of bewilderment at the grandiose spectacle that met his ardent gaze, took him deeper into the vortex of inquiry and he ended up with a philosophy that spoke of the awe and reverence that his search brought him. Some of his questions were: “Who am I? From where have I come? Where am I going? Who is the creator of the world I inhabit? What is it made of?” And such answers as arose in response to their prolonged meditations comprise the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्). The word Upanishad (उपनिषद्) consists of three syllables – Upa-ni-sad (उप-नि-सद्) – meaning knowledge acquired by sitting near the Guru (गुरु) and learning from him. There are about 200 Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) but 13 among them are considered to be the principal ones: written about 3000 years ago when the world was young, they are the creations of diverse minds. In essence the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) say that the world originated from Brahman (ब्रह्मन्); everybody has an imperishable soul, Ishvara (ईश्वर) is Paramatman (परमात्मन्). The soul – Atman (आत्मन्), the Supreme Soul – Paramatman (परमात्मन्), and the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) are interrelated. Creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world proceed from the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) and hence comprehension with regard to it is essential. There is a single thread that runs through all creation and this knowledge should emphasize the unity of all around us. Thus the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is taken to be one indivisible whole which remains the same even when something is withdrawn from it.<sup>8</sup>

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) lay down certain rules that need strict adherence such as, “Speak the Truth, and perform your duty. Abandon not your studies. Look upon parents and the Guru (गुरु) with the deepest reverence due to God.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैतवेदान्त), there are four great declarations, the Mahavakya-s (महावाक्य), which contain the essence of the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्). They are -

1. Supreme Consciousness is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).<sup>10</sup>
2. I am Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).<sup>11</sup>
3. That thou art.<sup>12</sup>
4. This Atman (आत्मन्) is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).<sup>13</sup>

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) sometimes reconcile the diverse views current at that time, which were perhaps, pursued independently in society. The Isha Upanishad (ईश-उपनिषद्) synthesizes two opposite views, renunciation and the path of action. The first verse indicates renunciation while the second one speaks of constant work. “All this – whatsoever moves on the earth should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through detachment. Do not covet anybody’s wealth. By doing Karma (कर्म), indeed, should one wish to live here for a hundred years. For a man such as you (who wants to live thus), there is no way other than this whereby Karma (कर्म) may not cling to you.”<sup>14</sup>

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) thus reflect the amplitude and depth of the knowledge man was seeking, which did not restrict itself to his worldly existence, but tried to probe the wider areas that related him to his place in the divine plan, the boundless expanse of the Universe, the personal equation with the creator, the essential quality of the soul, and its unending alliance with each individual soul.

Swami Vivekananda declared, “...let me tell you, we want strength, and the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) are a great source of strength. Therein lies power to invigorate the whole world. They call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable, the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and sects, to stand on their feet and be free; freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्).”<sup>15</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 Ranade R.D., A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 1986, p. 6
- 2 SkebÀ meod efJeÒee yengOee Jeoeffvle ~ ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti/ Rigveda I.164.46
- 3 Rigveda X.129
- 4 Atharvaveda XII.1. 11-12, 35, A. C. Bose (tr.), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966, p. 371
- 5 A sacrificial priest, especially the one who recites prayers of the Rigveda at a sacrifice.
- 6 Any officiating priest. His duty was to measure the ground, to build the altar, to prepare sacrificial vessels, to fetch wood and water, light the fire, etc.
- 7 Bhagavadgita III.14-15
- 8 पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते । पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ।।  
purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudachyate/  
purnasya purnamadaya purnamevavashishyate// Brihadaranyaka Upanishad V.1.1
- 9 सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः । मातृदेवो भव । पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव ।  
satyam vada/ dharmam chara/ svadhyayanma pramadah/ matridevo bhava/ pitridevo  
bhava/ acharyadevo bhava/ Taittiriya Upanishad I.1.1.1-3
- 10 प्रज्ञानम् ब्रह्म । prajnanam brahma/ Aitareya Upanishad III.1.1
- 11 अहं ब्रह्मास्मि । aham brahmasmi/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.4.10
- 12 तत्त्वमसि । tattvamasi/ Chandogya Upanishad VI.8
- 13 अयमात्मा ब्रह्म । ayamatma brahma/ Mandukya Upanishad 2
- 14 Isha Upanishad 1-2, Swami Gambhirananda (tr.), Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1989
- 15 Swami Vivekananda, Lectures from Colombo to Almora, Vedanta and Indian Life, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1984, p. 158

# **Art of Communication in the Veda-s**

***Organized by :*** K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham and Vedic Academy of Science  
and Arts, Canada

Delivered at : Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

26 March 2008

## Art of Communication in the Veda-s

**T**HE Veda-s (वेद) are the foremost literature in the world. They are referred to as Shruti-s (श्रुति) – that which is ‘heard’ or ‘revealed’. The term Shruti (श्रुति) also covers the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्), the fountainhead of Indian Philosophy. In the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद), the word Vak (वाक्) is often used to denote sound, voice or speech, so any kind of sound produced from inanimate things such as lightning or living beings such as birds, animals and human beings is regarded as Vak (वाक्).

The Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) speaks about speech of four types. The wise are aware of these. The three of them, namely Para (परा), Pashyanti (पश्यन्ती) and Madhyama (मध्यमा) are said to be hidden in the cave. This means that they are mystic and ineffable as they cannot be heard. Men speak fourth (type of) speech – Vaikhari (वैखरी).<sup>1</sup> Vaikhari (वैखरी) means that which is articulate, which can be heard by others. Hence it is the medium of communication.

The Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) also speaks about Sunrita Vak (सूनृता वाक्),<sup>2</sup> which means sweet and true speech. This expression provides a significant norm not only for communication, but also for human behaviour. It implies non-injury in words. It inspires good thoughts and not the vicious ones. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) reiterates significance of true and agreeable words and says that words which cause no agitation, and are true, as also agreeable and beneficial... form the austerity of speech.<sup>3</sup>

A story about the origin of the speech from the Taittiriya Samhita<sup>4</sup> (तैत्तिरीय-संहिता) goes as follows – Initially speech was continuous and hence could not be comprehended even by Gods. It was not grammatically systematized. Therefore all the Gods praised Indra

and requested him to divide the language according to grammar so that everybody could use it. Indra did accordingly. Then the systematic and grammatically organized speech came in usage. Hence we find a grammar called as Aindra (ऐन्द्र) Grammar (that which is composed by Indra) in Sanskrit language. This story tells about the systematic construction of the speech such as the division of speech in noun, verb, etc.

Various myths and legends fabricated around 'Vak' (वाक्) are evident of the extra-ordinary importance given to language by human race. The Bible (बायबल) (Genesis 11) has an interesting story that tells us how different languages came into being. It so happened that people on the earth decided to build a tower to reach the heaven and to God. So they started to build a high tower and one fine day God noticed it. He was angry as it was built without His permission. He cursed those people that they would speak different languages and nobody would understand each other. So all of them started speaking different languages and eventually they could not construct the tower due to lack of right communication amongst them.

The above legend describes the importance of communication. Unless it is meaningful, communication has no significance. Patanjali, in his treatise on Grammar, namely, 'Vyakaranamahabhashya' (व्याकरणमहाभाष्य) points out the significance of right communication. He says, "One who is skillful in the usage of words, wins. One who does not know the art of using proper words is ignorant."<sup>5</sup>

The need of proper communication has become even more intense today. Lack of communication has become one of the main causes for communication gap. Increasing communication gap among individuals leads to serious problems on personal and societal level, may they be emotional, psychological, political, communal, etc.

Goddess Sarasvati is the deity governing Vak (वाक्). As Saras (सरस् water) signifies nectar, the speech must be free from all that is malicious. The Buddha also gives importance to right speech and defines it. He says, "What, O Bhikkhu-s (भिक्षु), is Right Speech? It is avoidance of telling lies, avoidance of slandering, avoidance of hateful, abusive language, avoidance of frivolous talk or useless chat. Bhikkhu-s (भिक्षु), avoidance of these four evil speeches is called Right Speech."<sup>6</sup>

Vak (वाक्) is the most important medium of communication, since it reveals precisely what it has to express. However, nobody can deny the importance of non-verbal communication. A gentle touch of mother speaks a lot to her child. An affectionate glance can bridge the minds that are broken. Hence the expression 'body language' has

become popular today.

The jet age has provided us a number of means of communication. Consequently the communication is fast. All this communication involves speech directly or indirectly. But is this communication intimate? I feel somewhere the intimacy is lost; the gap has widened. This failure can be overcome if we use all the means of communication with a positive approach leading to constructive relation.

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Endnotes:

- 1 चत्वारि वाक्परिमिता पदानि  
तानि विदुर् ब्राह्मणा ये मनीषिणः ।  
गुहा त्रीणि निहिता नेङ्गयन्ति  
तुरीयं वाचो मनुष्या वदन्ति ॥  
chatvari vakparimita padani  
tani vidur brahmana ye manishinah/  
guha trini nihita nengayanti  
turiyam vacho manushya vadanti// Rigveda I.164.45
- 2 चोदयित्री सूनुतानां... । chodayitri sunritanam.../ Rigveda VI.61.4
- 3 Bhagavadgita XVII.15
- 4 Taittiriya Samhita VI. 4. 7. 3
- 5 Mahabhashyam of Patanjali, Yudhishtira Mimamsaka (tr.), Part I, I.1.3, Sri Pyarelal Drakshadevi Trust, Delhi, 1979
- 6 Dighanikaya Mahasatipatthanasutta 21

# **Reflections on Indian Philosophy and Hinduism**

*Delivered in* : the Maharashtra Tattvajnana Parishad

at University of Mumbai, Mumbai, India

17 November 2002

# Reflections on Indian Philosophy and Hinduism

**T**HE systems of Indian philosophy fall into two main divisions - Astika (आस्तिक), those which accept the authority of the Veda-s (वेद) and Nastika (नास्तिक), those which deny it. Thus the Charvaka (चार्वाक), the Jaina (जैन) and the Baudha (बौद्ध) are categorised as Nastika (नास्तिक) whereas Samkhya-Yoga (साङ्ख्य-योग), Nyaya-Vaisheshika (न्याय-वैशेषिक), Purvamimamsa (पूर्वमीमांसा) and Uttaramimamsa (उत्तरमीमांसा) are categorised as Astika (आस्तिक) systems. If we interpret Astika (आस्तिक) literally – belief in the existence after death – then all systems of Indian thought with the exception of the Charvaka (चार्वाक) will fall under the Astika (आस्तिक) category.

One of the main features of the Indian systems of philosophy is that they postulate at the very outset the sources of valid knowledge (Pramana-s प्रमाण) that they accept. As an exception, the materialistic school of the Charvaka-s (चार्वाक) relies on the direct sense-perception (Pratyaksha प्रत्यक्ष) as the sole source of knowledge while other schools accept a number of sources of knowledge. The main sources of knowledge are the direct perception (Pratyaksha प्रत्यक्ष), inference (Anumana अनुमान), analogy (Upamana उपमान), and verbal testimony (Shabda शब्द). Verbal testimony includes the words of a reliable person and the scriptural utterances. Vedic scriptures are accepted as the records of revealed truths. These schools also enumerate the categories of knowable objects (Prameya-s प्रमेय) accepted by them which vary according to each of the systems of Philosophy.

The word 'Darshana' (दर्शन) which is usually translated as 'Philosophy' means 'seeing' or 'experiencing' the Ultimate. It also means, that by which one can see.<sup>1</sup> So it is clear

that Indian philosophy is not merely a metaphysical speculation but has its foundation in direct experience. God and soul are regarded by the Hindu mind, not as concepts, speculative, but as things to be known directly. They can be experienced not merely by a chosen few, but, under right conditions, by all human beings. When asked by Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), Ramakrishna Paramahansa confirmed that he had seen God and Narendra could also see Him if he had an intense desire. Immediate perception pervades all Indian thought. But this perception is not through the senses or intellect; it is supra-sensuous and transcendental.

The Mandukya Upanishad (माण्डूक्य-उपनिषद्) speaks of three states of consciousness, namely, waking (Jagarita जागरित), dreaming (Svapna स्वप्न) and dreamless sleep (Sushupta सुषुप्त). These are common to all men. In addition, there is the fourth (Turiya तुरीय), the transcendental state which is the ultimate consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Though it is realizable by all, everybody does not strive for it. It is said in the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) that among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection.<sup>3</sup> Many of them do not experience it due to ignorance and lack of faith. “Men devoid of Shraddha (श्रद्धा) do not attain Me”, says Lord Krishna.<sup>4</sup>

The truth revealed by the Veda-s (वेद) does not contradict other truths. It is beyond reason but does not contradict reason. Thus, Indian thought, though having its foundation in supernatural revelation, gives a legitimate place to logic as well as reason. Yet the thinkers in India have declared that reason unaided by transcendental experience is blind.

The methods of attaining the highest state of consciousness are hearing (Shravana श्रवण), reasoning (Manana मनन) and meditating upon (Nididhyasana निदिध्यासन) the Ultimate Reality.<sup>5</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had attained the transcendental state and declared that it is attainable by one who strives hard.

## **Ethics**

Ethics also plays an important role in Indian philosophy. Moreover Hindu ethics not only concerns itself with outer human activity but also the inner life. It covers both, action and renunciation.

Indian philosophy speaks of ‘One Reality’ – the Self which is one. This doctrine serves as the foundation of the Hindu ethics. The great seers built the edifice of morality on the rock of the doctrine ‘One indwelling in many’. As one Self abides all, in injuring any one,

man injures himself. “The essence of ethics is: Kill not, give freely without any expectation of return, seize not by force what belongs to others, speak truth and observe piety. Anger should be controlled by forgiveness, greed by contentment, pride by compassion and the ill-effects of material prosperity and wealth by sharing.”<sup>6</sup> The moral law was a voluntary practice. In the Chandogya Upanishad (छान्दोग्य-उपनिषद्) a king describes how his subjects follow the code of conduct. He says, “In my kingdom there is neither a thief, nor a miser, nor a drunkard, nor one who does not perform sacrifice, nor any ignoramus, nor any unchaste man or woman.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Purushartha-s**

The doctrine of the four Purushartha-s (पुरुषार्थ) is a theory of human goals. By the term ‘Purushartha’ (पुरुषार्थ) is generally meant human effort or exertion. Our ancient scriptures have been using this term in the sense of human values or ideals. Dharma (धर्म virtue), the first Purushartha (पुरुषार्थ) covers a wide range of human activity associated with the human welfare in general. It signifies both virtues and duties. Artha (अर्थ wealth), the second Purushartha (पुरुषार्थ) provides for all the basic needs of society. It is an economical value that signifies all sorts of material good and satisfies human needs and aspirations. The third one Kama (काम pleasure) covers all enjoyments. It includes both physical pleasure and aesthetic joy. Both Artha (अर्थ) and Kama (काम) should be regulated by Dharma (धर्म) and should be pursued in a controlled manner. The last Purushartha (पुरुषार्थ), that is, Moksha (मोक्ष Self-realization) aims at the liberation of man from the worldly sufferings. The word Moksha (मोक्ष) may not be in the Veda-s (वेद) but the idea of Moksha (मोक्ष) in the sense of immortality and union with the Ultimate Reality is certainly there. The well-known Mrityunjaya Mantra (मृत्युञ्जय-मन्त्र) expresses the desire for immortality. It says, “We worship Tryambaka (त्र्यम्बक Rudra)... May he release me, like the cucumber from its stem, from death, but not from immortality.”<sup>8</sup>

The four Purushartha-s (पुरुषार्थ) are interrelated and interdependent. Wealth is an instrumental value; it is a means to Kama (काम). Dharma (धर्म) is also an instrumental value in a higher sense as it is a means to Moksha (मोक्ष). Life without these values is meaningless.

Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual. It is this feature that has enabled it to resist ravages of time and accidents of history. The spiritual motive dominates Indian life and Indian philosophy. The founders of philosophy strived for a socio-spiritual reform

of the country. Religion in India is not dogmatic. It is a rational synthesis which goes gathering into itself new conceptions as philosophy progresses. It is experimental and provisional in nature. T.M.P. Mahadevan says, "It is true that philosophy and religion began as one in India, as is the case everywhere. But soon they came to be distinguished, though this distinction never resulted in a divorce. One can easily see the difference, for instance, between the Bhagavata (भागवत) and the Brahmasutra (ब्रह्मसूत्र) with its diverse commentaries. While the principal aim of the former is to induce devotion in one's heart for the Deity, the main object of the latter is to enable one to understand the nature of Reality. But the reason why the two, philosophy and religion, have been closely associated with each other in India is that the final objective of both is the same, namely, to make man realize his supreme end which is release from Samsara (संसार cycle of birth and death). The purpose of religion is not only to refine man's emotions, but also to sublimate them and transform his entire life. Similarly, the task of philosophy is to bring light to the understanding and thereby help man realize his true nature."<sup>9</sup>

Worldly life is not neglected in philosophy and religion in India. The Veda (वेद), the authoritative scripture of Hinduism lays ample emphasis on worldly well-being. The seers wished,

"May we see through a hundred autumns.  
May we live through a hundred autumns.  
May we know through a hundred autumns.  
May we rise through a hundred autumns.  
May we prosper through a hundred autumns.  
May we be (remain established ) through a hundred autumns.  
May we become (grow) through a hundred autumns,  
Even more than a hundred autumns."<sup>10</sup>

The Vaisheshika-s (वैशेषिक) also say, "That, indeed, is called Dharma (धर्म) through which both prosperity and liberation are accomplished."<sup>11</sup>

In Hinduism people are not asked to worship only one God or follow only one path. They are free to choose a way according to their liking. Paths are different but goal is the same. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) prescribes different paths for aspirants of different temperament. Thus we find path of action, of knowledge, and of devotion. The Ishavasya

Upanishad (ईशावास्य-उपनिषद्) enjoins human beings to lead a life full of activity.<sup>12</sup> However, the renunciation of the fruits of all actions is most desirable. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) says, “Seek to perform your duty; but lay not claim to its fruits. Be you not producer of the fruits of Karma (कर्म); neither shall you lean towards inaction.”<sup>13</sup> Indian philosophy is thus not a mere way of thinking but a way of life, a way of light and a way of truth.

People can be happy and attain the Ultimate while performing their duties well in different walks of life. It has been said, “He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him with his own duty, man attains perfection.”<sup>14</sup> The only thing is that man has to be unselfish and generous.<sup>15</sup>

Hindu thinking respects others’ views. The expressions of the same truth may be different. The doctrine of Syadvada (स्याद्वाद) in Jainism reveals that opinions can vary and one should be able to view others’ theory in the right spirit and right perspective.

Indian thinking lays emphasis on the knowledge of the Self. Body is not permanent but soul is permanent and imperishable. “We all are sons of immortality”, declares the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद).<sup>16</sup>

Indian thinking also lays stress on Tyaga (त्याग) or renunciation and not on Bhoga (भोग) or enjoyment. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्), the seer, Yajnavalkya, offers wealth to his wife Maitreyi, who asks him, “If indeed, Sir, this whole earth filled with wealth would belong to me, can I become immortal through it?” Yajnavalkya replied, “No. Your life would be similar to the life of those who have luxuries and comforts. One cannot hope to attain immortality through wealth.” “Then”, said Maitreyi, “What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal?” Similarly Yama, the Lord of death, had tried to entice Nachiketa, the seeker of immortality, by offering him riches. “Ask for sons and grandsons, herds of cattle, elephants, gold and horses, land, a long life; but do not question me about conquering death”, said Yama. Nachiketa said, “Transient are all these and they wear out the vigour of all the senses. Man cannot be satisfied with wealth.”<sup>17</sup> The message is that we should not hanker for wealth. We should seek for ‘the Kingdom’ which is within us.

Man is not an isolated island. He is part and parcel of the entire world around him. The Hindu view perceives the whole world as one family. Hence sharing with others is considered as an important aspect of life. One should share wealth as the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद) announces, “Earn by hundred hands; distribute by thousand hands!” One should also share knowledge as the Upanishadic seers did. Buddha also said he did not have

a closed fist. One should share the happiness. Patanjali asks us to have altruistic joy in others' meritorious deeds. Give and you will be given thousandfold. This is possible when we recognize: "If we cannot be satisfied with the beauty of the flower until we pluck it and put it in our buttonhole, we cannot be at peace. From detachment comes wisdom, harmony with the environment, peace."<sup>18</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 दृश्यते अनेन इति दर्शनम् ।  
drishyate anena iti darshanam/
- 2 अमात्रश्चतुर्थोऽव्यवहार्यः प्रपञ्चोपशमः शिवोऽद्वैत एवमोङ्कार आत्मैव संविशत्यात्मनात्मानं य एवं वेद य एवं वेद ।।  
amatrashchaturtho'vyavaharyah prapanchopashamah shivo'dvaita evamomkara atmaiva samvishatyatmanatmanam ya evam veda ya evam veda// Mandukya Upanishad 12
- 3 मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।  
manushyanam sahasreshu kashchidyatati siddhaye/ Bhagavadgita VII.3
- 4 अश्रद्धधानाः पुरुषाः धर्मस्यास्य परंतप । अप्राप्य मां निवर्तन्ते मृत्युसंसारवर्त्मनि ।।  
ashraddadhanah purushah dharmasyasya parantapa/ aprapya mam nivartante mrityusamsaravartmani// Bhagavadgita IX.3
- 5 आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः ।  
atma va are drashtavyah shrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyah/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV. 5.6
- 6 Mahabharata Shantiparva 274.4-11
- 7 Chandogya Upanishad V.11.5
- 8 त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे

सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।

उर्वारुकम् इव बन्धनात्

मृत्योर् मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam/

urvarukam iva bandhanat mrityormukshiya mamritat//

Rigveda VII. 59.12, Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Samhita III. 60, Atharvaveda XIV.1.17

- 9 Mahadevan T.M.P., “The Religio-Philosophic Culture of India”, in The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. I, Suniti Kumar Chatterji and others (eds.), The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 2001, p. 165

10 पश्येम शरदः शतम्

जीवेम शरदः शतं

शृणुयाम शरदः शतं

प्र ब्रवाम शरदः शतमदीनाः

स्याम शरदः शतं

भूयश्च शरदः शतात् ॥

pashyema sharadah shatam

jivema sharadah shatam

shrinuyama sharadah shatam

pra bravama sharadah shatamadinah

syama sharadah shatam

bhuyashcha sharadah shatat// Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Samhita 36.24

- 11 यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिःस धर्मः ।

yato’bhyudayanihshreyasasiddhih sa dharmah/ Vaisheshika Sutra of Kanada I.2

- 12 कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेत् शतं समाः ।

kurvanneveha karmani jijivishet shatam samah/ Ishavasya Upanishad 2

- 13 कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन । मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूः मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

karmanyevadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana/

ma karmaphalaheturbhuh ma te sango’stvakarmani// Bhagavadgita II.47

- 14 यतः प्रवृत्तिः भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम्। स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दन्ति मानवाः ॥  
yatah pravrittih bhutanam yena sarvamidam tatam/ svakarmana tamabhyarchya siddhim  
vindanti manavah// Bhagavadgita XVIII .46
- 15 तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ।  
tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasyasviddhanam/ Ishavasya Upanishad 1
- 16 शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्राः आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः।  
shrinvantu vishve amritasya putrah a ye dhamani divyani tasthuh/  
Rigveda X.13.1; Shvetashvatara Upanishad II.5
- 17 Katha Upanishad I.i.23, 26
- 18 Radhakrishnan S., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, Oxford University Press, Delhi,  
1989, p. 131

# Yoga – Philosophy and Culture

*Delivered in* : the National Conference on Yoga

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

7 March 2009

# Yoga – Philosophy and Culture

**T**HE term Yoga (योग) has several connotations. The Yogasutra (योगसूत्र) of Patanjali defines Yoga (योग) as ‘the cessation of mental modifications.’<sup>1</sup> In the opinion of Patanjali, Yoga (योग) is disunion of the Self (Purusha पुरुष) from Matter (Prakriti प्रकृति). Thus according to Patanjali there is no union with anything at all.

In the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), Yoga (योग) means ‘composure of mind’, ‘expertise in action’ and ‘liberation from misery’.<sup>2</sup> Yajnavalkya defines Yoga (योग) as the union of individual soul with the Supreme Soul.<sup>3</sup> According to Amarakosha (अमरकोश), lexicon of Sanskrit words, the word Yoga (योग) has several meanings, namely, armour, means, meditation, contact and union.<sup>4</sup>

Patanjali’s Yogasutra-s (योगसूत्र) were compiled around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. However, it is observed that the Hindus were conversant with Dhyana (ध्यान) or meditation as a spiritual technique from ancient times. Amongst the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro has been found a figure of a Yogi (योगी) in meditative posture. The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) speak of meditation as means to experience the Reality. Buddhism carried meditation to other countries. The Sanskrit word Dhyana (ध्यान) became Ch’an in Chinese and Zen in Japanese and from Japan it reached the West.

## Ashtangayoga

There are two dimensions of Yoga (योग). One is the series of postures known as

Asana-s (आसन) and allied techniques; this dimension is known as Hathayoga (हठयोग). The other one deals with breath-control, concentration of mind, meditation and stilling of thoughts and is known as the Rajayoga (राजयोग) of Patanjali. Patanjali systematized and presented the knowledge through his text the Yogasutra (योगसूत्र). The mental disciplines prescribed by Patanjali have been utilized by all sects of Hinduism. They have become an indivisible part of their spiritual practice (Sadhana साधना).

Ashtangayoga (अष्टाङ्गयोग) which means Yoga (योग) consisting of eight limbs is for the purification of the mechanism of the body and mind and for gaining a direct vision of the Self. Yama (यम moral abstentions), Niyama (नियम observances of individual conduct), Asana (आसन posture), Pranayama (प्राणायाम breath-control), Pratyahara (प्रत्याहार withdrawal from objects of senses), Dharana (धारणा concentration, contemplation), Dhyana (ध्यान meditation) and Samadhi (समाधि absorption) constitute the eight limbs. Out of these; Yama (यम), Niyama (नियम), Asana (आसन), Pranayama (प्राणायाम), and Pratyahara (प्रत्याहार) are the external limbs while Dharana (धारणा), Dhyana (ध्यान), and Samadhi (समाधि) are internal.

## Norms

Moderation in eating is prescribed for a Yogi (योगी). “Yoga (योग) is not possible for him who eats too much or who does not feed himself at all. It is not possible for him who sleeps too much or too little. For him who is moderate in eating and recreation, temperate in his actions, who is regulated in sleep and wakefulness, Yoga (योग) chases grief away.”<sup>5</sup> On these verses from the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), Shankaracharya comments that the solid food should occupy half the stomach, water one fourth, and the rest should be left free for circulation of air.

It has been rightly said, “The lower satisfactions of life generally strangle the true joy of spirit. If intellectual life and moral activity are the true ends of man, then the bodily needs should be subordinated to them.”<sup>6</sup>

The Yoga (योग) philosophy points out necessary restraint of mental states. This restraint of mind can be brought about by practice and conquest of desire. One who has conquered desire for seen and unseen objects has attained Vairagya (वैराग्य), that is, detachment.

In the opinion of Vyasa, the commentator on the Yogasutra (योगसूत्र), the stream of mind flows in both directions, good as well as evil. When the mind seeks for knowledge and

freedom, it is said to be flowing towards the good; when it shows attachment to existence or when it flows downward towards non-discrimination, it is then flowing unto evil.<sup>7</sup> Serenity of mind may be attained either by inculcating virtues or by regulating breath.

### **Various Paths and Rajayoga**

Man has an intense urge to experience truth for himself, then alone, all doubts vanish, all darkness is scattered, and all crookedness is made straight. “Ye children of immortality, ... the way is found; there is a way out of all this darkness, and that is by perceiving Him who is beyond all darkness; there is no other way”,<sup>8</sup> exclaims Vivekananda.

To perceive Him, various paths are prescribed, the path of action, of devotion, of knowledge, and of Rajayoga (राजयोग). The last one amongst these is a practical method of reaching this truth. The instrument to reach the truth is the mind itself which one has to turn inside in order to concentrate all its powers to investigate it. The Katha Upanishad (कठ-उपनिषद्) says, “The self-existent Lord created the outgoing senses. Therefore, one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating aspirant, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away (from external objects) and then sees the indwelling Self.”<sup>9</sup>

The power of the human mind is immense. Hence the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) says, “That which is divine, goes far away from the waking person, and that goes likewise from the sleeping, the one light of lights, far-moving – may that mind of mine desire for what is good.”<sup>10</sup>

To serve this purpose we have to reach the conditions described in the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) while describing the ideal man – Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ). This ideal man is awake in the sphere of spirituality where others are asleep. He is asleep in the field of sensual desires.<sup>11</sup> Here I am reminded of what St. John of the Cross calls as the Night of Senses. In his opinion every seeker after truth has to make a monastic cell in his own heart and retire into it every day.

The Yogic practices sometimes lead to ecstatic states. Plato regards “this divine madness” as “the source of the chiefest blessing granted to man”. These are the moments that beget the highest intuitions. The mediaeval mystics often speak of vision and voices. The Yoga (योग), however admonishes the aspirant not to indulge in them.

### **The Meditation Process**

According to the Vedanta (वेदान्त) system the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality is not possible without meditation. Meditation is the tool for attaining immortality and eternal bliss. It takes the aspirant more and more inward, from the gross to the subtle, from the subtle to the subtler and from the subtler to the subtlest - the Supreme Spirit. By constant practice of concentration and meditation mind becomes transparent and pure like a crystal.

Meditation is the means and the method by which the soul shines forth in the divinity of its own being. This can be possible by following the Upanishadic threefold formula of Shravana (श्रवण hearing), Manana (मनन reflection), and Nididhyasana (निदिध्यासन meditation).

Meditation, according to Swami Vivekananda is concentration of mind and its innate powers on a particular object. The mind must be trained. The mind without control is scattered (Vikshipta विक्षिप्त) as it runs after every object presented to it through the sense organs. The mind has to be detached from the objects of senses and then collected together; it should be concentrated with a single force, and directed towards a lofty object. In his Rajayoga (राजयोग), Swami Vivekananda compares mind to a 'maddened monkey'. He says, "How hard it is to control the mind! Well has it been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough, someone made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. When a man is stung by a scorpion, he jumps about for a whole day: so the poor monkey found his condition worse than ever. To complete his misery, a demon entered into him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey? The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy at the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself of all importance. How hard to control such a mind!"<sup>12</sup> Meditation calms the mind and brings self-composure. It enables man to focus on the pursuit of Truth and leads him to the spiritual beatitude and peace.

### **Object for Meditation**

The object selected for meditation has to be pure and holy. It can be either personal or impersonal.

The personal object means a form of any god or goddess, an incarnation of God or a god-man, or a perfected being. Meditator should contemplate on the form (Rupa रूप) of the chosen deity (Ishta-devata इष्टदेवता). Simultaneously he should repeat the name (Nama नाम) of the deity.

The impersonal object of meditation is a symbol, which is sacred such as the mono-syllable Aum (ॐ) which is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad (छान्दोग्य-उपनिषद्) as well as in the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता). For Vivekananda, it is the 'holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms'.<sup>13</sup>

Aum (ॐ) is known as Pranava (प्रणव). It is known as Mantra (मन्त्र) with one syllable. It is the symbol of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). About the meditation on Aum (ॐ) it has been said, "He (the aspirant) crosses over to the other side with the boat of the syllable Aum (ॐ) and lands in the interior space of the heart. As the space within the heart gradually becomes manifest he enters carefully like a miner entering a mine in search of precious metal. Then let him enter the hall of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्)... and stand pure, purified, empty and tranquil, breathless, selfless, endless, indefectible, stable, eternal, unborn, independent, abiding in his own magnificence."<sup>14</sup>

### **Meditation**

All names and forms vanish in deep meditation. There is consciousness of infinite space. Gradually, this also vanishes. There is a state of nothingness. Suddenly dawns illumination, Nirvikalpa Samadhi (निर्विकल्पसमाधि).

During Nirvikalpa Samadhi (निर्विकल्पसमाधि), the Reality is intuited in all its wholeness. It is the experience of oneness with the Absolute according to Vedanta (वेदान्त). When all other thoughts except the one related to the object of meditation cease, it is Samprajnata (सम्प्रज्ञात). When all thought waves cease, it is Asamprajnata (असम्प्रज्ञात).

### **Yogavasishtha and Yoga**

According to Vasishtha the term Yoga (योग) stands for the practice for self-realization. Vasishtha states that all living beings strive for happiness. What creates problem is that they seek happiness by striving for sense-enjoyments thus satisfying the bodily needs. However, the sense-enjoyments are pleasant only at the beginning. All pleasures terminate

in pain. Vasishtha maintains that things by themselves are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It is the attitude towards the objects and experiences of the person that make them agreeable or disagreeable. The same object, for example, a sweet, is very pleasant when one starts eating. But one dislikes the same if he eats it in a larger quantity. So Vasishtha admonishes the aspirant to give up desires in order to experience the joy within. The ideas like 'may this be mine' and 'may this not come to me' should also be abandoned. One can attain real happiness only through self-realization. It arises in the tranquil mind which is devoid of craving.

In the Nirvana Prakarana (निर्वाणप्रकरण), Vasishtha compares human body to a house and Ahamkara (अहङ्कार) – the ego, to the householder. Vasishtha says, "The locus of Prana (प्राण) – vital breath is in the lotus-formed organ of the heart, which has also the power of moving the eye-lids in their twinklings... There are two principal airs, by name of Prana (प्राण) and Apana (अपान), which take their two different courses upward and downward, the one is the breath of life and the vitiated which is let out... By attempting to restrain their course by the habit and practice of Pranayama (प्राणायाम), the Yogi (योगी) is sure to lengthen the duration of his life in this world, and attain to his eternal life in the next."<sup>15</sup> The seed of the cycle of birth and death (Samsarabija संसारबीज) is the body and the mind. The sprout is the Vasana (वासना), the impressions in the mind. These Vasana-s (वासना) determine the course of further mental processes. The control of the mental processes results into burning of the seed.<sup>16</sup> The impressions are powerful so long as mind is active. The destruction of the mind results into destruction of impressions.

Mere control of the body through Hathayoga (हठयोग), without a control of the mind and without the attainment of self-knowledge is, in the opinion of Vasishtha, futile.<sup>17</sup> In order to obtain control over mind one has to eradicate egoism.<sup>18</sup> This can be possible only when one realizes that it is unreal from the point of view of the Absolute.

### **Bhagavadgita and Meditation**

The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) describes the process of meditation in the sixth chapter. Here the term Yoga (योग) is used in the sense of Yoga (योग) of meditation. While describing the technique of meditation it has been said, "The Yogi (योगी) should practise meditation all alone, in solitude. He should subdue his mind and body and should be free from desires and possessions. In a clean place having firmly fixed his seat, neither too high nor too low, and having spread over it the Kusha (कुश) grass, a deer skin and a cloth,

one over the other, sitting there on the seat, making his mind one-pointed, restraining actions of the senses and of the mind, he should practise Yoga (योग) for self-purification. He should hold the body, the head and the neck erect and still and fix his gaze on the tip of nose without looking around. Serene and free from fear, firm in the vow of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), subdued in mind, he should sit in Yoga (योग) having concentrated on Me (Lord Krishna).<sup>19</sup> When the eyes are fully open the external objects deviate concentration. When the eyes are closed, the meditator may fall asleep as a natural tendency, hence the eyes are kept slightly open.

Thus it is clear that physical exercise and the spiritual Sadhana (साधना) both are important for a Yogi (योगी). These should be moderate. The Yogi (योगी) should be free from body-consciousness in the midst of these activities. Then the meditation becomes easy and spontaneous for him. As he is not disturbed by pain, the Yoga (योग) becomes destroyer of pain for him.

When the mind rests in the Self alone, free from objects of desire, then the aspirant is established in Yoga (योग). His mind becomes similar to the flame in a windless place that flickers not. Consequently he beholds the Self and attains the peace of Nirvana (निर्वाण), the eternal peace abiding in Lord.<sup>20</sup> In this state he cannot be distracted by the heaviest affliction.

### **Some Other Meditative Techniques**

Dhyana (ध्यान) is one of the internal austerities according to the Jain Religion. In the Tattvartha Sutra (तत्त्वार्थसूत्र) Umasvati defines Dhyana (ध्यान) as the concentration of thought on a single object. It means withdrawal of thought from all other objects and fixing mind on a particular point.<sup>21</sup> Umasvati describes four types of meditation, namely, Arta (आर्त mournful), Raudra (रौद्र wrathful), Dharmya (धर्म्य analytic) and Shukla (शुक्ल white, that is, pure).<sup>22</sup>

The mournful meditation is meant for getting out of an unhappy situation or getting rid of painful feeling or ailment. The wrathful meditation is meant for a person who indulges himself in deadly sins. The analytic meditation occurs to a person who concentrates on the essence of the scriptural injunctions. The white (pure) meditation is meant for an aspirant who has suppressed passions and is on the verge of their elimination. It is believed that the last two types of meditation lead the aspirant to liberation.

The Preksha Dhyana (प्रेक्षाध्यान) is developed by Acharya Mahaprajna. Preksha (प्रेक्षा)

means to perceive carefully and profoundly. It connotes careful concentration on subtle consciousness by mental insight. It aims at purifying mental states.

### **Vipashyana**

The unique feature of the Buddhist meditative development lies in its two approaches, namely, Shamatha (शमथ calm) and Vipashyana (विपश्यना insight). These two have their respective techniques. Vipashyana (विपश्यना) means seeing all things as they are. It prevents arising of passions.

In the Mahayana (महायान), Vipashyana (विपश्यना) stands for the analytical examination of the nature of things. It enables the aspirant to eradicate the defilements once for all and puts an end to suffering in life. The light of insight wisdom surpasses any other light. The eradication of defilements, that takes place while attaining the highest level of insight wisdom, is compared to complete destruction of the roots of a tree so that it will never grow again.

The meditator, after gaining deep concentration of mind through mindfulness of in-and-out breathing directs his thoughts to insight meditation. The insight meditation is to be developed on the following lines:

- 1) discernment of Rupa (रूप form),
- 2) discernment of Nama (नाम mind),
- 3) contemplation on Namarupa (नामरूप mind and form),
- 4) both viewed as Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद dependent origination), and
- 5) application of the three characteristics, namely, impermanence, suffering and no-soul.

In meditation the contact of sense organs with their objects is suspended. Mind becomes serene and steady, pure and translucent.

### **Zen and Other Techniques**

In China the School of Mahayana (महायान) was established by Bodhidharma in the sixth century. It was known as Ch'an Buddhism. Ch'an is transcribed as Zen in Japanese. The Zen school believes that enlightenment can be attained through the direct perception of

one's own mind through meditation. Zen is described as 'a special transmission outside the Sutra-s (सूत्र), independent of word and writ, pointing directly to the mind of man, seeing one's true nature and attaining Buddhahood'.

The Tibetan Buddhism focuses very strongly on ritual practices and correlated meditative techniques. These practices and techniques involve use of Mantra-s (मन्त्र sacred sounds, syllables, or phrases), the widespread deployment of visual or iconographic symbols such as sacred Mandala-s (मण्डल) – symbolic diagrams.

### Conclusion

One has to understand that Yoga (योग) asks us to control the body and not kill it. "Abstinence from sensual indulgences is not the same as the crucifixion of the body, but the two have sometimes been confused in Hindu India as well as Christian Europe. The Yoga (योग) says that the perfection of the body consists in beauty, grace, strength and adamant hardness."<sup>23</sup> Peace is its ultimate end.

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Endnotes:

- 1 योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः । yogashchittavrittinirodhah/ Yogasutra I. 2
- 2 समत्वं योग उच्यते । samatvam yoga uchyate/ योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् । yogah karmasu kaushalam/ दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसंज्ञितम् । duhkhasamyogaviyogam yogasamjnitam/ Bhagavadgita II.48, II.50, VI.23
- 3 जीवात्मपरमात्मनोः संयोगो योग उच्यते । jivatmaparamatmanoh samyogo yoga uchyate/ Sarvadarshanasamgraha of Madhavacharya, E.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough (eds.), Parimal Publications, Delhi, 1986, p. 336
- 4 योगः सन्नहनोपाय-ध्यान-संगति-युक्तिषु । yogah sannahanopaya-dhyana-sangati-yuktishu/ Amarakosha III.3.22
- 5 नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।

- न चापि स्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ।।  
युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।  
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ।।  
natyashnatastu yogo'sti na chaikantamanashnatah/  
na chapi svapnashilasya jagrato naiva charjuna//  
yuktaharaviharasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu/  
yuktasvapnavabodhasya yogo bhavati duhkaha// Bhagavadgita VI. 16-17
- 6 Radhakrishnan S., Indian Philosophy ,Vol. II, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p. 355
- 7 Commentary of Vyasa on Yogasutra I.12, Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali with Bhasvati, P. N. Mukerji (tr.), University of Calcutta, 2000
- 8 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 128
- 9 पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भू  
स्तस्मात्पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।  
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्ष  
दावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ।।  
paranchi khani vyatrinat svayambhu –  
stasmatparanpashyati nantaratman/  
kashchiddhirah pratyagatmanamaiksha –  
davrittachakshuramritatvamichchhan//  
Katha Upanishad II.1.1
- 10 यज्जाग्रतो दूरमुदैति दैवं तदु सुप्तस्य तथैवैति ।  
दूरङ्गमं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरेकं तन्मे मनः शिवसङ्कल्पमस्तु ।।  
yajjagrato duramudaiti daivam tadu suptasya tathavaiti/  
durangamam jyotisham jyotirekam tanme manah shivasankalpamastu//  
Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Samhita XXXIV.1
- 11 या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी । यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ।।  
ya nisha sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami/

yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisha pashyato muneh// Bhagavadgita II.69

- 12 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 174
- 13 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 57
- 14 Maitri Upanishad VI.28
- 15 Yogavasishtha VI a. 24. 14-15, 18- 20, 28, 31, 35, 38
- 16 Ibid., V.91.1-46
- 17 Ibid., V.92.38-48
- 18 Ibid., VI.a.94.13
- 19 Bhagavadgita VI. 10-14
- 20 Ibid., VI. 15, 18-20
- 21 उत्तमसंहननस्यैकाग्र चिन्तानिरोधि ध्यानमाऽन्तर्मुहूर्तात् । uttamasamhananasyaikagra chintanirodhi dhyanamantarmuhurtat/ Tattvartha Sutra IX.27
- 22 आर्त्तरोद्रधर्म्यशुक्लानि ।  
arttaraudradharmyashuklani/ Ibid., IX.28
- 23 Radhakrishnan S., Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, pp. 355-356.

# Mystics and Mysticism

*Delivered in* : the International Interreligious Dialogue Seminar on Mystics and Mysticism

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

4 December 2006

## Mystics and Mysticism

**M**YSTICISM can be described as the experience of enjoyment of the union with God. Mystic experience depends neither on the intellect nor on the perception by the sense organs. It is the super-human power of the pure soul which culminates in the transcendent communion of the aspirant with the Divinity and brings forth to his inner eye the very core of Reality and Truth. Mystics have intimate and direct contact with the Ultimate Reality which results into the direct realization (Sakshatkara **साक्षात्कार**) of God. The Indian mystic, R. D. Ranade in his Pathway to God says that the mystic experience is a direct, immediate and intuitive apprehension of God. The human being experiences the super-sensuous profound ecstasy as an outcome of this experience.

The central fact of mystic experience according to Miss Underhill is “an overwhelming consciousness of God, and of one’s own soul. It is the communion with God, the living Reality capable of response that demands and receives from the aspirant total self-surrender. This sense of a double movement is found in all great mysticism.”<sup>1</sup>

In Hinduism liberation (Moksha **मोक्ष**) is considered as the final goal of human life. Bondage (Samsara **संसार**), that is, the cycle of birth and death, is due to the Karmic process. The seeker nullifies this Karmic bond and attains the Realization. This Realization is described in symbolic language by different traditions. “The divine love that fills the mystic’s heart overflows in the form of words, which are therefore not his words, but God’s: God is speaking through him.”<sup>2</sup>

## Mysticism and the Prominent Schools of Vedanta

In the opinion of Shankaracharya the final objective of the Vedanta (वेदान्त) is Self-realization. For the seeker who aspires for realization, it is intuition which is needed. According to Shankaracharya, Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is unknowable in the cognitive sense and knowable in the intuitive sense. He maintains that the scriptures serve a limited purpose as they are confined to intellect.

To Ramanuja, the exponent of the Vishishtadvaita (विशिष्टाद्वैत), there is the relationship of knower and known, between man and God. For Madhvacharya, God is independent and the individual is dependent on Him. Though relationship between an individual and God is interpreted variously by different philosophers, the Ultimate End is unanimously declared as Self-realization or God-realization.

## Symbols

Symbols such as Aum (ॐ), Linga (लिङ्ग) as a symbol of the Divine male-female creative power, Yantra (यन्त्र geometrical diagram) representing the mystical body of the Divine Being, a Kalasha (कलश a pot full of water), and a Svastika (स्वस्तिक an auspicious mark) are meditated upon by an aspirant. As man clings to form it is difficult for him to turn to the Inner Self. However, a wise man looks inward. The Agni Purana (अग्नि-पुराण) says,

“The child’s toy-gods are made of clay and wood;  
Of the average man, gods live in holy streams;  
Of the intelligent, in heavenly orbs;  
The wise man’s God is his inner Self.”<sup>3</sup>

In his work Constructive Survey of the Upanishadic Philosophy, R. D. Ranade describes some of the symbols such as flood of light or sonorous voices coming from within which the Upanishadic seers considered to be the harbingers of Self-realization.

## Mystic Experiences

Intuition plays an important role in the life of a mystic. The mystical experiences are

indescribable and these are experienced only when the intuitive faculty is active.

Dr. R. C. Mujumdar says, "Religion, in its essence, is based largely on intuition and emotion and not on a purely rational attitude of mind, and it is inspired and fed by faith and belief rather than reason and argument."<sup>4</sup>

The visions and mystical experiences of the mystics are of universal character in all religions. For example, the dark night of the soul is experienced by St. John of the Cross. The Indian saints from Maharashtra also give vent to this experience. When the dark night comes to an end the soul gets extraordinary experiences as he is about to attain his goal. Some of them can be cited here.

"The dark night of the soul is ultimately transcended and the mystic reaches his destination. One's mind is absorbed in hearing the mystic sound that destroys all passions. The sound is like the loud beating of the cymbals (says Gora); it is sometimes so extensive that one feels as if the heavens were reverberating with it or were endowed with tongues (says Jnanadev). The sound proceeds, Changadev tells us, as from a machine, but no form is seen. The sweet notes of a stringed musical instrument are heard and the mind is lost in that bliss. Namadev had a combined experience of both light and sound. He realized his identity with God in the supreme light beyond the sun and the moon, and in the midst of the loud beatings of drums. The sound heard further developed into automatic speech or writing. This is the common experience of both Namadev and Tukaram. Jnanadev and Ramadas had similar experiences."<sup>5</sup>

Most common experiences are those of light and form. The saints of Maharashtra speak about the following experiences. Ekanath describes his mystical experience of a lamp burning without oil. According to Jnanadev, God guides his devotee with a torch in His hand and there is light everywhere. All darkness vanishes and the aspirant sees a shower of stars, the light of the crescent and full moon by day, the light of the sun at night or the bright light of the dawn spreading all over the earth. Tukaram tells us that he has seen the extremely beautiful face of God, shining like billions of suns, appearing like a bright diamond set in the midst of a number of jewels. Ekanath saw God everywhere. The fulfilment of contemplation upon God is having His vision.

### **The Objectivity of Mystic Experience**

Mysticism is all about the transcendent experience of spiritual transformation and immersion in ecstasy. The verification of any truth needs an authority of a higher truth

to prove its validity. However, the Highest Truth is beyond all proof. Its validity cannot be tested, for it is the Truth of all truths.<sup>6</sup> It is the one and only source of all consciousness and being. The Upanishadic dictum ‘That thou art,’<sup>7</sup> tells us that the divinity exists in every human being, even though our intellect cannot know it.

What is beyond intellect is not nothingness. As it is beyond intellect it is described by negative terms such as ‘neti neti’ (नेति नेति) – ‘not this, not this.’<sup>8</sup> This famous Upanishadic expression refers to this aspect of transcendence of the Ultimate Reality. Maulana Jalal al-Din-al-Rumi (1207-1273 A.D.) says, “When to the talk of a mystic dost thou listen; O say not thou that it is wrong; thou thyself knowest it not, and the fault is in thee, O friend.”

### **Mystic Transformation**

Mystic transformation is beyond all words and expressions. It is the flight of the soul into subtle transcendent regions of spiritual ecstasy. It is the superhuman bliss which is beyond the intellect and the sensual perception. In this spiritual rapture all sensations and thoughts are suspended and the soul shines forth in its own divine radiance. Physical organs and intellect cease to work, as they do in sleep or in a trance. Even though at times reflex movements may continue, all conscious activity is suspended. However, the difference between sleep or a trance and transformation is that in the former we have either very low consciousness or none at all, while in the mystic transformation our soul awakes in a super-conscious light of transcendent Truth. Patanjali describes this as the removal of the screens hiding the light.<sup>9</sup>

Transformation is the state in which the inner eye works and illumines the mysteries that are beyond the reach of reason. In this stage the aspirant stands face to face with Divinity.

The lives of great devotees such as Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533 A.D.), Suradas (1478-1583 A.D.) and Kabir bear the testimony of the penchant for God that the mystics hold in their heart. It is reflected in their compositions lucidly.

### **The Importance of a Spiritual Master**

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) speak of spiritual preceptors highly. The Mundaka Upanishad (मुण्डक-उपनिषद्) says that the aspirant should approach the spiritual master in a humble way. “For the sake of this knowledge, let him ... approach the teacher alone, who is versed

in scriptures, and devoted to Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). To him, who has approached him, whose mind is completely calm, and who is endowed with tranquillity, the wise master gave the instruction.”<sup>10</sup>

Another Upanishadic text admonishes the aspirant to treat the master on par with God. “Be one to whom the preceptor is a God.”<sup>11</sup> The master is as though the ocean of grace for those who surrender themselves to him and though unasked, he reveals the secret knowledge to his disciple.<sup>12</sup> Famous teachers and philosophers such as Nimbarkacharya gave more importance to the Guru (गुरु) than to the knowledge of the scriptures in the process of knowing God. The aspirant should have a strong, profound faith in the spiritual master, then he should have desire for knowing God together with the desire to attain liberation. In short, the Guru (गुरु) prepares an aspirant for his spiritual ascent.

### **Grace of God**

In addition to the spiritual striving of the aspirant and the guidance of the Spiritual Master, the grace of God is essential for Self-realization or God-realization. The Mundaka (मुण्डक) and the Katha Upanishad (कठ-उपनिषद्) say that without God’s grace, Self-realization is not possible.<sup>13</sup> “We cannot create a plant out of nothing, nor force a seed to grow, contrary to its nature. We can give the plant the soil, the manure, the water, the light which will enable it to grow. That is all our moral effort can do and nothing more. The conditions can be determined, but the conditioning agent is free to bring about the event or not.”<sup>14</sup>

Repeating the name of God is one of the ways to attain grace. The Shaiva (शैव) saint Jnanasambandhara (7<sup>th</sup> century) said, “The Lord’s names are medicines; they are sacred mantra-s (मन्त्र); they are the way to salvation in the other world, they are all the other good things, too; through them all acute miseries are destroyed; meditate only upon the names of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Sufism**

Sufism lays more stress on the contemplation of the inner Self than on the outward religious practices such as rituals. It speaks about passing into the realm of Fana-fil-Allah (फना फिल्लाह complete surrender at the Lord’s feet), where the aspirant relishes the brilliant effulgence emanating from the beautiful face of the Lord. Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1752 A.D.) says, “These eyes are very benevolent to me. They look at the Beloved

as I raise them.”<sup>16</sup>

Great Sufis, like Maulana Jalal al-Din-al-Rumi and Mansur Al-Hallaj believed in transmigration, eternality of the soul, and the immanence of God. Rumi whose thoughts have the echo of Vedantic thoughts introduced Sama (समा), a particular kind of devotional dance similar to Kirtana (कीर्तन) in the Hindu tradition. Bayazid Bistami proclaims, “I am the unfathomable ocean, without beginning and without end. I am the throne of God, the preserved tablet, the pen or creative word of God.”<sup>17</sup> Faridud-Din Attar, the celebrated author of the allegorical poem ‘Logic of Birds’, says, “Verily I am God; there is no God but me.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Bridal Mysticism**

The union of the lover and the beloved is the culmination of mystic experience. When the seeking of the Lord and the separation come to an end, there is the great union and the soul is elated with joy. The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) says, “Of what use is any Bhakti (भक्ति) in which your [of the soul] voice does not break, eyes do not moisten, hairs do not horripilate...?”<sup>19</sup> The Christian mystic in his very life attains ‘union’ with God. This union is called ‘spiritual marriage’. Angela of Foligno (1248-1309 A.D.) wrote in Memorial IX,

“God told me, Daughter of divine wisdom, temple of the beloved, beloved of the beloved, daughter of peace, in you rests the entire Trinity, indeed the complete truth rests in you so that you hold me and I hold you.”

In total surrender to Jesus, she sings,

“I praise you God my beloved;  
I have made your cross my bed.  
For a pillow or cushion I have found poverty,  
and for other parts of the bed,  
suffering and contempt to rest on.”<sup>20</sup>

In Indian tradition the bridal mysticism is expressed in the passionate poetry of saints from all over India. Manikkavachakar (8<sup>th</sup> century), a minister of the Pandyan Court at Madurai, in one of his compositions says, “Melting in the mind, now standing, now

sitting, now lying and now getting up, now laughing and now weeping, now bowing and now praising, now dancing in all sorts of ways, gaining the vision of the form (of the Lord) shining like the rosy sky, with my hairs standing on end – when will I stand united with, and entered into, that exquisite Gem of mine (the Lord)!”<sup>21</sup> Mira (1498-1546 A.D.) rose to fame on account of her unflinching devotion to Krishna whom she worshipped as her beloved. Her songs are full of pangs of separation from Krishna. She longs for union with him. She says,

“I have talked to you, talked,  
Dark lifter of Mountains,  
About this old love,  
from birth after birth.  
Don’t go, don’t,  
Lifter of Mountains,  
Let me offer a sacrifice – myself –  
Beloved,  
To your beautiful face.  
Come, here in the courtyard,  
Dark Lord,  
The women are singing auspicious wedding songs;  
My eyes have fashioned  
an altar of pearl tears,  
And here is my sacrifice:  
the body and mind  
of Mira,  
the servant who clings to your feet,  
through life after life,  
a virginal harvest for you to reap.”<sup>22</sup>

Mahadeviyakka from Karnataka, (12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) explicitly calls Lord Shiva as her husband.

“I love the Handsome One:  
he has no death  
decay nor form  
no place or side  
no end nor birthmarks.  
I love him, O mother. Listen.

I love the Beautiful One  
with no bond nor fear  
no clan no land  
no landmarks  
for his beauty.

So, my Lord, white as jasmine, is my husband.”<sup>23</sup>

Nammalvar, an Alvar poet, considers Lord Vishnu as the lover and himself as the beloved. This is a distinct relation in the sense that here it is God who has to play the role of a lover and not that of a beloved. Nammalvar sings,

“I desire that if I saw you, I would impetuously take you  
and simply swallow you; but, stealing a march over me,  
you yearned for me and drank me off completely, ...  
O you impatient Lord!”<sup>24</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Mysticism is a spiritual experience found in all religions. While at the mundane level the practitioners of different religions would see differences in their religious practices, at the level of the mystics, these differences vanish and what is felt is a spiritual experience of a similar nature irrespective of the religion of the mystic. Thus mystics and mysticism bring out the universality of religions notwithstanding the differences in outward forms and practices.

In this context Ramakrishna Paramahansa says, “I used to repeat the name of Allah (अल्ला), wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans and recite the Namaz (नमाज)

regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu Gods but I had no inclination even for visiting them. After passing three days in that way, I realized the goal of that form of devotion.

I had to practice the various religions once, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and I have walked the paths of the different sects of Hinduism again – the Shakta (शाक्त), the Vaishnava (वैष्णव), the Vedantic and others. And I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are travelling, only they come through diverse ways.”<sup>25</sup>

The apparent differences of the mystic experiences are on account of the particular features of the religious discipline the aspirant follows. The Hindu devotees will experience fragrance of flowers more frequently on account of their associations of offering of flowers in worship to God. They will hear sound of gongs in temple or that of the divine conch or of a flute. The Yogin-s (योगी) hear the unstruck sound, the Anahata-dhvani (अनाहतध्वनि), whereas the Christian mystic will hear the Church-bell. Most of the Christian mystics hear the voice of Jesus whereas most of the Hindu mystics have a vision of the Lord and they see the divine light.

Even though mysticism lays stress on the personal experience of God, its unique feature which is of contemporary significance is that it underlines oneness of human life. It has been said, “The mystic or the intuitive consciousness is not to be confused with the instinctive. It is not a flight to unreason or a glorification of ignorance and obscurity. It assumes the indivisible oneness of human life, whose apprehension cannot be contrary to reason.”<sup>26</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 [www.rsiss.net/stepfolder/lawson2.html](http://www.rsiss.net/stepfolder/lawson2.html)
- 2 Gajendragadkar K. V., “The Maharashtra Saints and Their Teachings” in Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Part II, Chapter 26, The Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 374
- 3 The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), Introduction, The

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- 4 Mujumdar R. C., “Evolution of Religio-Philosophic Culture in India” in Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Part I, Chapter 2, The Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 31
  - 5 Gajendragadkar K. V., “The Maharashtra Saints and Their Teachings” in Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Part II, Chapter 26, The Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 374
  - 6 सत्यस्य सत्यम् । satyasya satyam/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad II.1.20
  - 7 तत्त्वमसि । tattvamasi/ Chandogya Upanishad VI.8.7
  - 8 नेति नेति । neti neti/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad III.9.26
  - 9 ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम् । tatah kshiyate prakashavaranam/ Patanjala Yogasutra II.52
  - 10 तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ।।  
तस्मै स विद्वानुपसन्नाय सम्यक्प्रशान्तचित्ताय शमान्विताय ।  
येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम् ।।  
tadvijnanartham sa gurumevabhigachchetsamitpanih shrotriyam brahmanishtham//  
tasmai sa vidvanupasannaya samyakprashantachittaya shamanvitaya/  
yenaksharam purusham veda satyam provacha tam tattvato brahmavidyam//  
Mundaka Upanishad I.2.12-13
  - 11 आचार्यदेवो भव । acharyadevo bhava/ Taittiriya Upanishad I.11
  - 12 अनापृष्टमपि ब्रूयुर्गुरवो दीनवत्सलाः । anaprishtamapi bruyurguravo dinavatsalah/ Bhagavata Purana III.7.36
  - 13 यमेवैष वृणुते तेनैव लभ्यः । yamevaisha vrinute tenaiva labhyah/ Mundaka Upanishad III.2.3; Katha Upanishad I.2.23
  - 14 Rao Nagaraja P., Introduction to Vedanta, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1960, p. 182

- 15 Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I, Ainslie T. Embree; Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 346
- 16 Behari Bankey, Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1982, p. 159
- 17 The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), The Ramkrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 594
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Rao Nagaraja P., Introduction to Vedanta, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1960, p. 207
- 20 Medieval Women Mystics, Elizabeth Ruth Obbard (ed.), New City Press, New York, 2002, p. 57
- 21 Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I, Ainslie T. Embree (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 347
- 22 Ibid., p. 366
- 23 Ibid., pp. 349-350
- 24 Ibid., p. 353
- 25 Sayings of Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1991, pp. 270-271
- 26 Radhakrishnan S., Eastern Religions and Western Thought, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, p. 63

# **Mystics in World Religions**

***Delivered in*** : the International Interreligious Dialogue Seminar on Mystics in World Religions

***organized by*** : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

4 January 2008

## Mystics in World Religions

**A**CCORDING to Hindu tradition mysticism deals with the joy of the union of an aspirant with God. The mystics are those saints who experience Reality which is inexpressible, indescribable, and beyond the realm of imagination. The vast writings of the mystics from the East and the West prove to be a truly universal legacy of mankind. The quest for the unseen, the dark night of the soul pinning for the union with God, intimacy with God during the moments of experience, the super-sensuous character of the experience and the symbols and analogies employed to depict these experiences stand above the apparent differences. Mystics have intimate and direct contact with the Ultimate Reality known as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) or God in the Vedantic tradition. The mystic experience culminates in the transcendent communion of the individual with the Divinity and brings forth to his inner eye the vision of the Ultimate Reality. This experience results in the super-sensuous profound ecstasy. Mystic experience does not fall in the realm of intellect or in the scope of perception of the sense organs. It is the super-human power of the uncontaminated soul which results into the direct realization. The Vedic seers call human beings as the children of immortality.<sup>1</sup> The human beings are divine sparks, encased in five sheaths, namely, the physical sheath, the vital air-sheath, the mind-sheath, the intellect-sheath, and the bliss-sheath.

### Vedantic Mysticism

Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is the key concept in the Vedantic mysticism. The Chandogya Upanishad

(छान्दोग्य-उपनिषद्) speaks about the transcendental nature of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). It says that knowledge of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) makes the unheard heard, the unconsidered considered, and the unknown known.<sup>2</sup> Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is within and without. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) speaks about the transcendental nature of God and proclaims that God abides all creation and all creation rests in Him.<sup>3</sup>

The Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) also refer to the worship of the Divine Personality, the form and the worship of the Divine attributes, and meditation on the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) without form.

The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) deals with Purushottama Upasana (पुरुषोत्तम-उपासना) – worship of Krishna – an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The theist schools of Vedanta (वेदान्त) maintain that the worship of the Divine Personality leads the aspirant to emancipation. The liberated soul serves Lord in His Eternal Abode. He lives in Lord as a distinct personality with a form.

### **Intuition**

All the mystics have the vision of God, not with the physical eye, but with the ‘third eye’ which stands as a metaphor for the intuition.

Shankaracharya, the great philosopher, who propounded the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैत-वेदान्त) considers Self-realization as the final goal of human life. He says, “A mere intellectual understanding of reality is not enough. The end of all knowledge is spiritual realization.”<sup>4</sup> The scriptures serve a limited purpose for the seeker who aspires for realization. It is intuition which counts here.

In this context Dr. R. D. Ranade (1886-1957 A. D.) the great mystic philosopher of India says, “If we were to enquire about the psycho-metaphysical nature of Anubhava (अनुभव experience), we find that it is an immediate, first-hand, intuitive apprehension of Reality. It satisfies all the requirements of a good criterion... It alone gives truth and does not require any other criterion for its validation. It is self evident. We have seen that a criterion has only an instrument value. When there is direct approach to Reality there is no necessity of an intermediate criterion and it can be dispensed with forthwith. The direct experience becomes its own criterion. Reality though ineffable is experienceable. Therefore, Anubhava (अनुभव) is the only appropriate criterion of it. There is no otherness at this stage. Here the faculty of intuition leads us on to the beatific vision.”<sup>5</sup> The distinction between the

knower and the known extincts. According to the Vedanta (वेदान्त) tradition they merge seamlessly. What remains is the communion with God, who responds to the love of the aspirant. There is receiving as well as offering. This sense of a double movement is found also in other traditions expressed beautifully.

Unconditioned surrender to God is an important feature of mysticism. Saint John of the Cross says,

“I remained, lost in forgetfulness;  
I lay my face on the Beloved.  
Everything stopped and I abandoned myself,  
forgetting my cares among the lilies.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Importance of Guru**

Guru (गुरु), the spiritual master plays an important role in the realisation of God according to Hindu mystic and Tantric traditions. It has been said, “Those who have faith in God and as in God, also in the teacher, to them are revealed the teachings, declared in the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्).”<sup>7</sup>

The attitude of deifying the spiritual master became prominent in the Vaishnava (वैष्णव) cult. The Vaishnava-s (वैष्णव) maintain that “except through the meditation of Guru (गुरु) ye cannot get emancipation”. This doctrine is known as Anugata Upasana (अनुगत-उपासना). We also find that Guru (गुरु) was considered as the personal manifestation of the Impersonal Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), hence he became an object of worship.

### **Devotion**

Mystic’s life is not life without prayer. A mystic is always immersed in repeating the name of Lord. It helps him to move from the gross to the subtle. Between name and form, name is more subtle. So a devotee repeats the name of God constantly. That is why the internal worship, that is, meditation (Dhyana ध्यान) is more significant than the external worship. The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) tells us that love of God proceeds directly from the heart; it is not prompted by any reason. The true devotee does not love God because he seeks something from Him, but he loves Him spontaneously. He gives up everything for this love. God is one and only passion in his life.

The ecstasies that Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533 A.D.) experienced in constantly chanting the name of Lord Krishna are the source of constant inspiration to the Vaishnava (वैष्णव) devotees. Krishna is the centre of most of the devotional lyrics.

Bullah Shah (1680-1752 A.D.), the Sufi saint, says,

“O Beloved! Come and meet me some time,  
When I shall hear the news of Thy coming,  
in joy I shall offer my head to Thee.  
In the garden sings the cuckoo and its melody wakes up the notes of love in my heart.  
Lord Shyama has wounded me  
and I pine in separation for him.  
When will the Lord visit me and quench my fire of separation? Asks Bullah.”<sup>8</sup>

Dr. R. D. Ranade says, “The truest Summum Bonum for the mystic is not liberation, either of the asymptotic or of the catastrophic kind, but the enjoyment of divine bliss here and now.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Relevance of Mysticism**

Today the world seems to be in chaos. There is constant onslaught of terrorism in the entire world and not a single nation remains unaffected.

In this situation what is the hope for mankind? If we think of political scenario it is constantly changing. Then whether those who have faith in the Divine can be of some help? Do they belong to this world or are they completely immersed in the divine ecstasy?

Though the Upanishadic seers were not worldly people, they had a concern for the well-being of the world. They sought for the solution of the dilemma of creation of the world, its creator and man's relation with the creator and the creation and have given us the formula of hearing, meditating, and contemplating on the Reality. Moreover it can be seen that they had a concern for man to man relationship. Hence the preceptor fondly tells his disciple who has completed his learning, not to imitate his faults and to inherit from him all that is good in him. Prior to the Upanishadic seers were the Vedic seers who too thought of the creation of the world and the creator and frankly admitted creation as a mystery and said that even He who created the world, the Lord himself,

the one who is in the heaven, whether He knows why and how the world was created is doubtful. In spite of these philosophical enquiries the Vedic seers were concerned with peace both internal and external, hence a lot of Shantimantra-s (शान्तिमन्त्र) such as “May peace be unto the Heavens! May peace be unto the Space! May peace be unto the Earth! Peace be unto the Waters! Peace be unto the Plants! Peace be unto the Trees! Peace be to all the Gods! Peace be to Brahman (ब्रह्मन्)! May peace envelop all! Peace, verily, peace! May peace embrace me! OM, Shantih! Shantih! Shantih! (ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः)”<sup>10</sup> recurringly appear in the Veda-s (वेद).

The consensus is that the saintly people are not worldly people yet they have a strong bond with all the living beings of the world. Not only Indian saints but the saints from all over the world have shown concern for the well-being of the world. Saint Francis of Assisi served the lepers. Mother Teresa was refuge for one and all. According to the great saint Khwaja Chishti, the devotion to God is to remove the misery of those in distress, to fulfill the needs of the helpless and feed the hungry.

The saints also strive to maintain communal peace. In his attempt to reconcile the Hindus and Muslims as well as different sects in Hinduism, Kabir says, “Listen, O men and women, take refuge in the One God. He is one; there is no second. Rama, Khuda, Shakti, Shiva are one; tell me how to separate them.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Thus we find that saints engage themselves in the service of the world. These saints have mystic experiences. However, with these experiences they do not recoil from the world. With the insight in God they become ‘the salt of the earth’ and offer their lives for the betterment of the world.

The experiences of the mystics serve as the lighthouse for devotees for times to come. In this age of dispute and dissent on the grounds of religious diversity, studies on the lives of great mystics and the vast expanse of literature related to Mysticism will be of great inspiration and solace for people seeking peace and harmony. I pray in the words of the Vedic seer, “Let the world be a single nest to live in.”<sup>12</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्राः आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः ।  
shrinvantu vishve amritasya putrah a ye dhamani divyani tasthuh// Rigveda X.13.1
- 2 येन अश्रुतं श्रुतं भवति अमतं मतम् अविज्ञातं विज्ञातम् इति ।  
yena ashrutam shrutam bhavati amatam matam avijnatam vijnatam iti/  
Chandogya Upanishad VI.1.3
- 3 समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।  
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ।।  
samam sarveshu bhuteshu tishthantam parameshvaram/  
vinashyatsvavinashyantam yah pashyati sa pashyati//  
मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।  
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ।।  
mattah parataram nanyatkinchidasti dhananjaya/  
mayi sarvamidam protam sutre manigana iva// Bhagavadgita VII.7, XIII.27
- 4 न धर्मजिज्ञासायामिव श्रुत्यादय एव प्रमाणं ब्रह्मजिज्ञासायाम् । किन्तु श्रुत्यादयोऽनुभवादयश्च यथासंभवमिह  
प्रमाणम् । अनुभवावसानत्वाद्भूतवस्तुविषयत्वाच्च ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य ।  
na dharmajijnasayamiva shrutyadaya eva pramanam brahmajijnasayam/  
kintu shrutyadayo'nubhavadayashcha yathasambhavamiha pramanam/  
anubhavavasanatvadbhutavastuvishayatvachcha brahmajnanasya//  
Commentary on Brahmasutra I.1.2
- 5 Ranade R. D., Vedanta, The Culmination of Indian Thought, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,  
Bombay, 1970, p. 41
- 6 The Dark Night, 8, quoted from 'The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross', Kieran  
Kavanaugh, Otilio Rodriguez (trs.), ICS Publications, Washington, 1991
- 7 यस्य देवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।  
तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ।।  
yasya deve para bhakiryatha deve tatha gurau/  
tasyaite kathita hyarthah prakashante mahatmanah// Shvetashvatara Upanishad VI.23

- 8 कदी आ मिल यार पियारियां, तोरियां वाटा तो सिर वारियां ।।  
चढ़ बागी कोयल कूक दीं, नित सोज़ अमल दी फुकदीं ।  
मैं नूं ततड़ी नूं श्याम बिसारिया ।।  
'बुल्ला' शह कदी घर आवसीं मेरे बलदी भाह बुछावसीं ।  
तेरियां वाटां तो सिर वारियां ।।  
kadi a mila yara piyariya, toriya vata to sira variya//  
chadh bagi koyal kuk di, nita soja amal di phukadi/  
main nu tatadi nu shyam bisariya//  
'bulla'shah kadi ghar avasi mere baladi bhah buchhavasi/  
teriya vata to sir variya//  
Behari Bankey, Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991,  
p. 310
- 9 Ranade, R. D., Studies in Indian Philosophy, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and  
Culture, Mumbai, 1986, p. 104
- 10 द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः ।  
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ।।  
dyauh shantirantariksham shantih prithivi shantirapah shantiroshadhayah shantih/  
vanaspatayah shantirvishvedevah shantirbrahma shantih sarvam shantih shantireva shantih  
sa ma shantiredhi// Shukla Yajurveda XXXVI.17, Atharvaveda XIX.9.14
- 11 Scott David C., Kabir's Mythology, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Delhi, 1985, p. 162
- 12 यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् ।  
yatra vishvam bhavatyekanidam/ Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Samhita XXXII.8

# Shankaracharya's Contribution to Indian Philosophy

*Delivered in* : the 2514th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Adya Jagadguru Shankaracharya

*organized by* : Shrimad Adya Jagadguru Shankaracharya Vedic Shodha Samsthan, Varanasi

at Mumbai, India

13 May 2005

# Shankaracharya's Contribution to Indian Philosophy

**I**NDIA, that is Bharata, is a sacred land where many sages, rishi-s (ऋषि) and saints were born who have enriched mankind with their wisdom. Shankaracharya is one such luminary who is the pride of India. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, in his famous work, Discovery of India, says “He [Shankaracharya] strove hard to synthesize the diverse currents that were troubling the mind of India of his day and to build a unity of outlook out of diversity. In a brief life of thirty-two years, he did the work of many long lives and left such an impress of his powerful mind and rich personality on India that it is very evident today. He was a curious mixture of a philosopher and a scholar, an agnostic and a mystic, a poet and a saint and in addition to all this, a practical reformer and an able organiser.”<sup>1</sup> He further adds, “He functioned on the intellectual, philosophical and the religious plane and tried to bring about a greater unity of thought all over the country. He functioned also on the popular plane in many ways destroying many a dogma and opening the door of his philosophic sanctuary to everyone who was capable of entering it.”<sup>2</sup>

Shankaracharya was one of the best thinkers of the world. His clear thinking is reflected in his works on philosophy. His Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैत-वेदान्त) – Absolute Monism, which is held in high esteem by all, has attracted attention of the intellectuals in such a manner that it may become the common philosophy of the whole intelligentsia.

Shankaracharya was an extraordinary genius; he has written on scriptures profusely but nowhere in his extensive writings he is ambiguous. In all works, most profound thoughts

have been expressed clearly. His commentaries on Prasthanatrayi (प्रस्थानत्रयी), the collective name for the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्), the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), and the Brahmasutra (ब्रह्मसूत्र) are marvels in metaphysical writings. They are clear yet deep, penetrating as well as broad-based. His commentary on the Brahmasutra (ब्रह्मसूत्र), a great philosophical treatise, is regarded as an excellent literary creation. His Prakarana (प्रकरण) texts and hymns are manifestations of his profundity of thought and emotional zeal. Through his writings Shankaracharya catered to the need of all members of society; his commentaries on Prasthanatrayi (प्रस्थानत्रयी) enlighten the elite whereas his Prakarana (प्रकरण) treatises enlighten the common man and the hymns leave a lasting impact on the minds of both.

He set a model for systematic metaphysical thinking and gave a new direction to the course of philosophical history in India. Shankaracharya came on the scene when Buddhism was at its peak in India. He faced the challenge, rigorously refuted the Buddhist philosophy in his writings, established Vedanta (वेदान्त) and revived the Sanatana Dharma (सनातन-धर्म). Due to his incessant efforts, those who had embraced other religions came in fold of Sanatana Dharma (सनातन-धर्म). It may truly be said that we owe to Shankaracharya for the revival of the Sanatana Dharma (सनातन-धर्म). He was able to accomplish this task out of his conviction and his fervour towards the Sanatana Dharma (सनातन-धर्म).

Shankaracharya's philosophy of Advaita (अद्वैत) or Monism declares that all living beings are verily Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). The realisation of unity between the individual soul and the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) brings about liberation.

According to Shankaracharya the Ultimate Reality, Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is one without a second. It is pure consciousness, existence and bliss. The unqualified, indeterminate, transcendent and indescribable Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) being associated with Maya (माया) appears as qualified, determinate, immanent, and as Lord or Ishvara (ईश्वर) who creates, protects and destroys the world, who is the controller of the world.

Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is supra-sensuous, homogeneous and eternal. It is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. It is both the material as well as the instrumental cause of the world. It is of the nature of truth, knowledge and infinitude.

The world emanates from Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). According to Shankaracharya the world is Vivarta (विवर्त), an illusive appearance without any real change in the original substance – Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), such as rope appearing as a serpent without any change in the rope.

The Mahavakya (महावाक्य) “Thou art That”<sup>3</sup> establishes identity between Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) and individual soul; the Mahavakya (महावाक्य) “All this is verily Brahman (ब्रह्मन्),”<sup>4</sup>

establishes identity between Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), the individual soul and the world. In short the non-duality of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), the non-reality of the world, and the non-difference of the soul from Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) – these constitute the teaching of Advaita (अद्वैत).

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, an eminent philosopher and the former President of India, puts the philosophy of Shankaracharya in a nutshell. He says, “The Advaita (अद्वैत) of Shankara insists on the transcendent nature of non-dual Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) and the duality of the world including Ishvara (ईश्वर) who presides over it. Reality is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) or Atman (आत्मन्). No predication is possible of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) as predication involves duality and Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is free from all duality. The world of duality is empirical or phenomenal. The saving truth which redeems the individual from the stream of births and deaths is the recognition of his own identity with the Supreme. “That thou art” is the fundamental fact of all existence. The multiplicity of the universe, the unending stream of life, is real, but only as a phenomenon.”<sup>5</sup>

The Advaita (अद्वैत) philosophy as propounded by Shankaracharya had a tremendous social impact. It served as a unifying force in India during his time when she was torn apart by many conflicting religious and social groups. We can also notice that the unifying force of Shankaracharya’s Advaita (अद्वैत) doctrine holds good even today. In the present age of diverse socio-religious tendencies the monistic convictions of Shankaracharya to a large extent contribute towards the development of a universal attitude among the Indian masses. This universal outlook in its turn helps to keep people united against all odds. Shankaracharya exhorted Indian people to extricate themselves from the shackles of age-old superstitions and nurture a more emancipated thinking. Though he was a Sannyasi (संन्यासी), Shankaracharya performed the funeral rites of his mother. His embracing a low caste person and recognising Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) in him was more than just a humanitarian act. It signifies equality in every human being. He not only preached oneness in all but also practised the same and inspired others to adopt the spirit of synthesis.

Though Shankaracharya is famous as a great philosopher and undoubtedly his main contribution is in the field of philosophy, he has contributed remarkably to other fields also. For instance, one can say that he was a great religious reformer. In his time various cults were preached and practised. Due to his incessant efforts people got rid of a number of conflicting cults which were assimilated in the Vedanta (वेदान्त) system. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “Shankara is a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer, such diverse gifts did he possess – that different images present themselves, if we try to recall his personality. One sees him in youth, on fire

with intellectual ambition, a stiff and intrepid debator; another regards him as a shrewd political genius (rather a patriot) attempting to impress on the people a sense of unity; for a third, he is calm philosopher engaged, in the single effort to expose the contradictions of thought with an unmatched incisiveness; for a fourth, he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know. There have been few minds more universal than his.”<sup>6</sup>

To preach Vedanta (वेदान्त) Shankaracharya travelled from North to South and from West to East throughout India. In his wanderings he experienced that India has diverse ways of worship. So he propagated worship of five deities, namely, the Sun, the Goddess Ambika, Vishnu, Ganesh and Shiva for those who follow the path of Karma (कर्म). He renovated old temples and also built new temples in different parts of India.

Shankaracharya established four monasteries, namely, the Shringeri in the Mysore province, Puri in the East, Dvaraka in the West and Badrinath in the Himalayas to keep his tradition alive for centuries to come.

Shankaracharya popularized the practice of pilgrimages. He made it obligatory for pilgrims to travel from one end of the country to the other so that they may develop the awareness of the underlying unity of India. Undoubtedly every aspect of his life and work is magnificent and inspiring. It must be said that he revived Hinduism by his extraordinary zeal, amazing intellect and spiritual power.

Advaita (अद्वैत) doctrine of Shankaracharya is both a system of philosophy and a way of life. The central and essential aspect of this philosophy is applicable to social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual fields.

Shankaracharya’s writings and his philosophy which have stood the test of time and his unique, invigorating and integrated personality raised him to the status of Jagadguru (जगद्गुरु). He was a perfect combination of several great qualities of head and heart which are rare.

Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “It is impossible to read Shankara’s writing, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of very fine penetration and profound spirituality... A master of the strictest logic, he is also the master of a noble and animated poetry which belongs to another order. The rays of his genius have illumined the dark places of the thought and soothed the sorrows of the most forlorn heart.”<sup>7</sup>

Shankaracharya’s Vedantic view has a healing effect on the tense and disturbed mind of modern man of the present age. His system also presents the fundamentals of ideal

human behaviour and ideal manhood which leads to achieve the best and greatest aim of human life. Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैत-वेदान्त) is meaningful for universal integration also. Human world suffering from narrowness and hatred can be benefited by it. Vedantic concept of One Self in all and of non-dualism can unite the whole mankind and uproot the social evils and show the way to translate into practice the noble concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) – the entire world as one small family.

In this way, Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैत-वेदान्त) can guide mankind for solving individual, social, religious, national and international problems of modern world and help in restoring world peace.

All of us have to learn and imbibe the message of this great humanitarian preceptor, the Jagadguru (जगद्गुरु) Shankaracharya, so that the whole human species may be happy and free from all sorts of evils, and human brotherhood throughout the world may be established through love to all and malice to none.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Nehru Jawaharlal, Discovery of India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992, p.190
- 2 Ibid., p.190
- 3 तत्त्वमसि | tattvamasi / Chandogya Upanishad VI.8.7
- 4 सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म | sarvam khalvidam brahma / Chandogya Upanishad III.14.1
- 5 The Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan, Mc Dermott Robert (ed.), Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1996, pp. 112-113
- 6 Radhakrishnan S., Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 450
- 7 Ibid., pp. 446-447

# **Saints of India**

*Delivered in* : the International Interreligious Dialogue Seminar on Streams of Spirituality

*organized by* : Abba School, Focolare Movement

at Castel Gandolfo, Rome, Italy

17-20 April 2004

## Saints of India

**I**NDIA, that is, Bharatavarsha has been a land of saints. One who lives in God, who always looks at the Self within and is above likes and dislikes, greed and anger, is known as a saint (Sant सन्त) in the Hindu tradition. He is free from egoism as his heart is set upon God. He devotes himself entirely to the happiness of others; his worship consists of helping his fellow beings. The Sant (सन्त) represents the perfect man who has had the experience of the Divine. No wonder, he is endowed with supreme insight rooted in spiritual wealth. This is the reason why king Janaka said to the sage Yajnavalkya, "I am grateful to your exalted holiness as I have obtained the wisdom from the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) through your sublime instructions. I offer my whole kingdom at your feet." Yajnavalkya said, "Of what use is it? There is no hope of overcoming death or the misery of the world with the help of all material wealth." As a whole, the term saint connotes a member of the Saint tradition, a group or better a succession of preachers and nonconformist mystics. The saints live and move in the kingdom of God. Really speaking they appear in this world from time to time with the explicit purpose of protecting the Manava-Dharma (मानवधर्म virtue) in the midst of severe decline of righteousness. Sant-s (सन्त), that is, saints speak of a sort of spiritual family whose members are spread from the 14<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era throughout the whole of India and part of the Deccan.

### Philosophers

It is significant to note that in India all Acharya-s (आचार्य founders of different schools

of Vedanta (वेदान्त) hailed from South and were basically devotees of high order. All these schools have their roots in the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) which can be said to be the concluding portions of the Veda (वेद). The great preceptor of Advaita (अद्वैत) is Gaudapada who is mentioned by Shankaracharya (778-820 A.D.) as the foremost preceptor. The greatest and the most effective preacher of the doctrine of non-duality is Shankaracharya who strongly maintained that the root cause of this wonderfully various world is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) which is sentient and takes both the forms, namely, sentient and non-sentient. According to him this world is an outcome of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), and it ceases to be on the experience of the essential unity. This is not in conflict with the essence of devotion (Bhakti भक्ति) as is expressed by him in different hymns (stotra-s स्तोत्र).

The foremost preceptor of qualified Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is Ramanujacharya (1017-1127 A.D.). His school of Vedanta (वेदान्त) is known as Vishishtadvaita (विशिष्टाद्वैत Qualified Monism). God, according to this school is identified with Vishnu, also called as Narayan associated with all auspicious qualities. Ramanuja is known as a great Bhagavata (भागवत) – a devotee of Vishnu.

Madhva (1237-1318 A.D.) advocates frank pluralism known as Dvaita (द्वैत). Plurality of reals is the basic doctrine of this school which accepts the five differences, namely, the difference between God and soul, soul and soul, God and matter, soul and matter and difference between one material thing and another. Nevertheless Vishnu remains the Supreme Being and Moksha (मोक्ष) consists in the soul's enjoyment of innate bliss, with faultless Bhakti (भक्ति). Bhakti (भक्ति) is the only means of obtaining the bliss.

Nimbarka (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) explained his doctrine of Dvaitadvaita (द्वैताद्वैत Dualistic non-dualism), where Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is Krishna accompanied by Radha. In the opinion of Nimbarka the soul does not lose its individuality even in the state of release.

Vallabha (1479-1544 A.D.) is the founder of Krishna-cult known as Shuddhadvaita (शुद्धाद्वैत), where the Veda-s (वेद) (including the Upanishad-s उपनिषद्), the Gita (गीता), the Brahmasutra (ब्रह्मसूत्र) and lastly the Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) are canonical texts complementary to one another. Here Krishna is Purushottama (पुरुषोत्तम), the Supreme Person. He is Sat (सत् existence), Chit (चित् consciousness), Ananda (आनन्द bliss) and Rasa (रस sentiment). According to this school, the world is a transformation of the very essence of God where the element of Sat (सत्) is manifest and the other two elements of Chit (चित्) and Ananda (आनन्द) remain latent.

**Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**

Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533 A.D.), a great devotee of Lord Krishna of the highest order, delighted in Kirtana-s (कीर्तन) describing episodes from Lord Krishna's life. He laid special emphasis on the love of the Gopi-s (गोपी), that is, the cowherdresses. He saw the highest kind of devotion in their self-surrender to Lord Krishna. The ecstasy that he experienced in constantly chanting the name of Krishna is an inspiration for the Vaishnava-s (वैष्णव). A devotional cult was formed round Chaitanya that lays stress on devotional and mystical aspect of faith. The main features of this cult include chanting of devotional songs, sacred name and invocations. According to Chaitanya, God is the universal male and the souls are female. Liberation is equated with total love for God, which can be attained through chanting the name of God, singing, music and dancing.

### **Kabir**

Kabir is undoubtedly a towering figure of the fifteenth century. This poet-saint of Kashi born in 1377 A.D. is said to have lived a life of 120 years breathing his last in 1497 A.D. This was the ripe time for the development of Bhakti (भक्ति devotion) movement as this period was one where in the North, the conquerors and the conquered were keen on putting an end to the atmosphere of uncertainty. The individuals among the masses were trying to get refuge in some unfailing principle that controls and regulates the whole world irrespective of the differences of caste, creed or religion. Such notion of the infinite was rooted in the glorious tradition from the time of the Veda-s (वेद) down to the times of the Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) wherein three different forms of one and the same principle of Bliss are referred to as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), Paramatman (परमात्मन्) and Bhagavan (भगवान्) by different devotees in keeping with their temperament as well as training. Thus some persons may think of the impersonal form of the Divinity, that is, Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) which was declared by the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) as bereft of name and form yet predominantly sentient. Here the emphasis is on knowledge or Dhyana (ध्यान), that is, meditation which is not really opposed to Action as well as Devotion.

It is significant to note that Kabir seems to have been of Hindu parentage, though he was adopted and brought up as a Mohammedan. By caste he was a Julaha – a weaver and as was the practice of those days he had not touched ink as well as paper. He got initiation from Ramananda (1410-1510 A.D.) and had the opportunity to join the theological and philosophical debates which his preceptor held with all the great Mullah-s and Brahmins of his day. This made him the prophet of universal brotherhood.

He worked at the loom but his mind was ever fixed on Rama, not the son of Dasharath as people knew but as the sentient principle that rules over the universe. In fact he presented a combination of the qualities of a devout Hindu steadfast in his principle and the fearlessness as the quality of a Muslim, the ruling community in his times. He endeavoured strenuously for the social, moral and spiritual uplift of the people. Kabir's sayings are the spontaneous expressions of his spiritual experience and his unflinching devotion to limitless Lord of Universe.

In his attempt to reconcile the Hindus and Muslims as well as different sects in Hinduism, Kabir says, "Listen, O men and women, take refuge in the One God. He is one; there is no second, Rama, Khuda, Shakti, Shiva are one; tell me how to separate them."

Really speaking Sufi saints like Kabir have attempted to bring about a synthesis of Sufi ideals and the tenets of Hindu philosophy.

### **Guru Nanak**

Guru Nanak (1469-1539 A.D.) practised rigorous meditation in order to realize God. He wandered from place to place. He emphasized the practice of repeating the name of the God. He explained the way to attain God in the following words, "Make His will your own. Be in tune with the Infinite. There is no other way." "Love the Lord as the lotus loves the waters. Even though with its waves the lotus is lashed, yet it does not abandon its love, instead blooms all the more." Guru Nanak himself has given a summary of his teachings: "Love the saints of every faith. Put away the pride. Remember the essence of religion is meekness and sympathy; not fine clothes, not the Yogi's (योगी) garb and ashes... but a life of goodness and purity amidst the world temptations."

### **Tulasidas**

If Kabir represents Bhakti (भक्ति), that is, devotion to Rama devoid of name and form, Saint Tulasidas (1532-1623 A.D.) represents Bhakti (भक्ति) – that is, devotion to Rama, as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This great poet has many books like Kavitaavali (कवितावली), Vinaya Patrika (विनय-पत्रिका), etc.; each of them having an excellence of his own but Ramacharitamans (रामचरितमानस) has been his magnum-opus. This epic depicting the glorious life of Rama and Sita has never become old and is recited in almost every hut in the North India up to this day. Due credit has to be given to this generous thinker and

philosopher for undermining the tussle between the devotees of Vishnu and those of Shiva. The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) declared that total surrender (Prapatti प्रपत्ति or Sharanagati शरणागति) of the devotee at the feet of divinity pleases Lord. Vallabhacharya, the founder of Pushtimarga (पुष्टिमार्ग) gave supreme importance to this kind of Bhakti (भक्ति) and was the first among the learned pandits responsible for popularizing Bhakti in the form of threefold service to Bala-Krishna which comprises of Bhakti (भक्ति) through wealth, body as well as mind. Pushtimarga (पुष्टिमार्ग) founded by this Acharya (आचार्य) has opened the doors of Bhakti (भक्ति) to great devotees like Suradas.

### Suradas

Suradas (1478-1583 A.D.) is rightly considered as the saving boat of Pushtimarga (पुष्टिमार्ग) as his songs gave rise to the deservedly famous Surasagar (सूरसागर), an unforgettable collection of songs addressed to Bala-Krishna depicting Vatsalya Bhakti (वात्सल्य-भक्ति), that is, devotion in the form of affection in all its stages. Suradas's Bhramaragita (भ्रमरगीता) is a novel yet poetic attempt in establishing the supremacy of Saguna Bhakti (सगुण-भक्ति), that is, devotion towards Divinity with name and form over Nirguna Bhakti (निर्गुण-भक्ति), that is, devotion on the Ultimate Reality without name and form. Suradas was aware of shortcomings of human nature, which obstruct an aspirant to see God. He says,

“My Lord, pardon me, among sinners a rare find,  
I'm lustful, greedy, full of sins of all kind.  
Childhood to old age, I never said any prayer,  
I've come to your shelter, forgive me if you care.  
Vulture, Harlot, Hunter absolved through thy name,  
Be kind, enlist me as Thy devotee same.”

### Narasi Mehta

Narasi Mehta (1414-1481 A.D.) the greatest Kirtanist of his age, was a simple minded devotee of Lord Krishna. He performed Kirtana-s (कीर्तन) even for the people of the low caste. His song 'Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye' (वैष्णव जन तो तेणे कहिये) is a description of the characteristics of a Vaishnava (वैष्णव), that is, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, which is sung fondly by every Hindu. He says, “A true devotee of Lord Vishnu is compassionate towards

others' sufferings, is equanimous towards good and evil, does not censure anybody, is free from falsehood and anger." The following words of Narasi Mehta summarise his teachings. "He who obstructs thee in repeating the name of Lord, forsake him, and perform the worship of Lord Vishnu with the body, mind and soul; renounce on that account thy caste, thy family, thy father, mother, brother, sister, wife and son as the snake discards its skin."

### **Mirabai**

Among the woman saints no one can forget Mira (1498-1546 A.D.) who rose to fame on account of unflinching devotion to Krishna in the form of her beloved. Her songs are full of the pangs of separation and joy of union with her beloved Krishna. She says, "Oh Krishna, come and adorn my eyes."

"In mine eyes  
And in the heart within me  
Thou art!  
Beloved, Thou art!  
And to Thee I come  
Radiant in Thy colour divine!"

Although a queen in Rajasthan Mira led the hard life of an ascetic in her unparalleled love for Krishna.

### **Saints of South India**

Purandaradas (1484-1564 A.D.), a great saint from Karnataka brought about a synthesis of knowledge, detachment and devotion; giving utmost importance to devotion to Lord Vishnu with unflinching faith.

Tyagaraj (1767-1845 A.D.), the great Telugu saint endowed with extraordinary creative quality was renowned for his singing and was blessed by God Rama in his cottage.

Narayanaguru (1586-1928 A.D.) was a great saint and reformist from Kerala. This preacher of Advaita (अद्वैत) philosophy maintained that humanity is the only caste in this world. He opened the doors of monkhood to all irrespective of caste.

Thiruvalluvar, an ancient saint from South India composed Tirukkural in 31 B.C. The work earned reputation as the Tamil Veda (तमिळ-वेद). It prescribes the moral code for society and thus deals with the art of living. Tirukkural consisting of 1330 aphorisms is divided into three sections that contain 133 chapters of 10 couplets each.

### **Saints of Maharashtra**

The name of Jnaneshvar or Jnanadev (1275-1296 A.D.), the founder of Bhakti (भक्ति) movement in Maharashtra is on the lips of everyone. His father Vitthalapant had renounced but had to return to his household life at the behest of his Guru (गुरु), Shripada Yati. Jnanadev was persecuted by the learned Brahmins of Alandi as he was born of a father who entered the life of a householder after becoming a monk (Sannyasi संन्यासी). Jnanadev wrote Jnaneshvari (ज्ञानेश्वरी), a wonderful commentary on the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), in Marathi at the age of sixteen. After completing his work, Jnanadev entered Sanjivana Samadhi (संजीवन-समाधि), that is, Samadhi (समाधि) while alive in his twenty-second year, about the end of October 1296. Here Samadhi (समाधि) means entering a cell underground in order to put an end to one's life to have union with God. He wrote Amritanubhava (अमृतानुभव) at the behest of Nivritti (1273-1297 A.D.), his Guru (गुरु), embodying his own experiences of realization. It will be pertinent to mention that Jnanadev founded a movement called Varakari Sampradaya (वारकरी-सम्प्रदाय) which still has its sway over the denizens of Maharashtra. Another significant factor displaying the inborn greatness and forgiving quality of this great Yogi (योगी) and thinker is that he has closed his great book Jnaneshvari (ज्ञानेश्वरी) with the deservedly famous Pasayadana (पसायदान a prayer for well-being of everyone) without a single word about the persecution that he and his brothers suffered. Instead he wrote, "Let the wicked forsake their evil intentions; let the good prosper; let the gloom of darkness disappear and let everybody get what he wishes for."

Muktabai (1279-1297 A.D.), the sister of Jnaneshvar, a girl of thirteen, became the Guru (गुरु) of Changadev an old Yogi (योगी). She said to him, "If you want to attain salvation, the first step is sincere devotion which will bring detachment and detachment will lead you to knowledge." According to Muktabai one can have God-realization through knowledge.

Jnanadev had many followers. Namadev (1270-1350 A.D.) who was his senior contemporary was a devotee of Vitthal, the deity in the temple at Pandharapur. In one of his compositions he says, "As a bee's heart might be set on the fragrance of a flower, or as a fly might take resort to honey, similarly my mind clings to God." His identification

with God made him sing, "I am God and God is me. God always dwells in the heart of his devotees." Namadev settled for some time in Punjab making his words ring in the ears of the people, which led to the building of a temple in his name. Namadev's realization of God did not prevent him from leading a householder's life and following his profession of a tailor. He tells us that our one and only goal should be the vision of God, whatever pursuit we might be undertaking. Children play with a kite which they send into the sky with a rope in their hands but their attention is upon the kite and not upon the rope... We may carry on any pursuit, says Namadev, provided we always think of God. He danced in spiritual ecstasy in front of the image in the temple of Pandharapur. He says, "If I give up meditation, O Lord, even for a while, my life-breath will vanish instantly." The passing away of Jnanadev, his dear friend was a severe blow to him; in fact the meeting of the two symbolizes the confluence of the path of devotion and the path of knowledge. Jnanadev represents the intellectual while Namadev the emotional side of spiritual life.

Among the contemporary saints of Namadev, Gora (1267- 1317 A.D.), the potter, evidently takes the first place. Due to seniority he was known as 'Uncle Gora'. He was given the responsibility of testing the spirituality of Namadev. It is said that being so filled with God-devotion once Gora did not realise that he trampled on his child in clay while dancing in joy; no wonder that God took care to save the child. Visoba Khechar (13<sup>th</sup> century) was the Guru (गुरु) of Namadev because he convinced Namadev of the omnipresence of God. Once Namadev saw Visoba Khechar sleeping. His feet were resting on a Shivalinga (शिवलिङ्ग). Namadev took this as disregard for Lord Shiva and tried to change the posture of Visoba. To his surprise he saw that wherever the feet rested, there sprang a Shivalinga (शिवलिङ्ग) under Visoba's feet. Savata, the gardener could see God in everything, in every vegetable. He breathed his last in 1295 A.D. Narahari, the goldsmith (1505-1610 A.D.) recognized the identity of Shiva and Vishnu. Chokha, the untouchable was very much loved by God. He got buried under ruins on the fall of a wall in 1338 A.D. From his bones the name of Vitthal was audible. Janabai, the maidservant of Namadev was a celebrated woman saint. Sena, the barber and Kanhopatra, the prostitute became known as great devotees of Vitthal.

Ekanath (1533-1599 A.D.) the well-known saint of Maharashtra had the fire of devotion towards Krishna, enkindled in his heart at the age of ten. The name and form of the Lord were not significant to him as was the essence. While on pilgrimage to Rameshvar instead of offering the holy water to the deity in the temple, he offered it out of compassion to a donkey dying of thirst. Ekanath's work known as Ekanathi Bhagavata (एकनाथी-भागवत)

has earned the same esteem in Maharashtra as the Ramacharitamanas (रामचरितमानस) in the north.

Tukaram (1608-1649 A.D.) is deservedly famous as a great devotee dedicated to Vitthal. The story of his life is a story of misfortunes such as loss of parents, the elder brother and sister-in-law. Out of disgust for life he is said to have concentrated on the Almighty for fifteen days without food, water or sleep. This austerity led to the experience of realization of Vitthal. Hereafter Tukaram began to spend his life more and more in devotional practices such as singing the name and glories of Lord Vitthal also known as Pandurang. People flocked to listen to his compositions (abhanga-s अभङ्ग) as they spoke of his experience of being in the vicinity of Vitthal. Bhagavata Dharma (भागवत-धर्म) is said to have reached its height in the simple yet weighty words of this saint. He was crystal-clear in saying, "A Brahmin who does not take the name of God is no Brahmin and an outcaste who loves the name of God is indeed a Brahmin." While describing the characteristics of a saint, Tukaram says, "He is the saint indeed who holds to his bosom the grief-stricken; such a saint is God himself. His mind is as soft as butter; he holds them to heart who do not have any refuge. He is as compassionate to the servants as he is to his own son." About his eagerness to have a vision of Lord, Tukaram says, "My body is burning, like a forest on fire; run! O Lord, I cannot extinguish fire, I am burnt up. My heart is about to burst... Bring water (of love) and run quickly; no one else can help me." Tukaram says, "O Lord, Thou art my mother, who else will help me in the last hour?" Tukaram desires to take birth again and again to serve his beloved Lord.

Narayan (1608-1681 A.D.) became famous as Ramadas. He ran away from the marriage ceremony on hearing the fortuitous words 'Savadhana' (सावधान Be Alert), found a cave on a hillock and spent twelve years of his life in severe austerities. It is said that Lord Rama appeared before him and initiated him. So he took the name Ramadas – the servant of Rama. From 1642 he spent another twelve years in a journey all over India. He felt the necessity of reviving real Dharma (धर्म). Ramadas stood out in a class all by himself and evinced a desire to spread his creed with the zeal of a missionary. He aimed at getting rid of foreign invaders and used direct methods for making people gather strength by adoring the mighty Hanuman. He did not ask his followers to shun the life of a householder. Instead he gave them strength and vigour. At the root he was a Vedantin believing in the Highest Reality, still he expressed a keen desire to build a life of activity by establishing monasteries. In his opinion, a saint ought to awaken others, but should not remain in their midst and should regularly meditate in the solitude of

hills and valleys. Ramadas's work called Dasabodh (दासबोध) is an advice for all people to live a life full of systematic wholesome activity intended to achieve the greatest good of the greatest number. No wonder that Shivaji, the great Maratha ruler found in him a real preceptor establishing Sanatana Dharma (सनातन-धर्म) in the service of God. Ramadas entails meditation as necessary for all aspirants and warns people that desire for fruit of action is an obstacle between God and us and disinterested love for God wins all. He praises God's name and describes it as the cream of creams, and the refuge of all. Mind being fickle, Ramadas addresses it and asks it to take resort to devotion, only then the Lord can be seen. Censurable conduct should be abandoned. Whatever is approved by people, that should be practised... Only that action should be undertaken which leads to everlasting fame even after one leaves body. While in the company of people or while taking food one should recite respectfully the portions of scriptures. One should eat food while one's mind contemplates on God.

Thus the glorious tradition of saints in the North as well as in the South is really a story of the people of God conveying the message of worshipping the Eternal and helping the people from all castes to bask in the sunshine of Divine Effulgence.

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# **Love in Its True Sense Prema Yathartharupa**

*Delivered in* : the Programme on Challenges of Modern Life

*organized by* : Swami Shri Prempuri Ashram Trust

at Prempuri Ashram, Mumbai,

India 18 July 2009

## Love in Its True Sense Prema Yathartharupa

**L**OVE is a very sublime sentiment, for a person in love looks beyond his or her own interests and is prepared to make sacrifices for the beloved. Mother loves her child and makes all sorts of compromises for it. Mother's love for her child is known as the purest form of love. That is why all over the world motherhood is respected.

In Indian tradition the supreme form of love is Bhakti (भक्ति) or devotion to God. According to Narada, Bhakti (भक्ति devotion) means intensive and supreme love for God.<sup>1</sup> Bhakti (भक्ति) is a bridge between the devotee and his God. It is a beautiful intimate relationship. The devotee is like a child, a friend, a lover or even a servant to Lord. Bhakti (भक्ति) implies total surrender (Prapatti प्रपत्ति) to Him. It is experiencing Him everywhere. Separation from Him cannot be borne by the devotee. It is just unbearable to him. The young ones of birds whose wings are not yet strong enough to make them fly are eager to see their mother. The hungry calves wait for their mother. The same is the intensity of the devotee aspiring for the vision of the Lord.

Formal worship of God is necessary, but gradually one should outgrow it and come to a higher platform. When love to God becomes perfect, the devotee does not ask for anything from God. It is just pure love for God that expects nothing. But anthropomorphism still remains as the devotee is a human being with his body, so he is bound to love God as the human beings love one another.

Human love is of several kinds:

1. The lowest, most common love, that comes out of need for protection, food, etc.
2. The love which inspires us to serve
3. The love of a friend
4. Motherly love
5. The love of husband and wife
6. Unselfish love

Man's love for God surpasses all these kinds.

We should learn to love others in true sense. The characteristics of unselfish love are beautifully and aptly described by St. Paul. He says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."<sup>2</sup>

We find that such intense love existed between Arjuna and Lord Krishna. Hence after seeing Vishvarupa (विश्वरूप), the cosmic form of Lord, Arjuna realizes that out of sheer love for Lord he had offended Him knowingly or unknowingly. Arjuna says, "Whatever I have rashly said from carelessness or love, addressing You as, 'O Krishna, O Yadava (यादव), O Friend', looking on You merely as a friend ignoring of this Your greatness; in whatever way I may have insulted You for jest while at play, reposing, sitting or at meals, when alone O Achyuta, or in company, that I implore You, Immeasurable One, to forgive." Hence Arjuna beseeches for pardon saying that, "Bear with me, O Lord as a father with a son, as a friend with a friend, as a lover with his beloved."<sup>3</sup> Sudama's love for Lord is also incomparable. This is the aspect of Bhakti (भक्ति) expressed through friendship.

The antiquity of the Divine love seen as the relationship between lover and the beloved can be traced to the Upanishadic times. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) it is stated, "As a man, fully embraced by his beloved wife, does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this infinite being (Self), fully embraced by the Supreme Self, not know anything at all, either external or internal. That is His form in which all objects of desire have been attained and are but the Self, that which is free from desire and devoid of grief."<sup>4</sup> Thus the non-duality of the devotee and the Divine is brought out by the symbol of beloved's embrace. Though the lover and the beloved are

two independent individuals, the bond of love makes them one. The separation is painful and there is continuous craving for each other.

This craving takes different forms which are described by Narada. The Bhakti (भक्ति) assumes the form of love for the attributes and greatness of God, for His beauty, for His worship, for His remembrance, love for Him as of a servant to his master, as of a friend, as of a parent and as of an endeared wife, that of a self-consecration to Him, love of absorption in Him and that of the pangs of separation from Him.<sup>5</sup> These are the different steps in the pilgrimage of Bhakti (भक्ति). In the beginning the devotee becomes aware of his own finitude and becomes aware of infinitude and the majesty of God. Consequently he adores Him as a superhuman power and establishes a personal relationship with Him. His heart is filled with the sweetness of His transcendent beauty and he begins to love and enjoy His sweet memories. Once this love becomes steady the devotee serves the Lord and considers Him as his master. Then he comes close to Him and loves Him as a friend. Further he manifests love for God as selfless love from the parents. Further the devotee reaches the culmination of the relation and loves God as a wife loves her husband; he loses himself in God, experiences His presence everywhere and is lost in the pangs of separation from the Beloved whenever he feels that he is separated from God. In the separation he is one with God as he is immersed in His memory. In later devotional literature the personal relationship with God takes five forms, namely, quietness (Shanta शान्त), servitude (Dasya दास्य), friendship (Sakhya सख्य), parental affection (Vatsalya वात्सल्य) and sweet wifely love (Madhurya माधुर्य).

Apara Bhakti (अपरा-भक्ति), the inferior devotion is tinged with selfishness as it is that of a Artharthi Bhakta (अर्थार्थी-भक्त), he who asks for something from God, whereas Para Bhakti (परा-भक्ति), the superior devotion, is of the highest type, for there is no remnant of any desire in this kind of Bhakti (भक्ति). The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) describes four types of devotees, Arta (आर्त the distressed), Jijnasu (जिज्ञासु the seeker of knowledge), Artharthi (अर्थार्थी the seeker of wealth) and Jnani (ज्ञानी the wise).<sup>6</sup>

The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) considers the unmotivated and uninterrupted devotion (Ahaituki Bhakti अहैतुकी-भक्ति) as the highest form of devotion.<sup>7</sup> Prahlada therefore prays fervently, "May not that uninterrupted attachment, as is entertained by indiscriminating men towards earthly objects, desert my heart, while I am constantly meditating upon Thee."<sup>8</sup>

The duality and non-duality in Bhakti (भक्ति) are a unique sport between the devotee

and the divine object of devotion. In the Gitagovinda (गीतगोविन्द) composed by Jayadev, we come across an excellent depiction of such intense devotion. Jayadev was a devotee of Lord Jagannatha. He visualizes love between Radha – the devotee, and Lord Krishna – the object of devotion, as a divine sport. The longing of the individual soul for its union with the Supreme Soul is depicted as romance between the two. However this romance is allegorical. It symbolizes the ascent of the soul culminating in ultimate union with the Supreme. It is indeed an exalted experience of the beauty and the dignity of life.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) brings to our notice that the complete union, wherein there is perfect merging of one into the other has no scope for any further sportive action between the two: “Because when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. (But) When to the knower of Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what?”<sup>9</sup>

Radha-Krishna, the couple is always worshipped as one even though they are two. The couple, Shiva and Parvati are not only worshipped together but their unity is depicted in the image of Ardhanarineshvar (अर्धनारीनेश्वर). The union between the two takes place for the cosmic creation.

Jnanadev, a great saint of Maharashtra says, “The devotee is truly God Himself. But for enjoying the ecstatic state of devotion God splits Himself into two. One part becomes ‘Servant’ and the other ‘God.’”<sup>10</sup> Jnanadev says that those who are not devotees cannot realize the sweetness of nectar of love.<sup>11</sup>

Only the devotees of Vitthal know what love is. Without love one cannot foster true devotion and cannot be overwhelmed with it.<sup>12</sup>

According to Jnanadev love is dear to God; it is as sweet as sugar mixed with camphor. It is as fragrant as sandalwood.<sup>13</sup>

Jnanadev says that he has love for Vitthal who is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) with attributes and who is black in complexion. To love God we need Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) with name and form, that is, Saguna Brahman (सगुण-ब्रह्मन्).<sup>14</sup>

Tukaram says that love cannot be talked about. It cannot be shown. It is something to be

experienced in mind.<sup>15</sup> He says that once we take name of Lord, love is born.<sup>16</sup>

Among the women, Mira (1498-1546 A.D.) is a prominent saint, who was a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna and saw Him in the form of her beloved. Her songs equally express the presence of her Lord in her heart and agony of separation from Him. She says,

“Without my beloved Master  
I cannot live.  
Body, mind and life  
Have I given to Beloved.  
Fascinated by His beauty,  
I gaze down the road night and day.  
Says Mira: My Lord,  
Accept your servant  
It is all she asks.”<sup>17</sup>

This is love in its true sense, that is, Prema Yathartharupa (प्रेम-यथार्थरूप). In this era of globalization, the focus is more on consumerism, guarding one's own interest, having more and more possessions. This attitude has brought a sea-change in our approach as regards the inter-personal relationships. We see many distortions of Prema (प्रेम) or love around us. We have to understand the divine dimension of Prema Yathartharupa (प्रेम-यथार्थरूप) to remove the selfish love (Virupa Prema विरूप-प्रेम) from our society.

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Endnotes:

- 1 सा त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा ।  
sa tvasmin paramapremarupa/ Narada Bhakti Sutra 2
- 2 I Corinthians 13:8-10
- 3 सखेति मत्वा प्रसभं यदुक्तं हे कृष्ण हे यादव हे सखेति । अजानता महिमानं तवेदं मया प्रमादात् प्रणयेन वापि ।।  
sakheti matva prasabham yaduktam he krishna he yadava he sakheti/

ajanata mahimanam tavedam maya pramadat pranayena vapi// Bhagavadgita XI. 41  
यच्चावहासार्थमसत्कृतोऽसि विहारशय्यासनभोजनेषु । एकोऽथवाप्यच्युत तत्समक्षं तत्क्षामये त्वामहमप्रमेयम् ॥

yachchavahasarthamasatkrito'si viharashayyasanabhojaneshu/  
eko'thavapyachyuta tatsamaksham tatksamayev tvamahamaprameyam//  
Bhagavadgita XI.42

पितेव पुत्रस्य सखेव सख्युः प्रियः प्रियायार्हसि देव सोढुम् ॥

piteva putrasya sakheva sakhyuh priyah priyayarhasi deva sodhum//  
Bhagavadgita XI.44b

- 4 तद्यथा प्रियया स्त्रिया संपरिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किंचन वेद नान्तरम्, एवमेवायं पुरुषः प्राज्ञेनात्मना संपरिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किंचन वेद नान्तरम्, तद्वा अस्यैतदाप्तकाममात्मकामकामं रूपं शोकान्तरम् ।  
tadyatha priyaya striya samparishvakto na bahyam kinchana veda nantaram, evamevayam purushah prajnenatmana samparishvakto na bahyam kinchana veda nantaram, tadva asyaitadaptakamamatmakamamakamam rupam shokantaram/  
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.3.21
- 5 गुणमाहात्म्यासक्तिरूपासक्तिपूजासक्तिस्मरणासक्तिदास्यासक्तिसख्यासक्तिवात्सल्यासक्तिकान्तासक्ति-आत्मनिवेदनासक्तितन्मयतासक्तिपरमविरहासक्तिरूपा एकधा अपि एकादशधा भवति ।  
gunamahatmyasakti-rupasakti-pujasakti-smaranasakti-dasyasakti-sakhyasakti-vatsalyasakti-kantasakti-atmanivedanasakti-tanmayatasakti-paramavirahasaktirupa ekadha api ekadashadha bhavati/ Narada Bhakti Sutra 82
- 6 चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।  
आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥  
chaturvidha bhajante mam janah sukritino'rjuna/  
arto jijnasurararthartha jnani cha bharatarshabha// Bhagavadgita VII.16
- 7 स वै पुंसां परो धर्मो यतो भक्तिरधोक्षजे ।  
अहैतुक्यप्रतिहता ययाऽऽत्मा सम्प्रसीदति ॥  
sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktiradhokshaje/  
ahaitukyapratihata yaya" tma samprasidati// Bhagavata Purana I.2.6
- 8 या प्रीतिरविवेकानां विषयेष्वनपायिनी ।  
त्वामनुस्मरतः सा मे हृदयान्मापसर्पतु ॥  
ya pritiravivekanam vishayeshvanapayini/

tvamanusmaratah sa me hridayanmapasarpatu// Vishnu Purana I.20.19

- 9 यत्र हि द्वैतमिव भवति तदितर इतरं जिघ्रति तदितर इतरं पश्यति तदितर इतरं शृणोति तदितर इतरमभिवदति तदितर इतरं मनुते तदितर इतरं विजानाति यत्र वा अस्य सर्वमात्मैवाभूत्तत्केन कं जिघ्रेत्तत्केन कं पश्येत्तत्केन कं शृणुयात्तत्केन कमभिवदेत्तत्केन कं मन्वीत तत्केन कं विजानीयात् येनेदं सर्वं विजानाति तं केन विजानीयाद्विज्ञातारमरे केन विजानीयादिति ।

yatra hi dvaitamiva bhavati taditara itaram jighrati taditara itaram pashyati taditara itaram shrinoti taditara itaramabhivadati taditara itaram manute taditara itaram vijanati yatra va asya sarvamatmaivabhuttatkena kam jighrettatkena kam pashyettatkena kam shrinuyattatkena kamabhivadettatkena kam manvita tatkena kam vijaniyat yenedam sarvam vijanati tam kena vijaniyadvijnataramare kena vijaniyaditi//

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad II.4.14

- 10 Jnaneshvari 12.186

- 11 या पिकलिया अमृताची गोडी । केवि जाणती इतर जन ।

ya pikaliya amritachi godi/ kevi janati itara jana/ Jnanadev Gatha 494

- 12 प्रेमेविण भरितें कैसे येत ।

premevina bharite kaise yeta/ Jnanadev Gatha 491

- 13 सकुमार साखर कापुरें घोळील्लि । गोडी परिमळु दोन्ही उरली ॥१॥

मित्त्रत्व करा जीवाहूनि वेगळें । पढियंते आगळ प्रेम जाण ॥२॥

तरुमाजी जैसा एक चंदनु । राहिला वेधुनि वनस्पती ॥३॥

sakumara sakhara kapure gholili/ godi parimalu donhi urali//1//

mitratva kara jivahuni vegale/ padhiyante agala prema jana //2//

tarumaji jaisa eka chandanu/ rahila vedhuni vanaspati//3// Jnanadev Gatha 497

- 14 लक्ष लावुनि त्रिपुटीं ठाण त्रिभंगी चोखडें । सगुण सांवळें म्हणोनि प्रीत मना ॥

laksha lavuni triputi thana tribhangi chokhade / saguna savale mhanoni prita mana //

Jnanadev Gatha 509

- 15 प्रेम नये सांगता बोलतां दावितां । अनुभव चित्ता चित्त जाणे ॥

prema naye sangata bolata davita/ anubhava chitta chitta jane // Tukaram Gatha 1419

- 16 प्रेमें तेथे वास करी। मुखीं उच्चारितां हरि।।  
preme tethe vasa kari / mukhi uchcharita hari // Tukaram Gatha 1621
- 17 The Devotional Poems of Mirabai, A. J. Alston (tr.), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1998,  
p. 63

# Fullness of Life

*Delivered in* : the International Interfaith Dialogue Seminar on Mysticism: Fullness of Life

*organized by* : Vivarium – Panikkar's Center of Intercultural Studies, Arbor Foundation and Jaca Book Publisher hosted by University of Foscari

at Venice, Italy

5-7 May 2008

## Fullness of Life

**T**HE expression 'Fullness of Life' denotes perfection. Every man, during his life, dreams of perfection. Even though he struggles for it, the ideal of perfection is seen differently by different individuals. It may be different for an artist, for a player, for an educationist, for an entrepreneur, etc. In the field of religion, there is no agreement on a single definition of perfection, for this lofty ideal is seen differently by different faiths. Hinduism calls fullness Purnata (पूर्णता), Christianity calls it Pleroma<sup>1</sup> whereas Buddhism speaks of emptiness–Shunyata (शून्यता). Purnata (पूर्णता), Pleroma and Shunyata (शून्यता) denote aspirant's pilgrimage from phenomena to noumenon.

In Hinduism, the fullness is to be one with God or to be one with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). This union is Fullness of Life. Fullness in the Christian tradition is 'being called to be as perfect as the heavenly father', 'being one with Christ as he is with his father', 'becoming God through union with the Son, by the work and grace of the spirit.'<sup>2</sup> According to the Madhyamika (माध्यमिक) school of Buddhism, Shunya (शून्य) does not denote 'nothing' or an 'empty void'. It is neither affirmation, nor negation, nor both, nor neither. It transcends existence, non-existence, both, and neither. Thus Shunya (शून्य) is Chatushkoti Vinirmukta (चतुष्कोटि-विनिर्मुक्त beyond four categories) and hence indescribable. On the empirical level it is Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद relativity), whereas on the transcendental level it is reality. The world is neither existent nor non-existent, hence it is indescribable. The absolute is transcendental. It cannot be described by intellect. Hence it is indescribable. The phenomena are relative; they are devoid of substantiality or independent reality. In short the phenomena of existence are Svabhava-shunya (स्वभावशून्य devoid of the Ultimate

Reality). The Reality is Prapancha-shunya (प्रपञ्चशून्य devoid of plurality). Thus Shunya (शून्य) denotes relativity as well as reality; Samsara (संसार) as well as Nirvana (निर्वाण).<sup>3</sup>

### Urge for Fullness

In Hinduism when we take into account the cosmic panorama of creation, we can see that the development is not accidental; it is designed in a particular order: from matter to life, life to mind, mind to intelligence, intelligence to spirit. Man is not merely an animated entity; he is having within himself nature and also super-nature. Though the Atman (आत्मन्) exists in all beings, the degree of its manifestation varies in plant life, animal life and human life. In vegetation only life exists. In animals it is life and instinct whereas in man it is more than that. Man has reason and self-consciousness. He is constituted of body, mind and spirit. He identifies himself with physical body (Anna अन्न), vital breath (Prana प्राण), mind (Manas मनस्) and intellect (Buddhi बुद्धि). All these are sheaths and not the real nature of man. Man should know that to identify himself with senses or with body is a sign of ignorance. One has to rise above the body-mind interests, the imperfections and link oneself to the Divine nature. “[The] aim is to work out the will of the Divine in the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down a divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

Unless the super nature is awakened, spiritual fulfillment cannot be achieved. The aspiration of soul to discover its true nature and to rest in it is the goal of human life. “All would change if man could once consent to be spiritualized; but his nature, mental, vital and physical, is rebellious to the higher law. He loves his imperfection.”<sup>5</sup> Discovery of true nature requires a spiritual background, a life of strenuous self-discipline and profound meditation.

Meditation results in the awareness that there is a unitary whole that binds all, which, as the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) points out, binds everything, everyone, like a thread that binds the pearls, without which all will fall apart.<sup>6</sup> This unitary whole is God in whom all entities are inter-related. He is within. He is to be felt, to be experienced. The Taittiriya Upanishad (तैत्तिरीय-उपनिषद्) tells us that God created the universe and entered into it.<sup>7</sup> The Katha Upanishad (कठ-उपनिषद्) says that the controller of the universe is One, He is the Inner Self of all beings. Only those who see Him within, attain eternal bliss.<sup>8</sup> Hence the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) tells us that the Self (Atman आत्मन्) is to be seen, pondered over and meditated upon.<sup>9</sup> So the wise one closes his eyes and

looks within, for he knows that God is not only above but also within. He moves to the source of all light, happiness and existence, his own true Self. The Self, (Atman आत्मन्) is immanent and transcendent. It exists in all beings. It is the essence of beings. On the cosmic level it is called Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). The Self is the fullest expression of man's being. The Self is beyond mind and thought. He is seen as a personal God within the domain of thought. The fullness of human life lies in search for Him in one's heart; it culminates in direct experience. When the self-consciousness reaches the higher plane man hears the call of the Infinite Self, hearing which his journey for realization of the Divine begins.

Sri Aurobindo says, “[God is] the omniscient and omnipotent, the sole original Being who manifests in himself all, whatever it may be, good and evil, pain and pleasure, light and darkness as stuff of his own existence and governs himself what in himself he has manifested. Unaffected by its oppositions, unbound by his creation, exceeding, yet intimately related to this Nature and closely one with her creatures, their Spirit, Self, highest Soul, Lord, Lover, Friend, Refuge, he is ever leading them from within them and from above through the mortal appearances of ignorance and suffering and sin and evil, ever leading each through his nature and all through universal nature towards a supreme light and bliss and immortality and transcendence. This is the fullness of the liberating knowledge. It is knowledge of the Divine within us and in the world as at the same time a transcendent Infinite.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Vedic Ideal of Fullness**

The Vedic prayer, “Lead me from the unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality”,<sup>11</sup> indicates man's urge for fullness.

The invocation prayer that precedes major Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) such as the Isha (ईश) or the Brihadaranyaka (बृहदारण्यक), says, “Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is perfect (Purna पूर्ण) and this world, the creation, is also perfect. The perfect springs from perfect and what remains is also perfect.”<sup>12</sup> This invocation clearly says that there is no shortcoming either in Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) or in creation, that is, the world along with the sentient and the insentient. Even though each soul is potentially divine as is proclaimed by the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद)<sup>13</sup> and reiterated by Swami Vivekananda,<sup>14</sup> man is unaware of his divine origin. The perfection is not experienced till man does not consider himself as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), the Ultimate Reality. Drop of water is not different from water; a bubble or a wave is water itself. The spark of fire is not different from fire. It is fire itself. However, as the flame covered

by smoke is obscure, man covered in sheaths does not shine as the Self – the Atman (आत्मन्) or the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) which is self-existent (Sat सत्), consciousness (Chit चित्) and bliss (Ananda आनन्द). What has veiled the real nature of man is his ignorance. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher and the former President of India says, “Unless we feel that there is such a thing as man’s encounter with the Supreme and allow it to constitute an essential element of man’s nature, man is not fulfilled, is not complete; he has not reached what he is to reach, unless he is able to develop the spirit in him.”<sup>15</sup>

### Tools

Self-effort and grace of Lord both lead the aspirant to the fulfillment of the goal. The two examples, namely, the young one of a cat and that of a monkey reveal the significance of grace and self-effort respectively. While being shifted from one place to another the former is held by the mother whereas the latter clings to its mother on its own.

In addition to several kinds of meditations, the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) provide man certain tools to attain fullness. These are known as Mahavakya-s (महावाक्य), the great declarations. They are:

Prajnanam Brahma (प्रज्ञानम् ब्रह्म) / “Consciousness is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).”<sup>16</sup>

Aham Brahmasmi (अहं ब्रह्मास्मि) / “I am Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).”<sup>17</sup>

Tattvamasi (तत्त्वमसि) / “That thou art.”<sup>18</sup>

Ayamatma Brahma (अयमात्मा ब्रह्म) / “This Atman (आत्मन्) is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).”<sup>19</sup>

In the declaration ‘That thou art’, ‘That’ denotes the ‘Brahman’ (ब्रह्मन्) and ‘thou’ denotes the ‘Jiva’ (जीव), individual soul associated with body, mind and sense organs. This declaration establishes the identity of Jiva (जीव) and Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). These great declarations illumine the internal path which Rev. Raimon Panikkar calls the ‘Ascending Way’. In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, the descent of the Overmind is equally important. He says “When the Overmind descends, the predominance of the centralizing ego-sense is entirely subordinated, lost in largeness of being and finally abolished; ...In this boundless largeness, not only the separate ego but all sense of individual, even of a subordinated or instrumental individuality may entirely disappear; the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic delight, the play of cosmic forces are alone left...”<sup>20</sup>

### The Bhagavadgita and Fullness of Man

The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), which is the essence of the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्), has its own beauty, grace of thought and wisdom. It speaks of three paths – knowledge, action and devotion.

Jnanayoga (ज्ञानयोग) – the path of knowledge means realizing the union of the individual soul with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) through knowledge. It implies intellectual analysis that results in the immediate perception of the Self – the inner reality of man and of the universe. Unless the barrier of ego is broken and union with the Self is consummated, one cannot enjoy the Kingdom of God within. The path highlights knowledge of the Self – the immutable, infinite, indestructible reality.

Karmayoga (कर्मयोग) – the path of action means doing actions without selfish interest and without ego of doership. ‘Whatever you do, do as worship to God.’ Renunciation does not mean renunciation of the world; it is renunciation of worldliness, not of actions but of desire.

Bhaktiyoga (भक्तियोग) – the path of devotion is adoration and worship of the Lord, who is the Inner Being, the Self of man. Bhakti (भक्ति) is complete and unconditional surrender to Lord. Its culmination is the experience of all-pervading, all-blissful God everywhere every moment. “In the heart of all – whatever there is in the universe – abides the Lord”, says the Isha Upanishad (ईश-उपनिषद्).<sup>21</sup>

All the three paths lead to the same goal. He who does not understand that each of the paths is equally valid, is ignorant. Thus Hinduism gives freedom to man to choose his path. “When once you recognize that the Reality is something to be felt, something to be experienced, you do not attach so much importance to the ways by which you attain it. They become subordinate. They become instrumental.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Fullness of Man**

The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) defines the fullness of man in clear terms by providing us the ideals of the Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ), the man of steadfast wisdom, of a Yogi (योगी) who has acquired complete self-mastery and of an ideal devotee. The animal propensities drive man to the satisfaction of sensual desires that are ever growing. With great interest and attachment his mind settles upon them. The unfulfilled desires make man angry. Being frustrated he loses his discriminative power. This is the end of man. He perishes, for he is caught in the mesh of desires. He perishes, for his intellect does not drive him to the

right direction. There is a fall, for he has forgotten his true Self.

Man cannot acquire mastery over senses by intellect or by mental self-discipline; both of them can be muddled in the snare of sense objects. Self-control is possible only through Yoga (योग ल्हदह) with something higher than mind and intellect. In other words, only Yoga (योग) with the Divine, can help. "He must sit firm in Yoga (योग), wholly given up to Me"; says Lord Krishna.<sup>23</sup>

Having mastered this Yoga (योग), the Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ) moves among the objects of senses but with the senses entirely under control. Thus he is free from liking and disliking, is above gain or loss, honour and contempt, praise and censure, pleasure and pain, etc. He is equal to all, enemy of none, none he condemns and favours none. Consequently he is tranquil. Grief and sorrow cannot touch the tranquil soul; his intellect is anchored in the peace of the Self.

The sign of a Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ) who is the pure, wise and discerning soul, is the expulsion of all desires, their inability to capture his mind as his mind is in the state of equilibrium, still and highly equipoised. Even though acting outwardly, he is immersed in the Divine. "A man with mind unperturbed by sorrows, who has done away with desire for pleasures, from whom liking and wrath and fear have passed away, such is the sage whose understanding has become founded in stability."<sup>24</sup> And yet he does not cease from work. It is not the work practised for the fulfillment of desire; it is the work to fulfill the Divine Will.

The status the Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ) reaches is the 'Brahmi Sthiti' (ब्राह्मी-स्थिति). This is the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्)-state. Being established in it man gets into oneness with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).<sup>25</sup> This state is the Fullness of Life.

### **Moksha : The Ideal of Fullness**

Moksha (मोक्ष), the lofty ideal of fullness is the heightening of consciousness to higher and higher planes, the ascent to Supermind. It is an inner development, the silence of mind, the merging of ego in the universal Self, the contact with the Divine Reality. The soul would pass beyond the borders of the ignorance and cross its original line of departure from the Supreme Knowledge. It would enter into the integrality of the supramental gnosis; the descent of the gnostic Light.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the fullness of man lies in liberation. Moksha (मोक्ष) implies freedom

from all kinds of limitations and imperfections including release from the cycle of birth and death. The Vedanta (वेदान्त) schools view the fullness variously. According to the Kevaladvaita (केवलाद्वैत Absolute Monism) system of the philosophy of Shankaracharya, the liberated soul is identical with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). In the opinion of Ramanujacharya, the master of the Vishishtadvaita (विशिष्टाद्वैत Qualified Monism), the liberated soul does not become one with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). Liberation consists in reaching the Vishnuloka (विष्णुलोक) or Vaikuntha (वैकुण्ठ) and in having the privilege of being in the proximity of the Lord while serving Him. In the Vaikuntha (वैकुण्ठ) the liberated soul can enjoy all that he wishes for, even without a body or assuming any form, which he commands at will. The Dvaita (द्वैत Dualism) of Madhvacharya holds that the liberated soul is not dissolved in the Absolute. It retains its individual consciousness as liberated and rests in the full knowledge of its deliverance from all misery. Nimbarkacharya, the promulgator of the Dvaitadvaita (द्वैताद्वैत Dualistic non-dualism) maintains that the soul does not lose its individuality even in the state of release. It only realizes its essential similarity to God. The Shuddhadvaita (शुद्धाद्वैत Pure Monism) system of philosophy of Vallabhacharya maintains that the highest state in liberation is to join the Lord in his sport and enjoy the bliss for all the time. The divine inmate of all souls is Lord Krishna. The Rasa-lila (रासलीला) in Gokula to which he beckons the soul is an eternal dance. The soul gets the privilege of enjoying the company of the Lord through love.

“Lord abides within the heart of living beings”,<sup>27</sup> says the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता); when the veil of ignorance is withdrawn and man receives the divine light, he acts in the divine power. Yearning for the Highest and a total self-surrender to Lord are the straight and swift ways to divine oneness.

Thus the soul becomes capable of dwelling in God and giving up his whole consciousness into the Divine. By knowing Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) he becomes Brahman (ब्रह्मन्).

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Endnotes:

- 1 Pleroma - Greek word for fullness which also means the full, the complete.
- 2 Panikkar R., The Intrareligious Dialogue, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 123

- 3 यः प्रतीत्यसमुत्पादः शून्यतां तां प्रचक्ष्महे ।  
yah pratityasamutpadah shunyatam tam prachakshmahe/ Madhyamikakarika XXIV.18
- 4 Sri Aurobindo, The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1989, p. 507
- 5 Ibid., p. 363
- 6 मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।  
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥  
mattah parataram nanyatkinchidasti dhananjaya/  
mayi sarvamidam protam sutre manigana iva// Bhagavadgita VII.7
- 7 सोऽकामयत । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति । स तपोऽतप्यत । स तपस्तप्त्वा ।  
इदं सर्वमसृजत । यदिदं किञ्च । तत्सृष्ट्वा । तदेवानुप्राविशत् ।  
so' kamayata/ bahu syam prajayeyeti/ sa tapo' tapyata/ sa tapastapta/  
idam sarvamasrijata/ yadidam kincha/ tatsrishtva/ tadevanupravishat/  
Taittiriya Upanishad II.6.11
- 8 एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा एकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति ।  
तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरास्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥  
eko vashi sarvabhutantaratma ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti/  
tamatmastham ye'nupashyanti dhirastesham sukham shashvatam netaresham//  
Katha Upanishad II.2.12
- 9 आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यो मैत्रेय्यात्मनो वा अरे दर्शनेन श्रवणेन मत्या  
विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वं विदितम् ।  
atma va are drashtavyah shrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyo maitreyyatmano va are  
darshanena shravanena matya vijnanenedam sarvam viditam/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad  
II.4.5
- 10 Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, p. 336
- 11 असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमयेति ।  
asato ma sadgamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya/ mrityorma'mritam gamayeti/

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.3.28

- 12 ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते । ।  
om purnamadah purnamidam purnatpurnamudachyate/  
purnasya purnamadaya purnamevavashishyate// Brihadaranyaka Upanishad V.1.1
- 13 शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा  
आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः ।  
shrinvantu vishve amritasya putra  
a ye dhamani divyani tasthuh/ Rigveda X.13.1
- 14 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1989, Vol. I,  
p. 11
- 15 Radhakrishnan S., The Creative Life, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 70-71
- 16 प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म ।  
prajnanam brahma/ Aitareya Upanishad III.1.3
- 17 अहं ब्रह्मास्मि ।  
aham brahmasmi/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.4.10
- 18 तत्त्वमसि ।  
tattvamasi/ Chandogya Upanishad VI.8.7
- 19 अयमात्मा ब्रह्म ।  
ayamatma brahma/ Mandukya Upanishad 2
- 20 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, pp. 950-952
- 21 ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
ishavasyamidam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat/ Isha Upanishad 1
- 22 Radhakrishnan S., Our Heritage, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, p. 95

- 23 तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ।  
वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥  
tani sarvani samyamya yukta asita matparah/  
vashe hi yasyendriyani tasya prajna pratishthita// Bhagavadgita II.61
- 24 दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।  
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥  
duhksheshvanudvignamanah sukheshu vigatasprihah/  
vitaragabhayakrodhah sthitadhirmuniruchyate// Bhagavadgita II.56
- 25 एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।  
स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥  
esha brahmi sthitih partha nainam prapya vimuhyati/  
sthitva'syamantakale'pi brahmanirvanamrichchhati// Bhagavadgita II. 72
- 26 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, pp. 951-952
- 27 ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।  
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥  
ishvarah sarvabhutanam hriddeshe' rjuna tishthati/  
bhramayansarvabhutani yantrarudhani mayaya// Bhagavadgita XVIII. 61

# **Mahatma Gandhi on Religious Ethics**

*Delivered in* : the Inaugural function of Gandhian Study Centre in K J Somaiya College  
of Arts and Commerce

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

1 December 2007

# Mahatma Gandhi on Religious Ethics

**D**HARMA (धर्म) is a prominent force which regulates human life. It is more than rites and rituals, injunctions and prohibitions, belief and faith. It binds man to God and to fellow beings. Hence there is a need to reflect on religious ethics. Conflict arises when one is rigid and inflexible in terms of religious freedom. Mahatma Gandhi applies natural law of fundamental unity in diversity to justify plurality of religions. He says, "In nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exceptions to this natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity."<sup>1</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi was a great believer in truth and as such he believed in the truth of all religions. In his opinion all religions are valid as they all are God-given. He says, "I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another."<sup>2</sup>

## **Morality**

Gandhi's definition of a religious man invites our attention especially when purity is confined to external purity. He says, "Let us take two men, one who believes in the

existence of God, yet breaks all His Commandments; and another who, though not acknowledging God by name, worships Him through his deeds and obeys His laws, recognizing in the divine laws, their Maker. Which of the two men shall we call a man of religion and morality? Without a moment's thought, one would emphatically reply that the second man alone is to be considered religious and moral.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Plurality of Religions**

Today we live in the world where multiple cultures and faiths exist. Hence interreligiosity becomes a necessity. Awareness in pluralism uplifts a human being from the local to the global perspective. Consequently he moves to an integrated approach. This approach does not make him indifferent towards his own tradition, culture and religion. Rather it widens his outlook and enables him to embrace the whole of the humanity. Gandhi says, “There will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. But I can clearly see the time coming when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity ...we are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Understanding of Other Faiths – Ways and Means adopted by Gandhi**

Gandhi was open to all religions. He made sincere efforts to understand the tenets of others' religions and tried to assimilate them in his personal life. He tells us, “I believe in the truth of all religions of the world. And since my youth upward, it has been a humble but persistent effort on my part to understand the truth of all the religions of the world, and adopt and assimilate in my own thought, word, and deed all that I have found to be best in those religions. The faith that I profess not only permits me to do so but renders it obligatory for me to take the best from whatsoever source it may come.”<sup>5</sup>

While studying scriptures of other religions Gandhi realized that every religion is a noble heritage for mankind. ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ went straight to Gandhi's heart. He compared it with the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता).<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi sincerely admits, “In trying to explore the hidden treasures of ancient culture, I have come upon this inestimable boon, that all that is permanent in ancient Hindu culture is also to be found in the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, and Zoroaster.”<sup>7</sup> He

appreciated all that was good in other religions. He tells us, "I read Washington Irving's Life of Mahomet and His Successors and Carlyle's panegyric on the Prophet. These books raised Muhammad in my estimation. I also read a book called The Sayings of Zarathustra."<sup>8</sup>

Religion is needed in all spheres of life to add to their value. In the opinion of Gandhi, "Religion which takes no count of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion."<sup>9</sup>

Ignorance about the religions of others gives rise to prejudices and also a sort of unwillingness to accept the integrity of the followers of others' traditions. Hence Gandhi says, "I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty."<sup>10</sup> While reading the sacred books of different faiths Gandhi became 'sufficiently familiar' with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. While going through them he was equiminded towards all these faiths. He never thought of criticizing them, instead he read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found in it the same fundamental morality. Some things were obscure to him but he did not imagine them to be wrong only because he could not understand them. Some of the things became clear over a period of time.<sup>11</sup>

### **Respect to Other Religions**

Not only tolerance but profound respect for all religions is the need of the hour. Rites and rituals, customs and traditions, beliefs and symbols of one religion might be different from those of the other. One has to accept different identities of religions and respect them. Mutual understanding becomes possible only when we avoid two extremes, namely, total identity and drastic difference. Total identity itself is a fiction whereas total difference dismisses the possibility of having any common meeting point. Hence there is a need to look for a golden mid-point – the mutual appreciation. Two factors are involved in the process of mutual appreciation – the desire to understand and the desire to be understood. A dynamic transcendental attitude makes mutual communication possible. "Everybody is agreed about the necessity of this (communal) unity. But everybody does not know that unity does not mean political unity which may be imposed. It means an unbreakable heart unity."<sup>12</sup>

### **Misuse of Religions**

Fanaticism has brought the world at the edge of peril. In the hands of the unenlightened people it inflames riots. Gandhi observes, "True religion being the greatest thing in life and in the world, it has been exploited the most. And those who have seen the exploiters and the exploitation and missed the reality naturally get disgusted with the thing itself."<sup>13</sup>

These exploiters of religion are ignorant about the noble spiritual values in religions including their own. This barrier of ignorance has to be removed. Gandhi admits, "I am Hindu by faith, and yet I do not know much about Hinduism, and I know much less of other religions. In fact, I do not know what is and what should be my belief, I intend to make a careful study of my own religion, and as far as I can, of other religions as well." He suggests: "One must gain a mature understanding of one's own religion and then study others."<sup>14</sup>

Today, some politicians use religion as a tool to achieve selfish ends in politics while, on the other hand, Indian secularism keeps the politics away from religion. To strike a balance between the two, religion should become the means of purification of evil forces in politics. In this context Gandhi says, "For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth... Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>15</sup>

### **Prayer – a Unifying Force**

In order to bring people together, interreligious prayers can serve as a powerful means. Reading of selected passages from scriptures of different religions can also help to strengthen a sense of unity and win the respect of man to all religions.

Recitation of prayer, according to Gandhi, is an invitation to be one with God. He criticizes those who offer prayers as a mark of their participation in social activities. He remarks, "Many offer prayer because they live in society and think they must participate in its activities. No wonder they hanker after variety. As a matter of fact however they do not attend prayer. They want to enjoy the music or are merely curious or wish to listen to the sermon. They are not there to be one with God."<sup>16</sup>

Today if we want to build up a harmonious society we must encourage interreligious prayers. In his Ashram (आश्रम), Gandhi used to have congregational prayers and readings

from scriptures of different religions. He strongly believed in the efficacy of prayer. He says, “The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable.”<sup>17</sup> It is important to see that Gandhi combines prayer with action. To him, “A true prayer is not a mere lip expression. Selfless service is prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

Every religion consists of the highest flight of human thoughts and ideals. These thoughts and ideals are the common heritage of humanity. Let our windows be open so that breeze comes in bringing the fragrance of flowers from groves afar. Let the walls that separate us from each other dismantle. A faithful attempt to create harmony in the communities conflicting in the name of religion has to be made and the beginning is to be made by us without waiting for others to take a lead. Gandhi’s way of life and his legacy can guide us in this direction.

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#### Endnotes:

- 1 Young India, 20. 8. 1925, quoted in Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion, K. L. Seshagiri Rao, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p. 120
- 2 Harijan, 16.2.1934, pp. 5-6 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2006, Vol. VI, p. 264
- 3 The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. IV, p. 23
- 4 Harijan, 2.2.1934, p. 8 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI, p. 268; cf. Harijan, 16.3.1947, p. 63: “Just as a tree had a million leaves, similarly though God was one, there were as many religions as there were men and women though they were rooted in one God.”
- 5 Harijan, 16.2.1934, p. 7 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI, pp. 264-265
- 6 S. Ganeshan, Mahadev Desai With Gandhi in Ceylon, Madras, 1928, p. 131

- 7 The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. I, p. 236
- 8 Ibid., p. 101
- 9 Young India, 7.5.1925, p.164 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI, p. 264
- 10 Harijan, 2.9.1926, p.308 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI, p. 267; cf. Harijan, 25.5.1947, p.166: "It is the duty of everyone to study the scriptures of religions other than his own. This enables people to keep their religion pure and rid it of blemishes."
- 11 The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. IV, pp. 243-244
- 12 Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 340
- 13 Ibid., Vol. V, p. 362
- 14 Ibid., Vol. V, p. 358
- 15 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 435
- 16 Mahatma Gandhi, The Essence of Hinduism, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1996, p. 185
- 17 Ibid., p. 165
- 18 The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. V, p. 499

# Reflections on Ahimsa and Indian Philosophy

*Delivered in* : the House of Commons, British Parliament to celebrate Ahimsa Day  
and in the book release function of the book 'Indian Philosophical Terms: Glossary and  
Sources'

*organized by* : Institute of Jainology, UK and India  
at London, UK

19 October 2004

# Reflections on Ahimsa and Indian Philosophy

**T**HE principle of Ahimsa (अहिंसा non-injury) is an integral part and the basic tenet of Jain religion and philosophy. The doctrine of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is very old in Indian thought but for the first time Jainism made it a focal point of the entire code of conduct. Ahimsa (अहिंसा) occupies the foremost place among the Anuvrata-s (अणुव्रत small vows) and Mahavrata-s (महाव्रत intense vows) prescribed in Jainism. It implies that one should not cause injury to anyone in thought, word or deed. One should lead one's life in such a way that it is in harmony with other living beings.

Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is not merely a negative ideal. It includes not only abstention from inflicting injury upon others but also includes nurturing love and rendering of active service to living beings which is a positive aspect of the doctrine. In his teachings Lord Buddha laid emphasis on loving kindness (Metta मेत्ता), compassion (Karuna करुणा), and non-violence (Ahimsa अहिंसा). He says that one who protects the life of all is called as a noble person and not the one who kills living beings.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) was the essence of the Vanaprastha (वानप्रस्थ) ideal in Hinduism. The Chandogya Upanishad (छान्दोग्य-उपनिषद्) refers to Ahimsa (अहिंसा). While narrating the essence of the Purana-s (पुराण), Sage Vyasa says that the essence of the eighteen Purana-s (पुराण) is that benevolence brings merit and injury inflicted on others causes sin.<sup>2</sup>

In the Mahabharata (महाभारत) Vyasa mentions non-injury as an important virtue for a self-restrained person. He proclaims, "Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is the best practice."<sup>3</sup>

In the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) a realized soul is described as one who is deeply involved in the well-being of all living beings.<sup>4</sup>

The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) includes Ahimsa (अहिंसा non-injury) in the characteristics of Dharma (धर्म) to be followed by all members of society. Non-injury accompanied by Daya (दया compassion) and Karuna (करुणा sympathy) results in infinite love for the whole mankind.

Patanjali, the founder of the Yoga (योग) system of philosophy includes Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in his Ashtangayoga (अष्टाङ्गयोग), the eightfold path of Yoga (योग) as the first constituent of the five Yama-s<sup>5</sup> (यम norms of restraint) which are not different from the Mahavrata-s (महाव्रत) in Jainism. According to Patanjali truth and other forms of restraints and observances are based on the spirit of Ahimsa (अहिंसा non-injury) and they are means for its fulfillment.

Saint Tulasidas, in his epic Ramacharitamanas (रामचरितमानस) has underlined importance of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) recurringly. He states that there is no religious act higher than benevolence, helping others, and no sin worse than causing pain to others.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mahatma Gandhi on Ahimsa**

Mahatma Gandhi practised Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in his life and used it as an amazing and unique weapon in the struggle of freedom movement of India. He says, "Passive resistance is a misnomer for non-violent resistance... Non-violence is the Law of our Species, as violence is the Law of the Brute... I accept the interpretation of Ahimsa (अहिंसा), namely, that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness."<sup>7</sup> According to Mahatma Gandhi the method of non-violence is not in any shape or form a passive or inactive method. It is essentially an active movement, much more active than the one involving the use of sanguinary weapons.

Regarding the policy of non-violence in the case of wrong-doers, he says, "Love, active state of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) requires you to resist the wrong doer by disassociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically."<sup>8</sup> While bringing out the efficacy of non-violence, he remarks, "It is a speciality of non-violence that its action never stops. That cannot be said of the sword or the bullet. The bullet can destroy the enemy; non-violence converts the enemy into a friend and thus enables the civil resister to assimilate to himself the latter's strength."<sup>9</sup>

## **Mahatma Gandhi on World Peace**

Mahatma Gandhi said, “There is no way to peace. Peace is the only way.” Thus peace is both, the path and end in itself. Modern world is fraught with wars and the agonies of war. Violence has become the way of strong nations. For people and nations who do not practise Ahimsa (अहिंसा), Saint Tulasidas retorts and says that the mighty rulers having brute force consider themselves to be infallible; they think, they can do any wrong to society and the weak are not in a position to blame them for their unjust behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

Lasting peace can be achieved if people and nations realize the importance of non-violence. In the opinion of Gandhi suffering and oppression come to an end not by warring against an enemy but by showing compassion and sympathy and by practising active non-violence which is the only path to the ultimate peace.

## **Significance of Anekantavada in the Context of Ahimsa**

At this juncture, it will be appropriate to see how Jainism has incorporated the doctrine of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in its philosophy and made a unique gift to the world. Anekantavada (अनेकान्तवाद) or Syadvada (स्याद्वाद) also called as Sapta-bhangi-naya (सप्तभङ्गिनय) is the theory of relativity of knowledge. Sapta-bhangi-naya (सप्तभङ्गिनय) means ‘dialectic of the seven steps’ or ‘the theory of seven-fold judgment’. The word ‘syat’ (स्यात्) is a Sanskrit verb which means probable, perhaps, may be.

Reality has infinite aspects. They all are relative and no one can claim that he knows all the aspects. One can know only some of these aspects, the partial truth. The theory of Syadvada (स्याद्वाद) made people aware that their judgments are relative, conditional and limited. This theory presupposes others’ right to hold a different opinion, a different view than our own which should not be necessarily criticized or discouraged. In this context the Jains narrate the old story of the six blind men and the elephant. The blind men who touched the different parts of the elephant tried to describe it on the basis of the part touched by each one of them. Thus the man who caught hold of the ear said that the elephant was like a country-made fan; the person touching the leg felt that the elephant was like a pillar; one who touched the tail said that it was like a rope. The person who touched the side said that the animal was like a wall, so on and so forth. Thus the man who judges anything without considering different aspects of reality can claim to know only partial truth.

This view makes Jainism open minded in its attitude towards others' views, other faiths and philosophies. To me this is the highest form of Ahimsa (अहिंसा).

### **Glimpses of Indian Philosophy**

The release of the book, Indian Philosophical Terms: Glossary and Sources impels me to say a few words on Indian philosophy. Philosophy literally means love of learning or wisdom. Every person has his own philosophy of life. It is almost impossible for one to live without philosophy. In the words of Aldous Huxley, "The choice is not between metaphysic and no metaphysic; it is always between a good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic." Philosophy is a discipline that aims at the search for the Ultimate Reality. There exists a natural and necessary urge in all human beings to know the visible world (Jagat जगत्) where they live and to know the cause of the world which most of the philosophers call as God (Jagadisha जगदीश).

There is a vast difference between the Western philosophy and the Indian philosophy. Indian philosophy is not merely speculative; it is related to life. The Western philosophy is essentially an intellectual quest for truth, whereas the Indian philosophy is not merely exploratory, it is intensely spiritual in its nature and hence lays emphasis on the need of practical realization of the Truth, not only for great saints but for every one of us. That is why Indian philosophy is denoted by the word 'Darshana' (दर्शन) which means both 'vision' and the 'instrument of vision'. Indian mind is not satisfied by merely knowing; it longs for direct realization, distinct and clear vision of the Eternal Truth. Thus, 'Darshana' (दर्शन) stands for the actual perception and direct experience of Truth. It also includes the various means that lead to immediate vision of the Ultimate Reality. The central theme of the Vedanta (वेदान्त) Philosophy is 'See the Self'.<sup>11</sup>

Since the direct realization of the Self is the main aim of most of the systems of philosophy in India, most of them become direct or indirect cause of developing some or other religious sect. Here, philosophy and religion go together. The purpose of most of the systems of Indian philosophy is annihilation of suffering. The suffering is said to be of three kinds – Adhyatmika (आध्यात्मिक) are those physical and mental sufferings, which are produced by natural and inter-organic causes, for example, the diseases and disorders of body or mind. Adhibhautika (आधिभौतिक) sufferings are physical and mental sufferings produced by natural and extra-organic causes such as birds, insects, animals, trees, etc. Adhidaivika (आधिदैविक) are natural calamities produced by supernatural and

extra-organic causes such as wrath of gods. Man desires to become free from all these sufferings. This desire is reflected in the common practice of uttering the word Shantih (शान्तिः) three times after each and every prayer, which aims at the removal of three types of sufferings.

The means, in almost all systems of Indian philosophy, are also three – Shravana (श्रवण) is listening the truth; Manana (मनन) is intellectual conviction after critical analysis and Nididhyasana (निदिध्यासन) is practical realization. It has been stated that the stages by which a person can arrive at realization of the true nature of things, are also three. They are faith, understanding and realization. The first stage is accepting the scriptures and the teachings of the great minds of the past. In the second stage a person arrives at a logical conviction through reasoning and analysis. In the last stage an individual becomes one with the Supreme and Ultimate Reality. Indian philosophical systems explain both sides of reality, the changeable and the unchangeable, being and becoming, permanent and impermanent, animate and inanimate. It is also said that almost all Indian philosophical systems have two common elements – an endeavor to attain Moksha (मोक्ष liberation) as the final ideal and the practice of asceticism to attain that ideal. Here asceticism stands for non-attachment Anasakti (अनासक्ति) and Vairagya (वैराग्य).

Indian philosophy includes both Logic and Ethics. The origin of Indian philosophy may be traced to the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्). These are philosophical in their content. They may be regarded as the cream of Vedic philosophy. They play an important role in Vedic systems of Indian philosophy. The founders of the Vedic schools of philosophy have drawn inspiration from them which are like a large Manasa (मानस) lake full of the pure water of philosophical thoughts from which each thinker, like a swan, draws the pearls of his philosophical system. Though the different branches of Vedic philosophy draw their inspiration from the common source, the same reservoir of thought, namely, the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्), yet their potentiality of growth and right of freedom of thinking are not affected. That is why the founder (Rishi ऋषि) of each system of philosophy tried to develop his own conclusions and offered his own reasons in support of those inferences. In spite of different views held by different systems of Indian philosophy the declarations like – ‘The Absolute Reality is One, the wise call it by many names’<sup>12</sup>, and ‘All this is verily Brahman’ (ब्रह्मन्)<sup>13</sup> are widely accepted. It is difficult for any Vedic system of philosophy to go beyond these dictums. Almost all the schools of Vedanta (वेदान्त) philosophy are variants of the theme of Monism. It is said that there exists a transition from the naturalistic polytheism through transcendent monotheism to immanent monism in the

pre-Upanishadic philosophy. The Transcendent God, the Custodian of the Cosmic and Moral Order became Immanent Purusha (पुरुष) who became Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) or Atman (आत्मन्) in the Upanishads (उपनिषद्) who is both Immanent and Transcendent.

The progress of philosophy to some extent is due to the powerful advent of Jainism and Buddhism. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Buddhism had a cathartic effect in clearing the mind of the cramping effects of ancient obstructions. The critical side of philosophy became as important as the speculative. Dr. Radhakrishnan points out that the Atmavidya (आत्मविद्या) or philosophy in course of time was supported by Anvikshiki (आन्वीक्षिकी) or the science of enquiry.<sup>14</sup> Each system was recognised as a Darshana (दर्शन) since each helped to see some aspect of the truth. But these apparently independent systems are branches of the one tree called Indian philosophy.

India has given birth to great masters such as Mahavir and Buddha to whom not only Indians but the entire humanity is indebted. It has been rightly said, "From the first born men of this land the human race should learn code of conduct."<sup>15</sup>

From times immemorial in an unbroken chain extending to the present day over the length and breadth of the land, India has produced great masters, thinkers, philosophers and saints. Hence she is called Santabhumi (सन्तभूमि), the land of saints, and Punyabhumi (पुण्यभूमि) the sacred land.

It gives me great pleasure in placing the book Indian Philosophical Terms: Glossary and Sources in the hands of those who want to be acquainted with the philosophical and religious trends and traditions of Ancient India.

The book will enable the readers to understand the integrity of philosophical thoughts in spite of variety of philosophical schools prevalent in India. These should exemplify unity in diversity. The book is a project under the joint auspices of K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai and Institute of Jainology, London and Ahmedabad. I am sure that this will be an invaluable reference book for the readers with inquisitive minds in general and the students of religion and philosophy in particular. This reference work is especially designed to fulfill the requirements of all those who want to explore and discover the hidden treasures of our glorious land.

The panorama of Indian religion and philosophy is vast and to take a comprehensive survey of all the aspects is doubtless an uphill task. However, no pains have been spared in making the work as exhaustive as possible.

In closing, I compliment Mr. Nemu Chandaria and Mr. Harshad Sanghrajka who proposed the theme and Kala Acharya who undertook the work Indian Philosophical Terms: Glossary and Sources and has achieved excellent success.

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Endnotes:

- 1 न तेन अरियो होति येन पाणानि हिंसति ।  
अहिंसा सब्बपाणानं अरियोति पवुच्चति ।।  
na tena ariyo hoti yena panani himsati/  
ahimsa sabbapananam ariyoti pavuchchati// Dhammapada XIX.15
- 2 अष्टादशपुराणेषु व्यासस्य वचनद्वयम् ।  
परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम् ।।  
ashtadashapuranesu vyasasya vachanadvayam/  
paropakarah punyaya papaya parapidanam//
- 3 अहिंसा परमो धर्मः ।  
ahimsa paramo dharmah/ Mahabharata Anushasanaparva 116.38
- 4 सर्वभूतहिते रताः ।  
sarvabhutahite ratah/ Bhagavadgita V.25
- 5 अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहाः यमाः ।  
ahimsasatyasteyabrahmacharyaparigraha yamah/ Yogasutra II.30
- 6 परहितं सरिसं धर्मं नहि भाई ।  
परपीडा समं नहि अधमाई ।।  
parahita sarisa dharmam nahi bhai/  
parapida sama nahi adhamai//
- 7 From "Love" by Mahatma Gandhi, <http://www.salsa.net/peace/conv/8weekconv2-6.html>  
and The Doctrine of Sword (Young India 11.8.1920) cf.

<http://appliedgandhi.blogspot.com/2008/03/understanding-gandhian-ideal-of-non.html>

- 8 Young India, August 25 1920, p. 2 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. V, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 132
- 9 Pilgrimage for Peace, 1950, pp. 88-89 quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. V, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, p. 185
- 10 **समरथ कहुँ नहिं दोषु गोसाई ।**  
samaratha kahun nahi doshu gosai/ Ramacharitamanas Balakanda 68.8
- 11 **आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः ।**  
atma va are drashtavyah/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad II.4.5
- 12 **एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।**  
ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti/ Rigveda I.164.46
- 13 **सर्वं खलु इदं ब्रह्म ।**  
sarvam khalu idam brahma/ Chandogya Upanishad III.14.1
- 14 Radhakrishnan S., Indian Philosophy, Vol. II , Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, pp. 17-18
- 15 **एतद्देशप्रसूतस्य सकाशादग्रजन्मनः ।**  
**स्वं स्वं चरित्रं शिक्शेरन् पृथिव्यां सर्वमानवाः ॥**  
etaddeshaprasutasya sakashadagrajanmanah /  
svam svam charitram shiksheran prithivyam sarvamanavah// Manusmriti II.20

# Religion and Secularism

*Delivered in* : the International Interfaith Dialogue Seminar on Religion and Secularism

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai and Pontifical Urbana University, Vatican

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

25 August 2005

## Religion and Secularism

**T**HE term religion has been defined differently. Peter Berger states, “Religion is the human attitude towards a sacred order that includes within it all beings – human or otherwise, that is, belief in a cosmos, the meaning of which both includes and transcends man.” We find several other definitions of religion. However, as each of them emphasizes only certain aspects of religion, it is difficult to find a perfect and all comprehensive definition of religion that can satisfy followers of all the religions existing in the world. Philosophers, sociologists, theologians, psychologists and promulgators of religion have defined it in their own fashion.

If we consider the etymology of this term, two most accepted derivations are:

1. This term is derived from the verb religero, that is, to execute painstakingly by means of repeated effort.
2. This term is also derived from religar, that is, to bind together.

These etymologies suggest two different aspects of religion. First one is objective side of religion, according to which religion involves the recurring performance of certain human activities, thus it belongs to the realm of external phenomenon. The second one is the subjective side which is related to inner experience of the psychic life. On this line religion is defined as a complex of man's inter-relations with the superhuman powers, which implies that religion is ‘not an autonomous activity of man or a unilateral manifestation of the human spirit, but involves a process of vital and reciprocal interplay between the human and supernatural’.<sup>1</sup>

Out of the two derivatives given above, most people accept the second one, that is,

from religar, 'to bind things together'. This derivation draws our attention to one of the most significant features of religion that religion has an intrinsic power to draw people together in a common enterprise of life as it binds people together in common practices and beliefs. Therefore religion is an organized system which holds people together. In common parlance the term religion connotes one's views regarding the creator who possesses supernatural powers and man's obligation towards Him. This connotation is not applicable to Buddhism as it does not accept a creator God.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan identifies religion with feelings, emotions, sentiments, instincts, cult, ritual, perception, conscience and belief or faith.<sup>2</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi believed that religion is a spiritual commitment which is total but intensely personal. Jawaharlal Nehru maintained that religion covers "inner development of the individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a certain direction which is considered good"<sup>3</sup>

Justice Chagla states, "Whatever binds a man to his conscience and whatever moral or ethical principles regulate the lives of men, they alone can constitute religion as understood in the constitution."<sup>4</sup>

### **Secularism**

The word secularism is not very old. The concept of secularism, in its modern form, was expressed by George Holyoake who was born in 1817 in Birmingham. Holyoake wanted to show to the workers the drawbacks of religion and the benefits of a collective society through a social movement which he called as a secular movement. Holyoake defined the term secularism as "a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on considerations purely human and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable and unbelievable"<sup>5</sup>

Holyoake held that morality could be based on purely secular considerations. He insisted that the relations of secularism to religion were to be mutually exclusive rather than hostile. Secularism could have a common ground with religion if it was moral, but basis for that morality should be wholly independent of all religious beliefs. He differentiates secularism from the concept of secular instructions. The former is wide while the latter has a limited sphere. The movement of secularism flourished in the middle of the nineteenth century but later on it merged in the general rationalism which represents secular spirit.

The term secular is derived from the Latin word Saeculum which means 'the age, the world' or 'this age' or 'this world'. This term was, later on, interpreted as the opposite of sacred. As a result of this, the concept of secularism was interpreted variously.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines this term as 'non-spiritual, having no concern with religion or spiritual matters'. The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics describes secularism as 'a movement, intentionally ethical, negatively religious with political and philosophical antecedents'. Encyclopedia of Social Science defines secularism as 'the attempt to establish an autonomous sphere of knowledge purged of supernatural fideistic presupposition'. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church speaks of secularism as 'a system which seeks to interpret and order life on principles taken solely from this world without recourse to belief in God or a future life'.

In spite of the fact that secularism has various shades of meaning, secularists agree upon certain basic principles which are as follows:

1. Secularism must seek human progress and improvement through material means alone.
2. Secular knowledge is founded upon the experience of this life and can be testified by reason.
3. A secular theory of conduct and welfare of life can be established on the lines of secular sciences such as mathematics, physics and chemistry.
4. Religion deals with other-worldly life amongst other things while secularism shows no concern to it. It deals only with the experiences of the known world.
5. Secularism links morality with reason. Reason will judge what is the best for man and experience will prove its validity. Hence it can be said that secularism is a branch of rationalism.
6. Secularism considers the development of the physical, moral and intellectual nature of man to the highest possible point as the pressing and prime duty of life.

This is called natural morality. Neither theism nor atheism has any role in it.

There are different shades of secularism. Sometimes secularism is posed as antagonistic to scientific humanism, intellectualism, naturalism, materialism, existentialism, utopian idealism, moralism, etc. But from the philosophical point of view, it is found that certain 'isms' like 'cosmism' or 'temporalism' contain secular trends.

It is the status of religion in society which gives a particular character to secularism. Marx considers religion as the opium for people. So the Marxist secularism is totally anti-religious.

The Western view holds that the spiritual and political authority should be separate to avoid conflict between the two. The concept of secularism had its roots in the West where the authority of Church was powerful. Secularism protested against interference of the Church in matters related to social life. It also aimed at solving the problem regarding the relation between the Church and the State. In the western countries secularism has different bearing on societies in Britain, America or France. In different times it coped up with different situations and while doing so had to change its intellectual and more often political stand.

### **Indian Scenario**

In India, the concept of secularism has a broader foundation. Here, secularism in its widest sense denotes coexistence of religions. Indian society is pluralistic in its nature. It is liberal in its approach towards religion. The Indian constitution under Article 25 (1) clearly states that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion. P. B. Gajendragadkar rightly remarks, "Indian secularism subscribes to the Hindu philosophical tenet that all religions have elements of truth and no religion can claim the monopoly of truth. From ancient times, Hindu philosophers have consistently proclaimed that all religions lead to God, and unlike some other religions, Hinduism has never put forth the claim that it alone is the true religion. The spirit of toleration is the foundation in the theory of secularism."<sup>6</sup>

Hinduism was never a militant religion. It is a way of life, which is evolved from the diverse revelations, experiences of great sages and saints, each striving to realize the Ultimate Reality. It has a variety of scriptures. Philosophical thinkers in India could preach their theories with total freedom without any fear. In the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "Hinduism is a movement, not a position; a process, not a result; a growing tradition, not a fixed revelation."<sup>7</sup>

Hinduism strongly proclaims that there are many ways to approach and realize the Truth. These ways are not only compatible but also complementary.

Religious freedom was one of the prominent characteristics of Indian culture. Kings

in India did not impose their religion upon their subjects. Sometimes they adopted a different religion than that of their predecessors and subjects. However, they continued generous support to people practising some other religion. King Ashoka's rule was ideal in this regard. Jainism, Buddhism and Islam coexisted with Hinduism in India for a long time. Occasionally Hinduism had confrontation with Islam when it became a militant force. Akbar's reign was one of the exceptions as he made conscious efforts to have peace with other religions.

In modern times social and religious reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy brought change in the Hindu society by removing outdated customs and replacing them with values like service to society and nation. The memorable Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj (ब्राह्मो समाज) (8<sup>th</sup> January 1830) reflects this attitude. It says, "And that no sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer, or hymn be delivered, made, or used in such worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and to the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds."<sup>8</sup> All the eminent figures like Justice M.G. Ranade, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Dadabhai Nauroji, Surendranath Bannerji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ravindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo advocated liberalism and secularism.

Secularism cannot substitute religion. Faith is a necessity in the life of human beings. Morality without the support of religious faith is not stable and strong. Religion comes into being in human consciousness on account of certain shortcomings and problems that all human beings have to face. So religion is a need, not a luxury. This was why Swami Vivekananda announced: "It is my belief that religious thought is in man's every constitution, so much so that it is impossible for him to give up religion until he can give up his mind and body, until he can give up thought and life."<sup>9</sup>

One cannot live peacefully and joyfully without some sort of religious faith. The only point I want to make is that everyone should be free to practise his own religious faith and no one should ever try to thrust his religious faith on the other. This is what true secularism aims at. Everyone should live with his own religious faith, respecting others practising their own religions, with attitude of sharing and caring.

Different religions are born from different traditions and in different backgrounds. So they are bound to differ from one another. In spite of these differences, as human feelings and sentiments are same everywhere, similarities also prevail. Almost all the religions

of the world believe in one supreme, all powerful, all knowing God even though He has many differing manifestations in different religions.

Another point of similarity among the religions of the world, except Buddhism and Jainism, is the belief that God has created the world and the world is dependent upon Him. All the religions also believe that God destroys the world at his own will.

Almost all the religions believe that the world is real in nature. Some religions lay greater emphasis upon the reality and significance of the present world than other religions. But no religion regards world as unreal. Some criticize Hinduism that it regards the world as unreal but they are mistaken. Ramanujacharya and others maintain that the world is fully real. Even Advaita Vedanta (अद्वैत-वेदान्त) of Shankaracharya does not take the world as a non-entity. This belief in reality of the world renders significance to the moral and other actions performed here. At the same time no religion regards this world as ultimately real. Consequently excessive attachment to this world is undesirable and non-attachment is regarded as a virtue.

Another most glaring similarity in all the religions is that man has been given an important place in the entire creation. He can elevate himself and can be an architect of his own destiny.

Every religion considers suffering as a problem and makes efforts to find a solution. Almost all religions agree that suffering is allowed by God for some good purpose. The ways of God are mysterious and are difficult to be understood by man. Though, apparently suffering is painful, ultimately it results in good. In Vedic Hinduism, evil spirits or anger of god was considered as the cause of suffering. Later in the Vedic schools of philosophy suffering is considered as the result of man's own past actions rooted in ignorance. So ignorance or lack of right knowledge is the root cause of suffering. Christians view the Original Sin as the cause of suffering. Man suffers on account of disobedience of the will of God.

One more vital point of similarity in world religions is belief in life after death. Secularism does not believe in a life beyond death and existence of another world, as this world is final in its opinion. Religions of Indian origin believe in rebirth or liberation of the soul of a man. Semitic religions believe that on the day of final judgment, based on the good and evil actions in life, the dead one is sent to heaven or hell which becomes his final fate.

Beliefs and rituals are found in all religions. Some of the beliefs are common while most of the practices are different and unique. In the case of ethics, adherence to non-injury,

non-enmity, detachment to worldly objects, purity, humility, kindness, compassion and love are common to all the religions. All the religions advocate universal brotherhood and censure cruelty to living beings.

As Dasgupta points out, “There is one thought, one culture, one religion that flows through all the ages, and all cultures and all religions, whatsoever may be their diversity in outward expression, must lose themselves in it. It is only through the supreme union of all cultures and religions that their claims to our acceptance can be recognized.”<sup>10</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 Gahrana Kanan, Right to Freedom of Religion: A Study in Indian Secularism, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p. 32
- 2 Radhakrishnan S., The Hindu View of Life, George Allen & Unwin Limited, London, 1960, p. 84
- 3 Nehru Jawaharlal, An Autobiography, Allied Publishers, Calcutta, 1962, p. 379
- 4 Quoted in Right to Freedom of Religion: A Study in Indian Secularism, Gahrana Kanan, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p. 39
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- 6 Gajendragadkar P. B., The Constitution of India: Philosophy and Basic Postulates, Oxford, 1969, p.40
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- 8 The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), “The Brahmo Samaj”,

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- 9 The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), "Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance", The Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 712
- 10 Dasgupta Surendranath, Philosophical Essays, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1990, p. 373

# **Networking of Dharmic Individuals and Faiths**

*Delivered in* : the Human Empowerment Conference

*organized by* : Sanatana Dharma Foundation Inc

at Dallas, Texas, USA

12-14 October 2007

## Networking of Dharmic Individuals and Faiths

**H**INDUISM has always recognized the need for change. It gave freedom of expression and after debates and arguments accepted different views which formed new sects. It allowed each sect to reach the truth through its own way of practice. The Arya Samaj (आर्य समाज), the Brahmo Samaj (ब्राह्मो समाज), and the Ramakrishna Mission brought out reform in Hinduism. Giving up husk, they made it suitable to the needs of a changing society. Basavanna (c. 1106-1168 A.D.), the great poet-saint of the South Indian region of Karnataka, has taken a revolutionary stand in his writings on Dharma (धर्म) by which he not only attacked the outdated practices but also made attempts to bring out desirable change in society. He says, “The lamb brought to the slaughterhouse eats the leaf garland with which it is decorated... The frog caught in the mouth of the snake desires to swallow the fly flying near its mouth. So is our life. The man condemned to die drinks milk and ghee...”

He who knows only the Gita (गीता) is not wise; nor is he who knows only the sacred books. He alone is wise who trusts in God.

When they see a serpent carved in stone, they pour milk on it; if a real serpent comes, they say, “Kill, kill.” To the servant of God, who could eat if served, they say, “Go away, go away”; but to the image of God which cannot reach, they offer dishes of food.

To speak truth is to be in heaven, to speak untruth is to continue in the world of mortals. Cleanliness is heaven, uncleanliness is hell.

Sweet words are equal to all prayers. Sweet words are equal to all penances. Good

behaviour is what pleases God. Kindness is the root of all righteousness.

Those who have riches build temples for Thee; what shall I build? I am poor. My legs are the pillars; this body of mine is the temple.”<sup>1</sup>

The variety of sects in India does not repudiate the unity of religion. Hence Professor Clement Webb says, “It (Hinduism) could perhaps more easily than any other faith develop, without loss of continuity with its past, into a universal religion which would see in every creed a form suited to some particular group or individual, of the universal aspiration after one Eternal Reality.”<sup>2</sup>

Hinduism allows freedom and flexibility in interpretation of precepts and practices in response to the demands of time. Ahimsa (अहिंसा) eulogized as a great Dharma (धर्म) is also to be practised accordingly. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) declares that there is no harm in killing Atayin-s (आततायिन्), the extremists.

In modern era the world witnessed a great master of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in Mahatma Gandhi. But the principle of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) has been grossly misinterpreted to mean meek submission. Mahatma Gandhi has elaborated the subtle nuances of Ahimsa (अहिंसा) time and again. He wrote,

“My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have therefore said more than once in these pages that if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women or our places of worship by the force of suffering, that is, non-violence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting.”<sup>3</sup>

He also says,

“My non-violence does not admit of running away from danger and leaving dear ones unprotected. Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice. I can no more preach non-violence to a coward than I can tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes. Non-violence is a summit of bravery. And in my own experience, I have had no difficulty in demonstrating to men trained in the school of violence the superiority of non-violence. As coward, which I was for years, I harboured violence. I began to prize non-violence only when I began to shed cowardice.”<sup>4</sup>

## **India as the Role Model of Peaceful Coexistence**

India has set an example of peaceful cooperation among the different cultures. Mr. Vincent Smith states:

“India beyond all doubts possesses a deep underlying fundamental unity, far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political superiority. That unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners, and sects.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of inflaming the emotions of people by giving importance to the outbursts of religious or sectarian fanaticism Hinduism echoes the spirit of unity in diversity, harmony in the discordant voices, peace in the midst of conflicts. Hinduism aims at bringing manifold practices into one fold giving them equal respect. A popular prayer lucidly puts it across, “The Shaiva-s (शैव) worship Him as Shiva (शिव) and the Vedantin-s (वेदान्तिन्) meditate on Him as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्); the Bauddha-s (बौद्ध) worship Him as Buddha while the Naiyayika-s (नैयायिक) regard Him as Creator. The followers of Jainism worship Him as Arhat (अर्हत्) and the Mimamsaka-s (मीमांसक) maintain that He is in the form of sacrifice. Lord Hari, the master of threefold universe who is worshipped variously may bestow upon you the fruit you desire.”<sup>6</sup>

The Indian tradition has always encouraged freedom to question, to argue and then to accept a doctrine if fully convinced. Emperor Ashoka speaks of Dharmavijaya (धर्मविजय) and not of conquest by force. It has been said,

“And this is the highest conquest in the opinion of His Sacred Majesty [Ashoka] – the conquest through the Law of Piety. And, again, the conquest thereby won everywhere is a conquest full of delight.”<sup>7</sup>

Right from the Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) that speaks of looking at all living beings with the eye of a friend, saints such as Ravidas have dreamt of a world free from torture and terror. The following composition of Ravidas expresses the ideal of a peaceful society.

“The regal realm with the sorrowless name:  
They call it Queen City, a place with no pain,  
No taxes or cares, none own property there,  
no wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture...  
where none are third or second – all are one;  
O, says Ravidas, a good-for-nothing tanner,

Those who walk beside me are my friends.”<sup>8</sup>

In modern times India which is a multireligious and multicultural country, has successfully sailed across the turbulent times of disintegration except for a few aberrations from imported cross-border forces. The contemporary political scenario of India reflects her potential and reality as the epitome of a peaceful, harmonious society as the high officials of the Indian State such as the Presidents and Prime Ministers of India have been from different religious traditions and different social strata.

### **Role of a Dharmic Individual**

Dharmic person is firmly rooted in his own Dharmic faith; moreover, he is also open-minded about other peoples' belief. What is important for him is truth and virtue, the content of a faith. David Frawely says, “True spiritual cultures are cultures of peace and humility and do not try to dominate or impose their ideas on anyone. They give reverence to the spirit of truth, which is universal, and do not sacrifice human beings at the altar of name and form, even that of God. It is the spirit of religion they further, not superficial adherence to a belief. They emphasize openness of heart and the sacred nature of the individual. They do not emphasize differences or fuel collective conflict. These are the truly religious people, and they are not limited by the religions they are part of. They do not make excuses for the oppression or injustice done in the name of their religion, nor do they fail to honour the true spirit of religion.”<sup>9</sup>

What David Frawely says about true spiritual cultures applies to the Indian culture, for Hinduism does not believe in the attitude that adherence to a particular religious metaphysics, a particular dogma takes man to liberation and its non-acceptance makes man a non-believer.

Emperor Ashoka had practised the spirit of coexistence. He says, “As proper occasions arise, persons of other religions should be honoured suitably. Acting in this manner, one certainly exalts one's own religion and also helps persons of other religions. Acting in a contrary manner, one injures one's own religion and also does disservice to the religion of others. It is concord (Samavaya समवाय) of all religions that is meritorious, as persons of other ways of thinking may thereby hear the Dharma (धर्म) and serve its cause.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Action Plan**

#### **Local Level**

Along with Interreligious dialogue, Intrareligious dialogue is also necessary to maintain peace and harmony in a society. We find that within Hinduism there are many sects which sometimes have different traditions and the followers believe that their tradition alone is the authentic one. Hence there are serious conflicts. In order to avoid them one should foster respect for other's sect. Forgetting wounds made by followers of other sects or religions in the remote past can help. To achieve this purpose one has to realize that:

“He insulted me, he struck me,  
He defeated me, he robbed me!  
Those who harbour such thoughts  
Are never appeased in their hatred...  
But those who do not harbour them  
Are quickly appeased.”<sup>11</sup>

India is dotted with innumerable mutts and monasteries, temples and shrines each headed by spiritual masters wielding influence on their followers. They have to rise to the call of the time. In addition to maintaining the strict sectarian practices they should shoulder the responsibility as the protectors of the great Dharma (धर्म). They have to restore people's faith in the glorious heritage of Hinduism. They should widen their base and reach to the last member of the community and take him in their fold as the divine image.

New institutions have emerged to cater to the religious and spiritual aspirations of Dharmic people. It is heartening to know that many magnificent temples have been erected in countries all over the world for the Dharmic Hindus who have settled abroad. These are not mere temples; these are not mere places of worship; they serve as locus of community activities following the maxim 'service to man is service to God'. Organizations such as ISKCON, Swami Narayan Sampradaya, Ramakrishna Mission, Hindu Seva Samgha, Vishva Hindu Parishad have been playing a major role in this regard. However, these still remain islands of Dharmic resurgence. Though moving in the same direction with altruist motives, they are not unified. Each of them is trying to ignite the flame of Dharma (धर्म); but they have to come together to put forth the glorious effulgence of Dharma (धर्म) to outshine the darkness of Adharma (अधर्म) that seems to envelop the Dharma (धर्म) in these modern times.

## **Global level**

The leaders of all faiths should learn to understand and appreciate the basic philosophy and practices of other faiths. Such networking would create an atmosphere of harmony and would enable the leaders of different faiths to give guidance to their followers so as to respect the sacredness of other faiths.

I think we should make conscious efforts to foster mutual friendship and respect between peoples from all religions. The friction is on account of political, economic or other interest such as power. We have to learn to have a peaceful coexistence. We should respect each other as members of one human family. We should learn to treat differences in religions as their identities. We should appreciate the common values in all religions. Our common policy should be rejection of fanaticism, extremism and mutual antagonism which lead to violence.

I suggest that a comparative study of the scriptures of different religions should be undertaken. This should be a joint venture and scholars from different religions should be involved in this programme. Sayings of the founders of different religions should be disseminated among the students on a massive scale.

The great masters of different religions should address groups of other religions and reveal them the wealth of their heritage. They should also address people from one single platform at least once a year.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, at the Vatican, has been working in the field of Interreligious Dialogue for a long time. Initially the dialogue between Christianity, Judaism and Islam was at the forefront. In the course of time dialogue with Asian religions also found an important place. The Council is regularly bringing out a bulletin 'Pro Dialogo' and holds interfaith meetings to create affinity among religions. Such efforts should be applauded.

Kazakhstan has taken a lead in organizing meetings such as the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. His Excellency Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, has taken a major initiative and role in organizing these Congress meetings. Every three years the Congress is organized. These meetings have created an amicable atmosphere for Interreligious Dialogue. We should create similar models to hold conferences on Dharma (धर्म).

## **Plan for USA**

Intellectual power is ruled by economic power while both of them are ruled by physical power. All these should be directed by spiritual power. Hence attempts should be made to foster spirituality amongst the youth. To fulfil the above purpose they should be educated in their own faith and should also be encouraged to keep themselves informed about the knowledge of others' faith.

We should follow the dictum 'Catch them young' to inculcate the moral and spiritual values. The core of each religion should form a part of the curriculum and it should go deeper at the advanced level. Students should get credits for the same and these credits should be included in their final assessment.

Priests and religious leaders can play a major role in upholding Dharma (धर्म) in other countries. However, they are ill-equipped to deal with the changes brought in by globalization. They should possess sound knowledge of the intricacies of the rituals and should be trained to transmit it to the followers in the language of the community.

We find a large amount of ignorance about Hinduism, hence periodicals and small publications should be brought out to disseminate the basic values, traditions, mythology and philosophy of Indian heritage. Somaiya Vidyavihar is willing to extend academic cooperation in this regard. It can take initiative to launch a portal, on which all the questions regarding Hinduism can be answered. Television programmes and cultural programmes can also be organized to spread the knowledge of the Indian heritage.

## **Conclusion**

Lastly, I appeal to the youth to take an active role in safeguarding the great heritage, the legacy of India. To you, young people of USA, I shall quote the words of Swami Vivekananda to wake you up from slumber and resume the march for the protection of Hinduism.

“O man, we invite you to the worship of the living present; from the regretful brooding over by-gones, we invite you to the activities of the present; from the waste of energy in retracing lost and demolished pathways, we call you back to broad new-laid highways lying very near...

With the conviction firmly rooted in your heart that you are the servants of the Lord, His

children, helpers in the fulfilment of His purpose, enter the arena of work.”<sup>12</sup>

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Endnotes:

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- 3 Mahatma Gandhi, All Men Are Brothers, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960, p. 132
- 4 Ibid., p.133
- 5 Smith Vincent, Oxford History of India, Percival Spear (ed.), Oxford University Press, USA, 1958, p. 7
- 6 यं शैवाः समुपासते शिव इति ब्रह्मेति वेदान्तिनो  
बौद्धा बुद्ध इति प्रमाणपटवः कर्तेति नैयायिकाः ।  
अर्हन्नित्यथ जैनशासनरताः कर्मेति मीमांसकाः  
सोऽयं वो विदधातु वाञ्छितफलं त्रैलोक्यनाथो हरिः ॥  
yam shaivah samupasate shiva iti brahmeti vedantino  
bauddha buddha iti pramanapatavah karteti naiyayikah/  
arhannityatha jainashasanaratah karmeti mimamsakah  
so'yam vo vidadhatu vanchhitaphalam trailokyanatho harih//
- 7 तम् एव च विजयम् मन्यताम् यो धर्मविजयः ।  
tam eva cha vijayam manyatam yo dharmavijayah/  
Ashoka's Rock Edict XIII, True Conquest
- 8 Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I, Ainslie T. Embree (ed.), Columbia University Press,

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- 10 Ashoka's Rock Edict XII, *True Conquest*, cf., Seshagiri Rao K.L., *Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p. 109
- 11 *Dhammapada* I.3-4
- 12 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1985, p. 186

# **Shared Challenges**

## **How to Preserve Religion and Culture**

*Delivered in* : the Hindu-Buddhist Summit on Giving Global Voice to Eastern Wisdom

*organized by* : Global Peace Initiative of Women

at Phnom Penh, Cambodia

12 February 2009

# Shared Challenges

## How to Preserve Religion and Culture

I am delighted to be in the midst of the eminent gathering of revered religious leaders of Hinduism and Buddhism. This is indeed a momentous occasion as thinkers from two great religions born in India have assembled to find out remedies for the common challenges they face.

Today all faiths are facing a serious problem of erosion of moral and spiritual values on account of increasing materialism and hedonism. As traditional societies and families are breaking up, the transmission of knowledge, beliefs, practices and values from one generation to the next has got weakened. In many families as both the parents are working, they cannot spare time to guide their children. It is found that an increasing number of children are born out of wedlock and grow up in single parent families. In place of traditional values, the children are exposed to the portrayal of sex, violence and unabashed hedonism in mass media, both print and electronic. This situation would not have occurred if we had not forgotten our foundations. The Taittiriya Aranyaka (तैत्तिरीय-आरण्यक) says, “Dharma (धर्म) is the foundation of the whole universe. In this world people go unto a person who is best versed in Dharma (धर्म) for guidance. By means of Dharma (धर्म) one drives away evil. Upon Dharma (धर्म) everything is founded. Therefore, Dharma (धर्म) is called the highest good.”<sup>1</sup> Here I am reminded of a piece of advice given by the Buddha. He says, “A man buries a treasure in a deep pit, thinking, ‘It will be useful in time of need, or if the king is displeased with me, or if I am robbed of, or fall into debt, or if food is scarce, or bad luck befalls me.’ But all this treasure may not profit the owner at all, for he may forget where he has hidden it, ... or his enemies or even his kinsmen may take it when he is careless.”<sup>2</sup> In short it should not happen that Dharma (धर्म), our

glorious treasure is forgotten.

The time has come for leaders and preceptors of Hinduism and Buddhism to network and jointly deal with the contemporary challenges. This is a modern way of Lokasamgraha (लोकसङ्ग्रह). The concept of Lokasamgraha (लोकसङ्ग्रह), that is, giving guidance to the multitude is recognized in both Hinduism and Buddhism. In the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that though he does not need to do anything since he has no unfulfilled desire; he acts only for the purpose of giving guidance to the world.<sup>3</sup> Lord Buddha also says that he does not wish to go for final Parinibbana (परिनिब्बान) even if he has attained it till he had monks and disciples who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, and knowers of the Dharma (धर्म).<sup>4</sup>

Hinduism does not follow the blood-stained path of struggle and conflict to disseminate its message. Buddhism also has spread all over the world without lifting a sword. The intrinsic strength of these faiths gave them a wide platform. Like dew-drops silently falling in the morning and turning buds of roses into full blossom, these faiths silently discharged the fragrance of their message. However, this is not enough. Time has come for the great masters of Hinduism and Buddhism to transform the people into a peace-loving society.

Though apparently Hinduism and Buddhism differ on certain concepts, the area of agreement between them is vast. Both underline the importance of non-violence, detachment and meditation. Cardinal virtues such as truth, compassion, non-injury, non-stealing, control of sense organs, etc. are equated with Dharma (धर्म) in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddha gave utmost importance to non-injury. In the Dhammapada (धम्मपद) it has been said, "They are not following Dharma (धर्म) who resort to violence to achieve their purpose. But those who lead others through non-violent means, knowing right and wrong, may be called the guardians of Dharma (धर्म)."<sup>5</sup> Wisdom (Prajna प्रज्ञा) and compassion (Karuna करुणा) are the two pillars on which the edifice of Buddhist teaching is erected. Wisdom has been called as 'mother' of all Paramita-s (पारमिता perfections). Karuna (करुणा) is the desire to remove afflictions of the afflicted. The Buddhist tradition calls loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity as Brahmavihara (ब्रह्मविहार). Patanjali mentions these collectively and says that by practising them mind attains placidity.

Though we find Samadhi (समाधि) and Prajna (प्रज्ञा) as common to both religions, I would like to bring to your notice that while Samadhi (समाधि) in Buddhism is concentration on

a single object; according to the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता), in addition to concentration of the mind on a single object Samadhi (समाधि) refers to communion with God. Wisdom (Prajna प्रज्ञा) according to the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) is “a fixed and unperturbed state of the mind, where the will and intellect remain unshaken in one’s course of duty, clear of all consequences and free from all attachments and in a state of equanimity which cannot be shaken or disturbed by pleasures or sorrows”.<sup>6</sup>

The doctrine of Karma (कर्म) and transmigration is given importance in both the religions. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) says, “Some say that a man is made of desires only (and not of acts). But as is his desire, so is his will; as is his will, so is the action that he does; and whatever action he performs – that he will reap.”<sup>7</sup>

The Vishnudharmottara Purana (विष्णुधर्मोत्तर-पुराण) says, “One gets pleasure by virtuous acts and pain by evil acts.”<sup>8</sup>

When a question is raised: “What is the reason, O Lord, behind the discrepancy amongst the mankind? Some have a short life-span; some others have a long life. Some are diseased, some others are healthy. Some are ugly and some others are beautiful. Some are powerful and some others are weak, some are poor and some others are rich. Some are low born and some others belong to noble family. Some are ignorant and some others are wise.” On this, the Buddha answered, “All living beings are owners of their Karma (कर्म). They are heirs to their Karma (कर्म); it is verily the cause of their birth; it is their relative and refuge.”<sup>9</sup>

The Eastern religions, such as the Vedic Dharma (धर्म), Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism and Taoism have spread their message over the length and breadth of Asia through a process of dialogue and discussion. People have been persuaded to accept new religious traditions on the basis of debate and reasoning and not through coercion. On the other hand, the spread of other religions has taken place through force and violence. This has resulted in tremendous hatred and bloodshed generated in the name of religion.

Presently Hinduism is facing numerous challenges, namely,

1. Materialism
2. Hedonism
3. Secularism
4. Fanaticism and Terrorism

## **Materialism**

People in the twentieth century all over the world are caught in the whirlwind of materialism. Indians are no exception. They have already forgotten the message of Shreyas (श्रेयस्) – the noble path, and blindly follow Preyas (प्रेयस्) – the pleasurable path. They have lost sight of the age-old message of scriptures that man has to strive for Dharma (धर्म), Artha (अर्थ) – wealth, Kama (काम) – gratification of senses and aesthetic pursuits and Moksha (मोक्ष) – liberation with a proper balance. Artha (अर्थ) and Kama (काम) have dominated human life. Consequently Dharma (धर्म) is being ignored by people.

## **Hedonism**

Materialism leads to hedonism. Man is consumed by lust for money. Therefore the norm laid down by Dharma (धर्म) that he has to enjoy the world in the spirit of detachment since the entire creation belongs to God, is overlooked. Greed drives man towards evil. Mahatma Gandhi remarked, “There is enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed.” We cannot afford to forget this message.

## **Secularism**

The notion of secularism is misinterpreted by people. Instead of equal respect to all religions it fosters an attitude of indifference towards one’s own religion. Most of the Hindus do not take pride in calling themselves Hindus, for they think it as against the spirit of secularism. Government policies try to appease the minorities under the pretext of secularism. The Hindus are passive and do not react to any situation that challenges the honour of their religion. Lack of faith and conviction in one’s own religion, susceptibility and poverty are some of the causes of this indeplorable condition which the Hindus have to uproot with a firm resolve.

## **Fanaticism and Terrorism**

Religion has often been used as a tool for instigating people against each other and poisoning their minds. Inflaming the minds of people by creating hatred for others’ religion at times results in crusades, mass destruction and massacre of the so-called heretics and non-believers. Fanatic and terrorist insurgency is spreading like wild fire

and often gaining support from least expected quarters. Modern technology has provided the extremists new tools and electronic equipments of alarming precision. The terrorists are indeed a microscopic minority, but are still able to hold to ransom the whole world. By equating terrorism with religious martyrdom they are able to influence the young minds and brainwash them in the name of religion. As Bernard Shaw says: “We turn our Temples of Peace promptly into Temples of War.”

### **Need for Change and Reform**

We find that many Hindus are unaware of the basic principles and ideals of Hinduism. They follow certain practices without understanding their significance. There are certain social practices in Hinduism that are not in tune with Dharma (धर्म). Sometimes there is a yawning gap between the ideals set by our scriptures and the prevalent practices. The practices are laced with cultural, social, economic and similar perspectives which are often driven by selfish, unthoughtful and regressive motives. For example, child marriages, female foeticide, caste discrimination, pathetic condition of widows are some of the issues which should be vigorously condemned and annihilated. A new reform movement which will enhance the intrinsic strength of Hinduism and at the same time make it meaningful as well as practicable in the changing lifestyle of modern times is the need of the hour.

### **Action Plan**

There should be a common minimum Acharasamhita (आचारसंहिता) – code of conduct for the Hindu people irrespective of their sects.

1. To create greater awareness about Hinduism, some concrete steps are necessary. We should teach the young generation moral and spiritual values through mass media. We should avail of print media to fulfill the need. Periodicals and small publications should be brought out to disseminate the basic values, traditions, mythology and philosophy of Indian heritage.
2. Religious teachings should be an integrated part of the education system from the primary level onwards. The essentials of all religions should form a part of the curricula.
3. Christianity has institutionalized the training of priests. They have to undergo a thorough training course involving academic study and field work. Thus, the Christian priests are well versed not only in the Christian theology and philosophy but they also

possess a sound knowledge of other religions and their philosophy. Buddhism and Jainism have realized the need for such extensive training and have taken up steps to train Bhikkhu-s (भिक्षु), Bhikkhuni-s (भिक्षुनी), Muni-s (मुनि) and Sadhvi-s (साध्वी). Hindu leaders also should think of promoting theological institutions and conducting rigorous training programmes for the priests and activists so that they can propagate Hindu Dharma (धर्म) with conviction and commitment.

4. Religious leaders in various monasteries, temples and shrines should establish residential schools for training children from the age of seven onwards in the basic practices and principles of Hindu Dharma (धर्म). Residential schools on the lines of the ancient Gurukul (गुरुकुल) system should be started. There should be networking among these institutions so that they work in unison.

5. Training should also be given to the Kirtanakara-s (कीर्तनकार), those who teach Dharma (धर्म) through singing glories of the Lord, so that the message of Hinduism can be transmitted effectively in India and around the world. This includes sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit in addition to the knowledge of language of communication in a particular country, to enable them to explain people the intricacies of rituals. Priests who work abroad should serve as emissaries of Indian culture and for this purpose they should also possess knowledge of local language. They should be adept in using modern devices, such as computers and possess organizational skills.

6. The Government of India controls the property and affairs of the temples and other places of pilgrimages of Hindus while the places of worship of other religions are owned by the respective religions. The Hindu temples and other sacred places should be autonomous and free to conduct their activities. The Hindu populace in general is not aware of this situation. The Hindu organizations should generate public awareness about this crucial issue and build up the public opinion to compel Government for taking proper steps. It has been pronounced "Dharma (धर्म) protects man when it is protected by him." Networking to protect Dharma (धर्म) is our bounden duty.

## **Cambodia**

We are proud that there are a number of examples of the establishment of political authority by immigrant Indians almost all over South East Asia. A Hindu Brahmin by name Kaundinya established a kingdom in Cambodia (Kambuja) in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

Since then many dynasties of kings bearing Indian names ruled in Cambodia at least up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Angkor Wat is the best preserved example of Khmer architecture from the Angkorian era. It depicts many instances from Purana-s (पुराण). Even today Cambodia has the most magnificent treasures of erstwhile Hindu and Buddhist art. For more than 2,000 years, Cambodia has been in close contact with India and China. It has been greatly influenced by both the cultures. Thus Theravada (थेरवाद) Buddhism, French Colonialism, Hinduism, and Angkor era culture appear to be the prominent factors that have shaped the culture of modern Cambodia. The Hindus and the Buddhists should be indebted to Cambodia for the hundreds of temples that exist in and around the region. The Ramayana (रामायण) is a proud heritage that India and Cambodia share with equal reverence.

From the glorious cultural past of Cambodia when we come to present times it is found that for fifteen or more years Cambodian people have gone through such terrible trials that can hardly find parallel in the history of modern world. Along with the people of Cambodia the basic infrastructure, industrial and agricultural production has suffered a severe blow. Now Cambodia is trying to rise from travails. We, the Hindus and Buddhists, are willing to extend our brotherly cooperation in cultural, educational, industrial and commercial activities to rebuild Cambodia.

There was a time when Hinduism and Buddhism had spread far and wide on the continent of Asia. Now, Hinduism is largely confined to India. Likewise the area of Buddhist influence is also diminishing. It is now necessary for us to jointly go forward and spread the message of Hinduism and Buddhism across the world. I, therefore, welcome the conference. I hope the deliberations in the conference would promote peace and harmony in the world and show the path of enlightenment to one and all.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Taittiriya Aranyaka X.79
- 2 Khuddaka Patha 8
- 3 न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।  
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ।।

- na me parthasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana/  
nanavaptamavaptavyam varta eva cha karmani// Bhagavadgita III. 22
- 4 Dighanikaya Mahaparinibbanasutta III.35
- 5 न तेन होति धम्मदो येनत्थं सहसा नये । यो च अत्थं अनत्थं च उभो निच्छेय्य पण्डितो ॥  
असाहसेन धम्मेन समेन नयती नरे । धम्मस्य गुत्तो मेधावी धम्मदो“ ति पवुच्चति ॥  
na tena hoti dhammattho yenattham sahasa naye/ yo cha attham anattam cha ubho  
nichchheyya pandito//  
asahasena dhammena samena nayati nare/ dhammasya gutto medhavi dhammattho'ti  
pavuchchati // Dhammapada 256-257
- 6 Bhagavadgita II. 68, 71-72, cf. Dasgupta Surendranath, A History of Indian Philosophy,  
Vol. II, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1975, p. 504
- 7 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4.5
- 8 शुभेन कर्मणा सौख्यं दुःखं पापेन कर्मणा ।  
shubhena karmana saukhyam duhkham papena karmana/  
Vishnudharmottara Purana I.108.30 cd
- 9 Majjhima Nikaya, Chulakammavibhanga Sutta, 3 ff

# **Buddhism as a Catalyst for World Peace at the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Delivered in* : the Conference on Buddhism – In Global Perspective

*organized by* : Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar, India, Otani University,  
Japan and K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

13 March 2002

## **Buddhism as a Catalyst for World Peace at the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**I**T was our greatest privilege that we had His Holiness Dalai Lama to inaugurate our Centre for Buddhist Studies in December 1993. Now again his presence here with us and his grace simply out of compassion for the spread of the teaching of the Buddha and the message of love and kindness for humanity at large is reassuring to all of us. His blessings for this conference are very befitting as he is the Nobel Prize Winner who is striving for the Global Peace. It is to be noted that his message to younger generation is to read and to reread the original texts for a better understanding of the doctrine.

I feel greatly privileged that the Somaiya Vidyavihar and its Centre for Buddhist Studies in collaboration with the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara and the Otani University, Kyoto, Japan are hosting this International Conference at the Somaiya Campus, which was founded half a century ago by my revered father Pujya Karamshibhai Somaiya to foster unity and brotherhood among all through education. My father had the privilege of being close to His Holiness Dalai Lama.

I hardly need to say that we are living in a time of crises. More than economic or political issues, it is the spirit of tolerance that is facing the biggest crisis today. The 21<sup>st</sup> century was ushered in with pomp and revelry bringing in its wake hope for a better world. However, events over the past months have set the clock back in time, taking this modern civilization to the threshold of barbarism. Nothing could be more symbolic of this than the wanton destruction of the towering statues of the Buddha in the Bamiyan Valley of

Afghanistan. All of us mute spectators of such barbaric acts are morally responsible in equal measure as the perpetrators of violence. We need moral strength and courage to combat the forces of evil. Buddha must come back to us. He should once again enter our minds and fill our hearts with love, compassion and tolerance for those who are different from us.

The advent of Buddhism with its focus on Karuna (करुणा) or Universal Compassion held so much sway on humanity that it attracted many followers and also resulted in refinement in the lifestyle of the followers of other religions. Gautama alias Siddhartha was born in a class-ridden society. He felt the pulse of the age which was throbbing with dissatisfaction in all spheres of life. He tried to find the reasons for human misery, gaining enlightenment in the process and preached that adherence to the Middle Path, the path of moderation was instrumental for cessation of suffering. This is relevant even today in a world plagued with political, religious and social turmoil, and probably explains the emergent signs of global interest in Buddhism.

In today's perspective Buddha's enlightenment is certainly not a matter of the fabled past. It is an experience of primordial value and is eternally significant as His tenets and teachings continue to inspire people. While Buddhism during the last 25 centuries has evolved into various branches such as the Theravada (थेरवाद), the Mahayana (महायान), Tibetan Buddhism, and so on, the core of teaching is Nirvana (निर्वाण), liberation here and now, signifying the confluence and assimilation of all the Buddhist schools of thought.

This learned gathering will discuss the nuances of the contribution of Buddhist thought and culture, and its relevance to humanity in today's global perspective. It is the prerogative of the scholars to do so. But to me as a concerned human being standing outside the periphery of scholastic dissertations and interpretations, it is the compassion of the Buddha that I have imbibed from the simple living of my father who always lived according to the ideal depicted in the verse, "Neither do I long for kingdom, nor for heaven, nor do I desire to be free from rebirth, I wish only to remove the sufferings of all beings afflicted by pain."

Compassion is what the human society needs most today. The core tenet of Buddhism – the cessation of suffering through eradication of greed – can act as a catalyst to foster universal love and understanding. Today's materialistic world is based on acquisition prompted by greed. This leads to unhealthy competition which cannot be devoid of pain – the pain of unfulfilled desires. We have a lot to learn by revisiting these core tenets and

inculcate them in simple lessons for the younger generation who is turning aggressive and intolerant when things do not go its way.

The Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व) ideal is found in Mahayana (महायान) Buddhism. Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व) while standing on the threshold of 'Nirvana' (निर्वाण) vowed that he would not cross over to the other side so long as there was a single living being not liberated on earth. Such was his compassion. Though Buddhism as a formal religion did not get a foothold in India, Buddha and Buddhism continue as a living spiritual force and are an inextricable part of the warp and waft of India's cultural and philosophical heritage. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan states, "His [Buddha's] presence is felt all around. Throughout worshipped as a God, he has a place in the mythology which is still alive..."<sup>1</sup>

Religious and ethical beliefs shape our views of the world in which we live. If religious values are not operative factors in international relations today, it is because we have drawn an artificial division between morality, politics and policy. The moral options of our time depend upon the concepts of ourselves and the role of the individual in our society. At Somaiya Vidyavihar, we strive to incorporate into academics values cherished by ancient Indian culture which includes all the great religions that are practised in this country. This is done through a series of activities such as propagation of Sanskrit and Pali as living languages, encouraging students for community-service, interfaith dialogue, etc.

The future of the 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to these youngsters who will go forth and carry the message of compassion and tolerance. World peace is possible only when youngsters across the globe learn the message of compassion and tolerance. At this juncture, we need a concerted effort to bring about interventions in the education system throughout the world that would talk of Peace. Buddhist doctrine with its deep roots in Indian civilization can show the way.

So what then is the relevance of Buddhism to world peace? Ahimsa (अहिंसा), the cardinal teaching of Buddhist thought refers to tolerance as a facet of non-violence. As the boundaries of the world shrink with the third wave of information-explosion, there is even greater need to abide by guiding principles of a universal nature that will provide all of mankind a blueprint to work towards peace. The Japanese scholar Nichidatsu Fujii illustrates this succinctly, "The world is becoming smaller, heavily interdependent. So when we meet a problematic situation, we need to see it from a holistic point of view."

## **Conclusion**

I wish all the delegates of this International Conference many fruitful hours of deliberations. Once again let me tell you how much I appreciate your coming all the way from your respective countries and cities to present your learned insight on the subjects earmarked for the various sessions. I would like to end my address with a small verse from the Dhammapada (धम्मपद).

“The scent of flowers does not travel against the wind, nor that of sandalwood, or of Tagara and Mallika flowers. But the fragrance of good people travels even against the wind; a good man pervades every quarter.”<sup>2</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 Radhakrishnan S., Dhammapada, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, Introduction, p. iv
- 2 न पुष्पगन्धो पटिवातमेति  
न चन्दनं तगर मल्लिका वा ।  
सतं च गन्धो पटिवातमेति  
सब्बा दिसा सप्पुरिसो पवायति ।।  
na pupphagandho pativatameti  
na chandanam tagara mallika va  
satam cha gandho pativatameti  
sabba disa sappuriso pavayati // Dhammapada 54

# **Contribution of Buddhism to the World Culture**

*Delivered in* : the International Conference

*organized by* : Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar, India, Otani University, Japan and K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

11 March 2004

# Contribution of Buddhism to the World Culture

I deem it a great privilege and honour to address this galaxy of scholars from around the globe. We have heard about the contribution of Buddhism to Japan and its importance in that country from His Excellency Hideo Date. We have also heard an erudite exposition from Prof. R. C. Sharma on the impact of Buddhism around the world.

During my frequent travels I have observed and appreciated the enormous contribution of Buddhism towards peace and harmony, especially in Asia. Buddhism moulded the thoughts, ideals and literature of not only the land of its birth but also of South East and Far East Asia from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Over this period of a millennium and half, Buddhism has left a deep imprint on the socio-cultural fabric of Asia and still continues to do so.

Now what is the essence of Buddhism or Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म)? I quote from Dhammapada (धम्मपद).<sup>1</sup> The teaching of the Buddha is to refrain from all sins to acquire merit and to develop purity of mind (by practice). The noble deeds of the Dhamma (धम्म) are the observance of kindness, liberality, truthfulness, purity, lovingness and gentleness. This practice is to be confirmed through Dhyana (ध्यान meditation) and Vipassana (विपस्सना looking inwards in contemplation).

The message of Buddhism emanated from Bodhagaya where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment (Sambodhi सम्बोधि) and spread across the world. I am happy that Bodhagaya has been recently included in the list of World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.

The pioneer in the global spread of Buddhism was the Great Emperor Ashoka who propagated it through his distinctive piety and loving kindness almost at par with the Buddha. I can quote no better than H. G. Wells, the famous Historian from his Outline of History:

“Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs  
That crowd the columns of history, their majesties  
And graciousness and serenities and royal highness and the like,  
The name of Ashoka shines and shines almost alone, like a star.”

Edicts of Ashoka, engraved on rocks, stone-slabs, boulders, pillars and cave-walls have been discovered throughout the length and breadth of his empire from Kathiawad in the West to Orissa in the East and from Afghanistan in the North to Mysore in the South. These edicts are in local Prakrit in India and in Greek and Aramaic in Afghanistan. Likewise, the scripts in which the edicts were engraved also vary from region to region, Brahmi (ब्राह्मी) script in India, Kharoshthi (खरोष्ठी) in Peshawar (in Pakistan) and Aramaic and Greek in Afghanistan. These edicts have provided valuable source material to scholars on the Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म).

In these edicts Ashoka calls himself ‘Devanam Piyadassi Raja’ (देवानां पियदस्सि राजा) – King who is beloved of gods. The purpose of these edicts was to inculcate and nourish the practice of Dhamma (धम्म) among the people not only within his kingdom but also in the surrounding lands. This was the initial work of dissemination of Buddhism by Emperor Ashoka.

Thereafter at the beginning of the Christian era, Mahayana (महायान) school of Buddhism was developed by Nagarjuna, Subhakarasimha, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra and others. Apart from spreading all over the Indian subcontinent, the Mahayana (महायान) school spread to Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Indian masters including Buddhadata, Buddhaghosha, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Bodhiruchi and Bodhidharma were responsible for spreading the Theravada (थेरवाद) and the Mahayana (महायान) School of Buddhism in South, Southeast and East Asia. Many of them translated Buddhist scriptures into Sinhalese and in Chinese spreading message of Buddhism far and wide. Bodhidharma was also responsible for taking the martial arts from India to China.

Among the travellers to India specially, the three Chinese scholars were responsible for

documentation of the period and for the compilation and translation of the Buddhist texts. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Fa-hien presented a vivid record of the contemporary socio-economic and political scene. The great Chinese Buddhist scholar Xuan Zang was the guest of the famous King Harshavardhana. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. King Harshavardhana synthesized Buddhism and Hinduism. Xuan Zang collected, preserved and translated the important scriptures of the Mahayana (महायान) School specially of Yogachara (योगाचार) into Chinese. Later it was I-tsing who recorded and translated Nagarjuna's important works like Suhrulekha (सुहल्लेख). The school of Dhyana (ध्यान meditation) became Chan in China and Zen in Japan.

Nalanda, the great centre for scholastic learning, became a University having as many as 12,000 scholars from all over Asia engaged in studies on Buddhism and other religions. However, because of its greatness as a learning centre for many foreign scholars, it attracted invaders who damaged the great University from time to time. It was attacked initially by Huns. It resulted in the exodus of many scholars to Tibet. Later the greatest devastation took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> century at the hands of Bhakhtiar Khilji, who went to the extent of not only burning the texts but saw to it that scriptures were lost. Thereafter, owing to the lack of patronage, Nalanda never revived.

Fortunately, it has been possible for us to reconstruct some of these texts from the translations in Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese and other languages. South East Asia kept alive the Pali tradition; Tibet kept alive the Sanskrit Mahayana (महायान) tradition.

The subsequent period witnessed the spread of Buddhism in Tibet by the Great Teachers such as Padmasambhava, Naropa, Shantarakshita and Atisa Dipankara. The Buddhist religion and Tantric practices associated with it were so deeply assimilated in Tibet that to this day they permeate every aspect of life in Tibet. Buddhism left deep imprint on the culture and philosophy of the countries in Southeast Asia. It has deeply influenced the language and literature of these countries.

Buddhism influenced not only the religious conduct and philosophical thought of all the above mentioned countries in South, Southeast and East Asia; it has permeated the very life and lifestyle of the people, every expression of their culture. One cannot otherwise imagine the development and richness which one experiences in the performing and visual arts of these countries. The prototypes of the major expressions in visual arts whether it is sculpture, painting or architecture are to be traced back to India. No Buddha image could have been fashioned without reference to the sandalwood image of

Buddha created by Udayana during his sojourn to heaven. Legends apart, the prototypes of early East Asian images can easily be traced back to the Kushana, Gupta and Pala images. The paintings from Alchi, Nepal, Tibet and Myanmar cannot be appreciated and understood without the paintings at Ajanta, besides even those from Kizil (Central Asia) and Dun Huang (China) carry the imprint of the works at Ajanta. The very flowering of the Stupa (स्तूप) architecture in Central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan and Southeast Asia cannot be understood and aesthetically appreciated without the prototypes at Sanchi, Ajanta, Nalanda and Pahadpur (Bangladesh). The origin of the Pagoda-s of China and Japan has to be traced to their earlier counterparts in northwest frontier region and the Deccan. One cannot understand the unique Borobudur Stupa (स्तूप) without knowing the development in philosophical thought in India and its expression in colourful Pata-s (पट) and Thangka-s (थङ्गक).

I am happy to find that over the last century or so, there has been a resurgence and interest in Buddhism. The message of Buddhism has spread all over the world. People all over Europe and the American continent are now appreciating the Buddhist Dhamma (धम्म) as the most practical realistic and rational approach to life. Buddhism is deeply rooted in human psychology and promotes and sustains basic values including altruism, brotherhood, love, forbearance, friendliness and compassion. There is growing conviction that Buddhism as a World religion encompassing West and East alike, can serve as a sheet anchor for ensuring world peace. The fleeing of His Holiness Dalai Lama from Tibet appears to be a blessing in disguise for Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म) and has catalyzed for its spread all over the world mainly embracing the Middle Path avoiding all extremes which is now being widely accepted. India, the land of birth of Buddhism, will be now seen with a renewed vigour in Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म). His Holiness Dalai Lama remarks "I first bow down to Bharat as a Guru (गुरु)." A Japanese scholar has remarked that Buddhism has brought peace and equanimity within and around him.

We, in the Somaiya Vidyavihar, have been striving to provide value based education through the thirty three Institutions under the umbrella of Somaiya Trust in Mumbai. These include seven cultural institutions, which are striving to study and disseminate values in human life. Apart from the K.J.Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, which was inaugurated by His Holiness Dalai Lama in the year 1993, we have K.J.Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, K. J. Somaiya Indological Research Institute, K. J. Somaiya Yoga Academy, K. J. Somaiya Centre for Studies in Jainism, the latest addition was inaugurated by Acharya Mahaprajna in the year 2003. We are also having two institutions for

promotion of study of Sanskrit, namely, Surabharati and K.J.Somaiya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth under Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan which is a Deemed University. We consider it a great privilege to host this International Conference on the Contribution of Buddhism to the World Culture. I wish the deliberations all the success.

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Endnote:

- 1 सव्वपापस्स अकरणं कुसलस्स उपसंपदा ।  
सचित्तपरियोदपनं एतं बुध्दान सासनं ॥  
sabbapapassa akaranam kusalassa upasampada /  
sachittapariyodapanam etam buddhana sasanam // Dhammapada 183

# Dharma and Abhidharma

*Delivered in* : the Fourth Bi-Annual International Conference

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, Dept of Philosophy, University of Mumbai Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar, India and Shuchin University, Kyoto, Japan

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India,

6 March 2006

## Dharma and Abhidharma

**D**HARMA (धर्म) and Abhidharma (अभिधर्म) constitute theme of not only eternal relevance but also of great contemporary relevance in the disturbed times in which we find ourselves today.

Ethics and values play a vital role in the present situation of globalization. The concern is an outcome of growing violence, fissiparous tendencies, parochial ethnic, linguistic and religious conflicts throughout the world. A sense of mutual distrust and fear of 'the other' is visible everywhere. Never before have these apprehensions existed in such awesome proportions.

At this juncture in history, nations – developed and developing, face erosion of humanistic, ethical and moral values. The result is immense sense of alienation of the common man. Somehow the common individual continues to suffer practically in every sphere of human activity because of erosion of values and ethics. The phenomenon is not new. The magnitude has increased.

Lust for power or desire to dominate is barely restrained by fear – the fear of man's own vastly improved instruments of destruction. Fear, however, is not a very reliable brake on man's impulses, and it constantly poisons the atmosphere by creating a feeling of frustration which again will fan the fires of hatred.

Now why are we discussing, rather doubting whether these ethical teachings of the ancient are imbibed by the present generation in spite of so much advance both scientifically and economically all over with a few exceptions? The issue is whether we are imparting an

education which can bring out the best in an individual. Does the present system have enough strength to equip ourselves to smoothen the tensions between the materialistic pursuit and spiritual quest? Comprehensive education can help substantially in achieving an understanding with regard to Truth, Beauty and Goodness which can be conceived as the finest values to be acquired for a smooth journey towards spirituality. It has become the need of the hour. Earlier it was thought that the Eastern nations are marked for their religious and philosophical quest and Western nations were known for their material and scientific progress. Of late, the quest for spirituality has become global.

Hence I was very much inspired and became more committed to do something really worthwhile after attending the conference of the International Association of History of Religions (IAHR) held last year in March at Tokyo. After so much of achievement, materially, scientifically, technologically, I noticed that the nations on the globe are very much concerned and worried about the lack of awareness of their own religious traditions which have been the very foundation for their culture and civilization. In the absence of such an awareness there has been so much chaos, confusion about practices or rituals of particular groups. I prefer the term 'Dharma' (धर्म) which has a wider connotation covering every facet of human activity. This, I pointed out in the International Conference at IAHR, Tokyo. The issue was discussed at length and it was suggested that religious education should be a part of formal education imparted at different levels from primary to university level. Hence, this time when the theme of the conference is chosen as 'Dharma (धर्म) and Abhidharma' (अभिधर्म) I am looking forward to more meaningful academic deliberations among the scholars of the world assembled here which would help us to implement the result of their discussion in order to usher world-peace and harmony. We have heard Venerable Nawang Samten in his keynote address making special reference to the philosophical approach to understand 'Dharma (धर्म) and Abhidharma (अभिधर्म)'. We will also be listening to the views of the great scholar, Emeritus Prof. Frits Staal, on the study of comparative tradition. Though the theme of this conference will be dealt with in greater detail by the scholars, I have my own musings which I would like to share with the august audience.

What is Dharma (धर्म)? I am reminded of the statement in the great epic Mahabharata (महाभारत) by Duryodhana, "I know what is Dharma (धर्म good) but I am unable to follow it; I know what is Adharma (अधर्म evil) but I cannot refrain from it."

Such a situation arises in life when an individual cannot take the path of spiritual well-being (Shreyas श्रेयस्), discarding what he considers as attractive (Preyas प्रेयस्) due to his

gross instincts.<sup>1</sup>

When we carefully analyze our lives, we find that our thoughts and actions do not come up to our own expectations and ideals. Many a time we fail to do good. Something is lacking in all of us. We are not at peace with ourselves. With charming smiles we carry burdens which others cannot understand. We camouflage the problems which lie deep within us. When we talk to others we try to act as though we are the happiest people living in the world. The burden that tortures us may be a huge debt, shattered love, worldly affairs, an ailment which torments us, issues of family life... and much more both at home and outside. The list goes on.

The main problem of every human being is Adharma (अधर्म). We are not born in this world to practise Adharma (अधर्म evil), but somehow man falls prey to it. Since we habitually commit acts of Adharma (अधर्म), we realize we are separated from God; or if we talk in the language of the Buddha, we are away from 'the Law of Nature'. We all believe that our 'Goal' is one. This we may call annihilation of grief, sorrow and delusion or the highest knowledge or proximity to the Supreme Being according to our philosophical inclination. The paths may be different but the goal is the same. We all aspire for that ultimate supreme bliss – Ananda (आनन्द) or happiness beyond description. Lord Buddha preached, "Our Karma (कर्म action or deed), either good or bad, decides our destiny. If our actions are clean and good we will be rewarded rightly or else be punished here and now."<sup>2</sup>

### Different Religions

In their pursuit to reach this goal, philosophers came up with different solutions. While we all aspire for infinite bliss, we may call it paradise; we may call it Brahmajnana (ब्रह्मज्ञान) following the Advaita (अद्वैत), proximity to the Supreme Being following the Vishishtadvaita (विशिष्टाद्वैत) tradition, Kevalajnana (केवलज्ञान) following the Jain tradition. The Buddha calls it enlightenment (Sambodhi सम्बोधि) and liberation (Nibbana निब्बान) here and now, unlike the other Indian philosophers.

The spirit of civilization sometimes gets stuck up in the mire of finite values and becomes stagnant; and history tells us that since the malady is a spiritual one, there is only one way to overcome the deadlock. Manusmriti (मनुस्मृति) emphasizes on the dictum, "One who shelters and defends the law (Dharma धर्म), the law shelters and defends him."<sup>3</sup>

Lord Buddha spoke of his mission as setting in motion 'the Wheel of Dharma' (धर्म). Here

Dharma (धर्म) is conceived as a wheel, and human life is conceived as a cart on wheels. Lost in enjoyment and pleasure and losing sight of the higher values of life, society stagnates and disintegrates. So Buddha, in his discourse at Sarnath said, "Come let us put our shoulders to the wheel and make it move."

The very concept of the wheel implies something in motion. Buddha said, "I have come to set the wheel of Dharma (धर्म) in motion." Lord Shri Krishna said, "I have come to establish Dharma (धर्म)." The energies that Lord Buddha created and released from his inner life, powerfully influenced man and movements around him. He analysed the true cause of sorrow and showed the path to overcome it. Lord Krishna declared that an aspirant should surrender to Him, the Almighty.

If man cannot achieve Moksha (मोक्ष salvation) by his own efforts through rituals and tradition, then the last resort is God Himself. It is compassion of God that has to open a way for man to achieve Moksha (मोक्ष).

### **Different Paths**

In theistic religions 'God is Love'. If there is God, His foremost attribute must be 'Love'. Only then man has something to do with Him. If God loves man, God needs to incarnate Himself as a human being. Otherwise how will man know of God's love? God should show his love towards man by solving the biggest problem that man faces, that is, "To atone for his Adharma (अधर्म evil deeds) and transform him." If this can be done the solution to man's basic problem is achieved. God as an incarnated being should undergo the difficulties and suffering of a human being; that is, He also needs to pay the penalty for Adharma (अधर्म misdeeds or sins), not by mere words but by undergoing an immense punishment on behalf of man. We read about the Avatara-s (अवतार) like Rama and Krishna in the Ramayana (रामायण) and the Mahabharata (महाभारत). They have paved a new way, different from Upanishadic thought of 'Brahmajnana' (ब्रह्मज्ञान) which says that Jnana (ज्ञान) alone is the means to Moksha (मोक्ष). The bliss is to be attained through unconditional love or devotion.

Can we equate this to the concept of 'Bodhisattva' (बोधिसत्त्व) who waits for aeons to help the whole humanity to attain 'Nirvana' (निर्वाण)? The 'Love for God' (Bhakti भक्ति) is nothing but the compassion (Karuna करुणा) towards fellow being which is the essence of Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म).

All religions believe in love. It is love and compassion that liberate man.

### **Buddha Dhamma**

The basic characteristic of Buddhist teachings is their emphasis on facing reality, engaging in practice and bringing about the cessation of grief, sorrow and delusion. It does not demand blind following of doctrines. Instead, it points out the real situation to awaken the suffering beings; furthermore, it reveals the path towards emancipation through the analysis of causes and consequences. Thus, whoever aspires for liberation from worldly sufferings can tread upon the guiding steps and eventually attain enlightened realization (Sambodhi सम्बोधि).

This is the slow and steady march from 'Dharma' (धर्म) to 'Abhidharma' (अभिधर्म) – the highest philosophy. The 'Abhidharma' (अभिधर्म) lays emphasis on mind (Chitta चित्त), psychic factors (Chetasika-s चेतसिक), matter (Rupa रूप) and salvation (Nirvana निर्वाण).

The Buddha emphasizes on suffering (Dukkha दुक्ख), impermanence (Anichcha अनिच्च) and non-existence of an enduring self (Anatta अनत्ता).

1. All things are continuously evolving.
2. Suffering: Human lives are full of all sorts of problems and hardships, especially obvious among them are the sufferings related to birth, aging, sickness and death (Jati जाति, Jara जरा, Vyadhi व्याधि and Marana मरण). Although there are pleasures of life, alas none can last for long. Therefore, from an extended point of view, human existence would be seen to be just a gradual movement towards decay and decease.
3. Transmigration: Based on some cases of reincarnation and records of profound religious experiences it could be inferred that death does not amount to becoming naught. Rather there is a spiritual continuity that goes through birth and death from life to next life, and usually such continuity (Bhavanga भवङ्ग) remains within the sphere of transmigration that consists of six realms: heavenly beings (Deva देव), devils (Asura असुर), human beings (Manusha मानुष), animals (Tiryancha तिर्यञ्च), hungry ghosts (Rakshasa राक्षस) and hell-beings (Niraya निरय).
4. Conditional Arising: All phenomena arise as a result of combination of all sorts of conditions. All things are related as mutual cases or conditions for their interdependent co-emergence (Pratityasamutpada प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद).

5. Causal Relation: All events should be understood with reference to their causal relations and situations. Even though it is impossible to comprehend all causal relations and their underlying principles, through accumulation of experiences, we realize the existence of causal relations and their effective operation among phenomena.

6. Self: Ordinarily people identify at various levels, that is, physical body, blood relations, locality, society, culture, race, country, etc. the essence of their existence, and thus formulate their own notions of self. This results in alienation from others and in creation of imaginary barriers and even antagonism with others.

7. Karma (कर्म) : Based on attachment to various theories of self, thoughts, speeches and activities arise to affect people and their surroundings. The collection of all traces of such thoughts, speeches and activities is called Karma (कर्म).

Using these seven fundamental concepts which are explained above, the Dharma (धर्म) teaches 'Samatha (समथ) and Bhavana' (भावना) emphasizing on rules of (ethical) conduct that one has vowed to follow (Silaparakka Dhamma सीलपरक्क धम्म). Ordinarily, the five basic rules to be observed are truthfulness, non-stealing, non-violence, celibacy and non-covetousness (Satya सत्य, Asteya असत्य, Ahimsa अहिंसा, Brahmacharya ब्रह्मचर्य, Aparigraha अपरिग्रह).

Buddha laid emphasis on wisdom, good conduct, meditation and cultivation of mind full of compassion (Bodhichitta बोधिचित्त).

### Motivation

The motivation of a Buddhist is not to deviate from Bodhichitta (बोधिचित्त), that is, the aspiration to attain perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. In other words, one aims at enlightenment so that one would become capable of saving all beings from suffering, and eventually help them to attain liberation and to share the joy that will lead to cessation of suffering.

Salvation through Dharma (धर्म) aims at liberation from suffering in human life and transmigration and attainment of ultimate awakening. Therefore, it is the panacea for all seasons and ages that need not be preoccupied and affected with the result at one particular time and locality. Suitable conditions, mature time, proper advice given and well received yield beneficial results. Therefore, there is no need to insist on spreading the teachings to particular individuals at a given time and place; instead, one should

endeavour to maintain constant propagation of the teachings to people in general without discrimination.

## **Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of all Dharma (धर्म) practices is to realize that which transcends all worldly structures of time, locality, race, culture, society, etc., therefore, genuine Dharma (धर्म) practice must be universal. This is a fundamental axiom of the Dharma (धर्म). However, some actual practices and activities are built upon the dualistic distinctions of pure and impure, and good and evil; these are incomplete pedagogic devices. To attain ultimate liberation one needs to undergo all sorts of actual situations in order to master the harmonization and unification of right view and stability in meditation. Such deep and penetrating realization cannot be achieved by merely understanding the theories and their shades of meanings, without experiences at their base.

Thus the various kinds of subtle dharmic experiences made this Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म) spread across the world. Assimilating different native elements, the Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म) became Sinhalese, Thai, Javanese, Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, Japanese besides being Indian, and now in Europe and Western countries, the Buddha Dhamma (बुद्ध-धम्म) is becoming the universal Dharma (धर्म), treading the 'Middle Path' without bloodshed or war.

Everyone wants to be happy and no one wants to suffer, but very few people understand the real causes of suffering and happiness. We tend to look for happiness outside our self, thinking that if we had the right house, the right car, the right job, and the right friends we would be truly happy; we spend almost all our life compromising with the external demands of world, trying to make it conform to our wishes. All our life we try to surround ourselves with people and things that make us feel comfortable, secure, or stimulated; yet, we do not discover pure and lasting happiness.

It is time we seek happiness from a different source. Happiness is a state of mind, so the real source of happiness must lie within the mind, not in external conditions. If our mind is pure and peaceful we shall be happy, regardless of our external circumstances, but if it is impure and without peace we can never be truly happy, no matter how hard we try to change our external conditions. We can change our home or our partner countless times, but unless and until we change our restless, discontented mind we shall never find true happiness.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist practices, be it called Nirvana (निर्वाण), Buddhahood, Right Awakening, etc., is nothing but returning to original purity and merging into limitless oneness. Furthermore, it is not a static and inactive dead silence, but a constant and automatic outpouring of great compassion in the form of endless endeavours and activities, for salvation of others. Human life is transient and impermanent; a practitioner can only seize the present moment, recognize the goal correctly, and practise diligently with utmost effort. As to the depth of actual realization there is no way to force it, because the process of cultivation develops only naturally. Although in Buddhist literature there are various levels of achievement identified and described, they only serve to remind the practitioner that one should not be easily satisfied or take lesser results as higher attainments.

I once again thank all the dignitaries, the scholars who have assembled here to participate in the deliberations and conclude with folded hands –

“He, so compassionate for the world, shall once become a Buddha, destroying all dangers and sorrows; I humbly bow to Avalokiteshvara.

This universal Lord, chief of kings, who is a (rich) mine of monastic virtues, he, universally worshipped, has reached pure, supreme enlightenment, after playing his course (of duty) during many hundreds of Aeons.”<sup>4</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 अन्यत् श्रेयो अन्यदुतैव प्रेयस्ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।  
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्य साधु भवति हीयतेऽर्थाद्य उ प्रेयो वृणीते ॥  
anyat shreyo anyadutaiva preyaste ubhe nanarthe purusham sinitah /  
tayoh shreya adadanasya sadhu bhavati hiyate'rthadya u preyo vrinite //  
Katha Upanishad II.1
- 2 कम्मस्सका सत्ता कम्मदायादा, कम्मयोनी कम्मबन्धू कम्मप्पटिसरणा ...  
kammassaka satta kammadayada, kammayoni kammabandhu kammappatisarana...  
Majjhima Nikaya III. 5.289, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1994
- 3 धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

dharmo rakshati rakshitah / Manusmriti VIII.15

- 4 Max Muller, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXI, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1989, Ch. XXIV, p.417

# Religion – Unity in Diversity

*Delivered in* : the General Assembly of International Association of History of Religions, UNESCO

*organized by* : International Association of History of Religions, UNESCO

at Tokyo, Japan

30 March 2005

## Religion – Unity in Diversity

THE International Association of History of Religions (IAHR) seeks to promote the activities of all scholars and affiliates that contribute to the historical, social and comparative study of religion. As such, the IAHR is the preeminent international forum for the critical, analytical and cross-cultural study of religion, past and present. I am really honoured not only to be part of this International Conference being organized at Tokyo but I am also very happy that IAHR is recognizing the regional organization under its umbrella – South and Southeast Asian Study of Religions (SSEASR). Keeping this in mind I want to propose what the term ‘Dharma’ (धर्म) means, rather is understood generally by majority of people inclusive of both common man as well as academicians. Actually the term ‘Dharma’ (धर्म) has a wider connotation as Duty, Law of nature, religion, way of life – customs and practices, ethics, etc. One cannot narrow down the term ‘Dharma’ (धर्म) as religion alone. I am indebted to the views of many of the renowned scholars to discuss the history of religion which has to be interdependent either on Sociology or Phenomenology or Psychology of religion, whose works, I have quoted or mentioned without any specification. I owe to all of them to make my stand here in this academic arena.

I am extremely happy not only to be associated with this World Committee, but feel very much committed to the cause of this dialogue of religions of the world by learned scholars coming together.

Almost for the past one week, the scholars have been discussing various aspects of ‘Religion’ such as ‘Religion: Conflict and Peace, Religion and War, Religious Persecution,

Religion and Human Rights, Religion and Identity, Religion and Globalization, Religion and Migration, Religion and Terrorism, Religious Fundamentalism, Sacred Canons of Peace, Religious Conflict in the Media, Religious Conflict in the Internet, Gods of War and Peace', and so on.

For me 'Religion' is something that binds the humanity. We have a famous Rigvedic saying, "There is only One Truth, but wise call it as many." Whenever I pass by the neighbourhood mosque, I bow my head in respect just as I do when I pass by the temple. The Mullah's call to the Faithful turns me towards prayer and God. I go through the same upsurge of emotions when I visit a Church or Gurudwara. When I bow my head in humility to Christ and the Guru Granth Sahib (गुरु ग्रन्थसाहिब), similarly when I hear the Buddhist chant 'Buddham sharanam gachchhami' (बुद्धं शरणं गच्छामि), I see in them my beloved Lord Krishna. These thoughts continue to reverberate within me for long, giving me the peace I experience when I say my usual prayers. This feeling of affinity helps me to have a bond with people of all faiths. May be, I was a Christian in my previous birth and I could be born as a Muslim in my next birth.

Certain happening in one part of the world does affect the other. The rise of fundamentalist groups, the strife among various ethnic and religious groups, the September 11 strikes in the United States, and closer home the Ayodhya controversy and the Gujarat riots indicate that religion-related conflict has become a part of our lives. Communication technology has played a major role in bringing together diverse peoples from across the globe, even if they are geographically and ideologically miles apart. The worldwide web, though is merely a tool, it brings with it both advantages and disadvantages, depending on how it is used. While it has the power to create greater understanding through knowledge dispersal, it has also facilitated networking of fundamentalists and terrorist groups.

However, such destructive attitude like the demolition of the famous Great Buddha sculpture at Bamiyan by Taliban, vindicates the fact that religion is a creation of the human mind, just like the other concepts such as concept of time. A Muslim woman's baby girl was swapped for a Hindu woman's baby boy. Both the babies would have been brought up to follow their adopted faith, had the exchange gone undetected.

Ironically, religion, which is meant to symbolize our love and yearning for God and which exhorts compassion towards all, has been reduced to becoming a tool in the hands of manipulators and terrorists to achieve their personal agendas.

All these new developments and misuse of technology in propagating religion-based hate

and terror give rise to some disturbing questions such as, 'If all religions advocate universal brotherhood, love, compassion and peace, how can any religion be used to generate terror and hatred?' Dr. S. Radhakrishnan often said, "A truly religious person will be free from fear and hatred as it implies the complete transformation of an individual's nature. While the formal or scriptural aspects of religion – which are vulnerable to misinterpretations – may divide the world; the deeper spiritual side can only have a unifying effect."<sup>1</sup>

At present, society is inclined to regard the contemplative persons as parasites. From the point of view of major world religions, however, the existence of contemplative persons is the only justification of human society. It is not certain whether religion itself can be considered useful unless man retains some sense of the wisdom that may be acquired by sitting in quiet recollection. On this point Dr. S. Radhakrishnan offered a remark, "The soul in solitude is the birth place of religion. Moses on the lonely Mount of Sinai, Buddha under the Bodhi (बोधि) tree lost in contemplation, Jesus by the Jordan in the stillness of prayer, Paul in the lonely sojourn in the desert, Mohammed on the solitary mount at Mecca, Francis of Assisi in his prayers in the remote crags of the highlands of Alverno, found the strength and assurance of the reality of God. Everything that is great, new and creative in religion rises out of the unfathomable depths of the soul in the quiet of prayer, in the solitude of meditation."<sup>2</sup>

Now we are living in a time when the most basic questions as to the meaning of life and civilization, religion as a way of life, must be brought into our consideration. The existence of nuclear weapons, the challenges of social and economic justice, and the environmental stresses, force us, if we are at all aware of the seriousness of their implications, to ask ourselves as to what the value of life is, and what we must do in order to preserve it. Some major changes need to take place if we are to come through this time alive and have a future.

Civilization enables society to bring itself together to function well. It is in our case a global society which has begun to live according to its highest principles and to help its citizens to come together in cooperation and mutual support. In order for that to happen, all of us need to live according to ethical principles such as showing mercy to others and being considerate to people of all races, cultures and religions and for all other forms of life.

Beyond the understanding of Spirit, there is the realm of ethics that must be strengthened so that it can be applied universally. Whether people consider themselves religious or not, there are standards of living that must be followed if we want to have a society at all. Religion means to bind together, to unify. Religions have tended in the past to compete

with each other, and even to fight with each other, as is still happening among Muslim sects in Iraq and among Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. As a result, many people have turned away from religion, feeling that it is irrelevant to today's world. When we discuss whether religion is relevant or irrelevant, it may not be out of context to say that India, which I am representing with her multireligious and multilingual facets, is the country that rightly deserves to be known for her 'Unity in diversity'. A lot of efforts are being taken to bring in commonality among various faiths at the academic level and emphasize the concept of secularism.

Now that the interfaith movement is being given importance, all of us need to take another look at the potential of the ancient and traditional religions, and the more recent spiritual movements, to provide leadership in achieving peace, justice and a sustainable environment. This change provides a real step forward in the emergence of a global civilization that works for all. Science also has a role to play in the process of unification among religions, especially, as it bridges the gap between the religions and other dimensions of consciousness.

The culture of India has been shaped by the long history of India, her unique geography and the absorption of customs, traditions and ideas from some of her neighbours. It has preserved its ancient heritage, which was formed during the Indus Valley Civilization and evolved further during the Vedic age, rise and decline of Buddhism, Golden age, Muslim conquests and European colonization. India's great diversity of cultural practices, languages, customs and traditions are examples of this unique co-mingling over the past five millennia. The various religions and traditions of India that were created by these amalgamations have influenced other parts of the world too. Most Indians emphasize the country's cultural diversity, tolerance and receptiveness to foreign influences.

Religious studies in the academic field of multi-disciplines throw light on secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours and institutions. It describes, compares, interprets and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historical, and cross-cultural perspectives.

While theology attempts to understand the intentions of a supernatural force (such as deities), religious studies try to study human religious behaviour and belief irrespective of a particular religious viewpoint. Religious studies draw upon multiple disciplines and their methodologies including anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy and history of religion.

Religious studies originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when scholarly and historical analysis

of the Bible (बायबल) had flourished, and Hindu and Buddhist texts were first being translated into European languages. Early influential scholars included Friedrich Max Muller in England, and Cornelius P. Tiele in the Netherlands. Today religious studies are pursued by scholars worldwide. Earlier it was known as Comparative Religion or the Science of Religion besides the History of Religion (associated with methodological traditions). The history of religions is not concerned with theological claims apart from their historical significance. Some topics of this discipline are the historicity of religious figures, events and the evolution of doctrinal matters.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sociology of Religion**

The sociology of religion concerns the dialectics between religion and society; the practices, historical backgrounds, developments, universal themes and role of religion in society.<sup>4</sup> There is particular emphasis on the recurring role of religion in all societies and throughout recorded history. The sociology of religion is distinguished from the philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion does not set out to assess the validity of religious beliefs, though the process of comparing multiple conflicting dogmas may require what Peter L. Berger has described as inherent 'methodological atheism'.<sup>5</sup>

It may be said that the modern formal discipline of sociology began with the analysis of religion. The works of Max Weber emphasized the relationship between religious belief and the economic foundations of society. Contemporary debates have centred on issues such as secularization, civil religion and the cohesiveness of religion in the context of globalization and multiculturalism.

The sociology of religion also deals with the negative and positive impact of religion on society. Society becomes better and more stable when there is religion. Theorist such as Marx states that "Religion is the opium of the people" while others say that religion has become a way for people to deal with their problems. Society needs religion to better itself because society depends on religion and religion depends on society.

### **Cultural Anthropology of Religion**

The cultural anthropology of religion is principally concerned with the cultural aspects of religion. Of primary concern to the cultural anthropologist of religions are rituals, beliefs, religious art and practices of piety.

## **Geography of Religion**

Recent interest in the geography of religion has focused on how religious practitioners enact sacred space through their sacred practices as well as the relationship between religion and geopolitics. It is interesting to note that in our country all the images of the deities in the temples in the North of India are made of white stone and those in the south are in black. May be, it is true to the saying and belief that we see ourselves in God Almighty relating the complexion of the people in the north and south of India. It is not an imaginative thought but it is true.

## **Literary Approaches**

There are many approaches to the study of sacred texts. One of these approaches is to interpret the text as a literary object. Metaphor, thematic elements, and the nature and motivations of the characters are of interest in this approach. We have Alwar-s (आळ्वार), Nayanmar-s (नायन्मार), Kabir, Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya for Bhakti (भक्ति) – devotional literature. We have schools of philosophical thoughts promulgated by Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya who have interpreted the scriptural ethos with different interpretations.

Thus one can analyze the study of religion from the viewpoint of anthropology, psychology, neurology and so on.

Before I conclude, I would like to record my sincere thanks to the President of IAHR, his team and my scholar friends assembled here for having shared my thoughts.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Radhakrishnan S., Eastern Religion and Western Thought, Oxford University Press, New York, 1959, p. 48
- 2 Ibid., p. 53

- 3 Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments, Ed. by Kevin J. Christiano, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2008
- 4 Schultz Kevin M. and Harvey Paul, "Everywhere and Nowhere: Recent Trends in American Religious History and Historiography," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, ed. by Amer Hussara, Wisdom Publication, Boston, 2010, pp. 129-162
- 5 Berger, Peter L. The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Anchor Books, New York, 1967

# Relevance of Buddhism to the Modern Society

*Delivered in* : the Bilateral Colloquium between Indian and Chinese scholars

*organized by* : Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies

at Shanghai, China

26 October 2006

# Relevance of Buddhism to the Modern Society

I greatly value this opportunity of Interaction and Bilateral Discussion between Indian scholars and Chinese scholars on the important subject of 'Relevance of Buddhism to the Modern Society'.

The penetration of Buddhism in Southeast Asia spread the message of peace, dialogue, intellectual transformation and tolerance of differences. Its thrust was on the avoidance of bloodshed, hatred, and animosity against each other.

On this occasion, I am reminded of the famous saying that the Buddha has always taken into consideration the capacity and the understanding of the people around him and he preached whatever was useful and apt to suit the particular religious, philosophical, social condition and environment of that time. The most important feature of Buddha's teachings is that he always considered the time, the place, the person, the totality of these circumstances, whenever, whatever and to whomsoever he was going to preach.

“The noble Tathagata (तथागत), the perfectly Awakened one, knows the sense, the Dhamma (धम्म), the proportion, the time, the assembly, endowed with these five qualities, Tathagata (तथागत) turns the transcendental wheel of the Law according to the Dhamma (धम्म).”<sup>1</sup>

This Bilateral Conference between the Indian scholars and Chinese scholars on the 'Relevance of Buddhism to the Contemporary (Modern) Society', reminds us that the common link between both the countries is Buddhism; Buddha said, “Oh Monks, keep moving for the welfare of many and for the happiness of many!”<sup>2</sup>

## **Buddhism became Universal without War or Bloodshed**

Buddhism has become a universal religion – the way of life for many people all over the world. Buddhism had crossed the geographical boundary of the land of its origin as early as in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B. C. but without bloodshed and war. It is the universal compassion with which Buddhism has encompassed the world and made many South, Southeast and East Asian countries embrace Buddhism as their State religion. Even today India and China try to bring back our understanding as close neighbours. History of both countries goes back to the earliest centuries.

Just a week back I had been to Lijiang in Yunnan Province. It was indeed a memorable experience. Our delegation from India met the Mayor Mr. Zhang Zu Lin and Dr. Wu Song, the President of Yunnan University. The purpose of our meeting was to stress the need to build meaningful friendly relations between the two Universities and the institutes affiliated to them, and also the various departments of the two states in the two countries. The dialogue started on a very positive note. Now being at Shanghai attending this joint conference, I am sure that our efforts will strengthen our bond further academically as also in other spheres.

Our scholars will be speaking on the role of Buddhism in the contemporary society whether it is the Chan (Zen/Dhyana ध्यान) meditation based on Lankavatara Sutra (लङ्कावतारसूत्र) or on Dashabhumikasutra (दशभूमिकसूत्र).

## **Centuries Old Cross-Cultural Relations**

I would like to point out that the cross-cultural relations between the two countries are centuries old and go way back in history. In geographical range and in the number and diversity of the peoples which it embraced from the borders of Iran and Japan and from Central Asia to Java, the expansion of Buddhism in Asia was an extensive phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> The abundance of written traditions, the diversity of schools, and the wealth of cultural elements that Buddhism bore along with it added to the greatness of the phenomenon.

“When Buddhism began to penetrate in the Chinese world in the first and second centuries, it already possessed a long history. During this period it had become steeped in Iranian and Hellenistic influences, not to mention all that it owed to the authorized substrate of Northern and Southern India. It continued to develop in the Buddhist

countries outside China during the period when religious fervor was at its zenith in China (A.D. 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries). But its subsequent transformations also concern the history of China.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Profound Influence on Intellectual Life**

A Chinese Buddhist temple – a relatively autonomous body – has been unique. It has many religious communities, centers of worship, and large estates. The dependents of the temple prospered due to the divergent interests of the aristocracy, the peasants’ communities, and the state. Thanks to its social, political and economic role and its impact over the minds of people from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and to its profound influence on intellectual life, presently Buddhism has been one of the basic elements in the formation of the Chinese ethos. Its advent enriched religious, philosophical, literary and artistic traditions of China.

“Buddhism conquered the greater part of the Asiatic continent, by traveling along the commercial routes, carried with the great flow of trade. One path was the chain of oasis connecting oasis of the Amu-Darya valley with Kansu; and the other consisted of the maritime routes followed by the trade between the Indian ocean and Southeast Asia.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Adaptation of Buddhism to the Chinese World**

The penetration of Buddhism into China and its adaptation to the Chinese world was a complex phenomenon, the different aspects of which seem to have been relatively independent of one another. This foreign religion did not present itself by any means as a monolithic creed composed of indissoluble elements, but simultaneously a pell-mell of the worship of statues, a hitherto unknown kind of monastic life, a series of moral precepts, various different doctrines and techniques of concentration or ecstasy. Worship and piety on the one hand and doctrine and philosophy on the other at first developed without any connection with each other.

In the first few centuries of the Christian era, this foreign religion was regarded as a variety of Taoism. In the course of time, the idea even developed that Buddhism was the product of ancient Taoist influences – hence the theme of the conversion of the barbarians by Lao tzu is discussed. Though important the role of Taoism was, it was in a much more general way, all the religious, moral and philosophical traditions of the Chinese

world that contributed to this vast phenomenon of assimilation also affected the whole social and political history from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In short Buddhism became a great religion in China. There took place at the level of local cults and communities a subterranean activity about which very little is known. The results alone were to emerge when Buddhism had become a Chinese religion with its priesthood, its faithful followers, and its places of worship.

### **Decisive Turning Point**

“The beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, to which lustre was lent by two great names, Hui-yuan (A.D. 334-417) in Yangtze, China and Kumarjiva (A.D. 350-413) in the North China, may be regarded as one of the decisive turning points in the history of Buddhism in China. It was then that Buddhism came of age in every domain of the extremely complex reality that every religion forms. Acquaintance with great Indian and specially Kashmiri schools grew wider and more precise, the quality and worth of translations made remarkable progress and the contributions of the Greater Vehicle (Mahayana cene<sup>3</sup>eeve tradition) were no longer confined to collections of the philosophical notions. The spirit of devotion and of communion between the lay and religious worlds which made Buddhism a great religion of salvation began to permeate the Chinese world.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Widespread Translation of Buddhist Texts**

The translation of Indian Buddhist texts (in Sanskrit, Prakrit or Pali) into Chinese extended over nearly ten centuries. The first translations started from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and continued till the last of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They cover all the Buddhist schools of India and the countries converted to Buddhism and constitute a very considerable body of texts – about forty million Chinese characters and one thousand six hundred and ninety different works, some of which were translated several times at different periods. This literature is the richest and most extensive source of Sutra-s (सूत्र), treatises on discipline, commentaries and scholastic texts that exist in all the various Asian languages which served as vehicles for Buddhist scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

### **Two-way Journeys and Interaction of Buddhist Scholars**

The sea route between India and China was being actively used during the early centuries of the Christian era, if not directly at least by the mediation of the Indian (Hindu) colonies of Indonesia. This inference is confirmed by the story of Fa-hien's travels at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. He is indeed the first Buddhist who is known to have succeeded in accomplishing a sea voyage from Sri Lanka to China. He did not visit the mainland of South India but took ship from Tamluk to Sri Lanka and his interest was centered chiefly in Buddhism.

After Fa-hien there was a succession of Buddhists who sailed between Southern India and China. The names of several others who followed the sea route in the 5<sup>th</sup> century are mentioned in the Kwai-yuen catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka (त्रिपिटक), compiled in 730 A.D.<sup>8</sup>

Bodhidharma, the Indian priest from Kanchi introduced the Dhyana (ध्यान) school of Buddhism, which is called Chan in Chinese (Zen-shu 禅-宗 in Japanese). He was the third son of a king in Kanchi in South India. He went to China in 527 A.D. Reference is also made to Vinitaruchi, a Brahmana (ब्राह्मण) of South India, who reached the Chinese capital in 582 A.D. and translated two works into Chinese. He then proceeded to Tonkin and founded Dhyana (ध्यान) school there.<sup>9</sup>

Further the role of Fu-nan as intermediary in the trade relations between South India and China became apparent in a curious account<sup>10</sup> of a highly valued mirror from western India that was offered for sale in China sometime between 500 A.D. and 550 A.D.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century forms a great epoch in the annals of Indian Buddhism due to the attraction offered by its study to many pious Chinese pilgrims. Some Indian monks also traveled to China to labour there in the cause of the Buddhist faith. Dharmagupta, a scholar from Lata (Gujarat) left his native land at first for Central India and gradually found his way across Kapisa and Badkshan, Kashgar, Turfan and other places to the Chinese capital about 590 A.D. and he spent the rest of his life there translating many Buddhist texts into Chinese and writing a memoir on the countries of the West till 619 A.D.<sup>11</sup>

The interaction between India and China from 5<sup>th</sup> century to 7<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the journey of noted Indian Buddhists like Prabhakaramitra, a famous scholar from Nalanda, who reached China in 627 A.D. and engaged himself in translating many Buddhist texts there. Nineteen scholars were appointed by the court to assist him in his work. He died there in 633 A.D.<sup>12</sup>

Another Indian scholar, Bodhiruchi went to China in 693 A.D. on the request of a Chinese envoy probably at the court of Chalukya king. He translated fifty-three volumes of Buddhist texts in which, it is believed even the Chinese king and queen took part along with high officials.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the Indian monks were responsible in the spread of Buddhism and in translating the Buddhist scriptures and texts into Chinese, the famous Chinese scholars like Xuan Zang who came through Silk Route (land route) to India (honoured by King Harshavardhana) took many Buddhist texts of Yogachara (योगाचार) school (Yogacharabhumi-shastra योगाचारभूमिशस्त्र, Dharanipitaka धारणीपिटक etc); following him I-tsing who translated texts on Sanskrit basic grammar (Siddham सिद्धम्) took as many as he could which Xuan Zang could not; it is to be noted that detailed accounts of their visits recorded by them really helped India to have reliable historical records of their past.

Similarly, the Chinese monk scholars and Indian monk scholars from South India like Bodhisena, Vajrabodhi and Acharya Prajna from Kashmir had played the vital role in founding the esoteric Buddhism in China.

### **Visits – a Vast Treasure of Information**

If China had been benefited by Indian influence through its interaction, it was the same with India also. The Chinese travelers, pilgrims, ambassadors to Indian kingdoms have recorded their accounts of travel to India in such details that the historical data and date of many of the dynasties and the kings could be determined with the help of the Chinese documentations and chronicles.

The travel accounts of famous Chinese pilgrims had left behind a vast treasure-house of information about the conditions of Indian kingdoms and geographical descriptions of many places in India. The cultural contact between India and China, started from much earlier centuries, that is, from Pallava kingdom in the South, Pala kingdom from the north of India with Loyang of T'ang and Sung dynasties in China. The cultural period prospered in every sphere including Art and Architecture. The prolonged visits of Chinese pilgrims speak volumes, not only of the great veneration which the Chinese had for Buddhism, but also for the new angle of vision with Indian culture that inspired the Chinese.

### **World – a Global Village**

I have tried to cover the journey of Buddhism over 2500 years which has been the journey of goodwill and spread of message of harmony. Wherever Buddhism went, it got assimilated with the local population. Over the period, it established itself as a great philosophy for life and also became a guideline for the rulers. In some parts, particularly in China and Japan, it blended itself with the local culture so perfectly well that it could be regarded as extension of one into another. This process has been extremely smooth and non-violent.

In India, in a typical village we see different religions and faiths existing and living in total harmony. It characterizes Unity in Diversity as distinct form of monoculture. These are regarded as a beautiful bouquet of different colourful flowers which not only blend but create a colourful interior design. Can this spirit of village be replicated on a global scale?

In the present era, spectacular advances in technology have literally reduced the world into a 'global village'. The impact of telecommunication, mobile technology is so great that every part of the world is exposed to each other instantly to the varieties of a lifestyle which have emerged traditionally. The question that now arises is how can this evolve internationally into a beautiful composite culture?

Today, the world is passing through turmoil and tension. The primary concern of nations is to bring safety and security at home. But the efforts of great nations have not yielded desired results. The world has to find solutions for the same as this is the need of the hour.

The world needs a new paradigm, a new direction to find peaceful and honourable solutions where it will be a win-win situation. In violence, both are the losers. To sum up, this paradigm has to be based on Buddhist thought, and should emerge as an all-embracing oriental phenomenon. The entire approach depends on dialogues, recognition of different viewpoints, fundamental emphasis on non-violence and compassion. In this conference, let us create a new paradigm, a new formula and send a correct message across the world.

## **Conclusion**

While concluding, I wish to express my admiration to you. What your ancestors had preserved and what they gained from Buddhism you are able to protect it intact. I did witness the Thousand Armed Avalokiteshvara, Reclining Buddha, the depiction of different hells, etc., at Dazu Rock carvings during my visit last year. If I remember

correctly, at that time this joint programme was thought of as a beautiful flower to blend the fragrance of the Past with the Present for which I commend and compliment Prof. Dr. Yu Xuanmeng and his team of scholars.

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Endnotes:

- 1 तथागतो अरहं सम्मासम्बुद्धो अत्थञ्जू, धम्मञ्जू  
मतञ्जू कालञ्जू, परिसञ्जू! इमेहि खो, भिक्खवे, पञ्चहि  
धम्मेहि समन्नागतो... धम्मेनेव अनुत्तरं धम्मचक्कं पवत्तेति ।  
tathagato araham sammāsambuddho atthannu, dhammannu  
matannu kalannu, parisannu! imehi kho, bhikkhave, panchahi  
dhammehi samannagato ... dhammeneva anuttaram  
dhammachakkam pavatteti /  
Anguttaranikaya, Vol. II, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1995, p. 140.
- 2 चरथ, भिक्खवे, चारिकं बहुजनहिताय बहुजनसुखाय ...  
charatha, bhikkhave, charikam bahujanahitaya bahujanasukhaya...  
Dighanikaya, Vol. II, Mahavaggapali, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1993,  
p. 35, Book of the Discipline, IV, p. 28
- 3 Jacques Garnet, A History of Chinese Civilization, Cambridge University Press, USA,  
1996, p. 210
- 4 Ibid., p. 211
- 5 Ibid., pp. 211, 214
- 6 Ibid., pp. 216-221
- 7 Beal Samuel, Buddhism in China, Bharatiya Publishing House, Delhi, 1980, pp. 98-101
- 8 M. Anesaki, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS), Great Britain, 1954, pp. 368-370

- 9 Yamakami Sogen, *Systems of Buddhist Thought*, Kessinger Publication, USA, 1912, pp. 5-6
- 10 Chinese text, cited and translated by Berthold Laufer, *Optical Lenses*, Hispanic Society of America, New York, USA, 1915, pp.200-202; cf. K. A. N. Sastri, *op.cit*, pp. 84-85
- 11 Sylvain Levy and Chavannes, *Journal Asiatic*, 1900 (May-June), pp. 418-421
- 12 Bagchi P., *India and China*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Hind Kitab, Bombay, 1950; Kipin and Kashmir; *Sino Indian Studies*, *Indological Studies*, Vishvabharati, 1982, II, pp. 42-53; S. C. Das, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, Elibnon Classics, Rupa & Co., New Delhi
- 13 Joshi Lalmani, *Studies in Buddhist Culture of India*, Motilal Banarasidass, New Delhi, 1987, p. 168; Bodhiruchi translated *Dashabhumikasutra* into Chinese; cf. Takakusu, *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2001, p. 114

# **Pratityasamutpada Dependent Origination**

*Delivered in* : the National Seminar

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies sponsored by Indian Council of  
Philosophical Research, New Delhi  
at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

9 March 2007

# Pratityasamutpada Dependent Origination

I always admire the way Buddhism has captivated the whole world with its compassion. Now as the religion of the world, it is very apt to discuss this unique philosophy of the Buddha in the age of globalization.

Recently I attended the lecture delivered by His Holiness Dalai Lama for a small group at Leela Kempenski, Mumbai and later at Bodhagaya conference. He spoke about Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) – Dependent Origination from the viewpoint of Nagarjuna – the great Buddhist Philosopher of Shunyavada (शून्यवाद) and other Philosophers like Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu and others. He opened the treasure of knowledge for me. I am really curious to understand this unique Buddhist concept Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) – Dependent Origination.

The principle of 'Pratityasamutpada' (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) constitutes the core of Buddhist philosophy. Vasubandhu, the author of Abhidharmakosha (अभिधर्मकोश) has dealt with the difference between the meaning of the term 'Samutpada' (समुत्पाद) and 'Samutpanna' (समुत्पन्न). The simple meaning of 'Pratityasamutpada' (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) is 'conditioned co-production or interdependence or dependent origination'.

The question as elucidated in the Samyuttanikaya (संयुत्तनिकाय)<sup>1</sup> with which the Buddha started before attaining Buddhahood was: In what a miserable condition the people are! They are born, they decay, they die, pass away and are born again; and they do not know the path of escape from this decay, death and misery.

Buddha pondered over the problem as to how to know the way to escape from this misery

of decay and death. What are decay and death? Depending on what do they come? As the Buddha thought deeply into the root of the matter, it occurred to him that decay and death can only occur when there is birth (Jati जाति) so they depend on birth. Then it occurred to him that birth could only be if there were a previous existence (Bhava भव). Here I am reminded of the Upanishadic concept of rebirth as enunciated in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) where it is said that just as an insect going to the end of a leaf of grass by a new effort collects itself in another, so does the soul coming to the end of this life collect itself in another.<sup>2</sup> This life thus presupposes another existence.<sup>3</sup> Karma (कर्म action of an individual) in Buddhism includes both Karma (कर्म) and Karmavipaka (कर्मविपाक action and fruit of one's own action). It is the cause of rebirth. This is exactly the same both in the teachings of the Buddha and the Vedanta (वेदान्त); Karma (कर्म) – the cause (Hetu हेतु) and Karmavipaka (कर्मविपाक) – the result of the action, bring rebirth. However, 'Pratityasamutpada' (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) is the term coined by the Buddha in the sense of 'cause and arising' (arisen) and not in the sense of 'Karana-Karya' (कारण-कार्य) or 'Hetu-Phala' (हेतु-फल). Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) denotes the continuity as a chain of cause and effect.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) it is said that as one acts, as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. Others, however, say that a person consists of desires. As is his desire so is his will; as is his will, so is the deed he does, whatever deed he does, that he attains.<sup>4</sup>

Does it not sound the same as the concept of Chullakamma Vibhanga sutta (चुल्ल कम्मविभङ्ग सुत्त) of Majjhimanikaya (मज्झिमनिकाय)<sup>5</sup> where the Buddha says, "One's own action or deed is one's own friend, one's own relative; it is one's own action that makes the man the master of his future."

The Buddha contemplated strongly on the reasons as to what our present birth might be due to. He had to fall back upon another existence (Bhava भव) to explain it. This cycle of dependence of existence is called wheel of existence (Bhavachakra भवचक्र). Decay and death (Jaramarana जरामरण) could not have happened if there was no birth.<sup>6</sup> If Bhava (भव) means Karma (कर्म) which brings rebirth as Chandrakirti<sup>7</sup> argues that would mean that the present birth could only take place on account of the works of a previous existence which determined it. Thus the concept of 'Karma (कर्म) and Karmavipaka' (कर्मविपाक) is based on 'Pratityasamutpada' (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद).

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्), sage Yajnavalkya cautions Artabhaga<sup>8</sup> not to disclose their discussion on Karma (कर्म) and cycle of rebirth (Karma कर्म and Samsara संसार). Yajnavalkya told Artabhaga, “We two alone shall know about this, this is not for public...” “What they said was about Karma (कर्म) and what they praised was Karma (कर्म); verily one becomes good by good action, bad by bad action.”

The scholars are there to debate, whether the teaching of the Buddha is earlier or of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) or whether they are contemporary. I leave it to them.

Chandrakirti's interpretation on the statement ‘as a man does, so will he be born’<sup>9</sup> from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्), that Bhava (भव) is that Karma (कर्म) which leads to future rebirth (Punarbhavajanakam Karma पुनर्भवजनकं कर्म) seems a better explanation. The word Bhava (भव) was used in the Pali scriptures for the first time as a philosophical term. But on what does this Bhava (भव) depend? There could not have been a previous existence if people had not betaken themselves to things or works they desired. This betaking oneself to actions or things in accordance with desire is called Upadana (उपादान). In the Upanishad (उपनिषद्), it is mentioned, ‘Whatever one betakes himself to, so does he work’<sup>10</sup>

As this betaking to a thing depends upon desire or greed (Trishna तृष्णा), it is said that in order that there may be ‘Upadana’ (उपादान), there must be Tanha (तण्हा). In the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) also it is said, ‘Whatever one desires so does he betake himself to.’ Neither the word Upadana (उपादान) nor Trishna (तृष्णा equivalent to Tanha तण्हा) is found in the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) but the ideas contained in them are similar to the words Kratu (ऋतु) and Kama (काम). Desire (Tanha तण्हा) is then said to depend on feeling or sense-contact that presupposes the six senses as fields of operation.<sup>11</sup> These six senses or operating fields would again presuppose the whole psychosis of the man – the body and the mind together called Nama-rupa (नाम-रूप)... etc.<sup>12</sup>

The theory of Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) has its revolutionary aspect in the postulation that nothing should be accepted as immutable and above change and destruction. That there is always a pertinent cause for every change and that beneath every change there are events and forces which are responsible for the emergence of a specific human situation, has been dealt with in detail in the Buddhist scriptures. The theory of Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) provides the framework for demonstrating the irrelevance of many philosophical concepts and ideas which have no bearing on the

human situation and the removal of suffering from the individual's life and society. The Buddha aimed to provide a solution to the problem of suffering and the theory of causality accepted by him provides an outlook which is revolutionary and scientific.

The theory of Pratityasamutpada (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद), the doctrine of four noble truths and the eightfold path can be utilized to prepare the ground for social change. Social change requires the removal of many causes which pollute the human minds and make persons behave in an obnoxious way in relation to the other members of the society. The Buddha has stressed on the removal of the psychological causes, such as, greed, covetousness, anger, malice, envy, deceit, treachery, impetuosity, arrogance, pride, conceit,... etc. which defile the mind.<sup>13</sup>

The Buddha knew the benefits of living in societies which believed in the noble ideals of equality, freedom and justice. The teaching of the Buddha has a dimension of humanism, otherwise it would not have embraced mankind of different geographical regions of the world such as South or Southeast or East Asia or the Europe or Western countries. It is really amazing to see that even after 2550 years after Buddha's enlightenment, the academic curriculum in the Buddhist studies has been implemented in Europe and Western countries, and also in countries like Brazil and USA where they have named the institution as Nalanda. The fragrance of the Buddha still permeates and prepares the ambience for peace. His meditation technique is captivating the world at its zenith. This could be possible because the Buddha aimed at dealing with problems faced by man in this world, and he did not give any importance to the transcendental world wherein the ideals of welfare and progress of man find no practical realization.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Samyutta Nikaya II.5, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1994
- 2 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4.3
- 3 Dasgupta S., History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1991,

- pp. 87ff.
- 4 यथाकारी यथाचारी तथा भवति साधुकारी साधुर्भवति पापकारी पापो भवति पुण्यः पुण्येन कर्मणा भवति पापः पापेन। अथो खलु आहुः काममय एवायं पुरुष इति स यथाकामो भवति तत्क्रतुर्भवति यत्क्रतुर्भवति तत् कर्म कुरुते यत् कर्म कुरुते तत् अभिसंपद्यते।  
yathakari yathachari तथा bhavati sadhukari sadhurbhavati papakari papo bhavati punyah punyena karmana bhavati papah papena/ atho khalu ahuh kamamaya evayam purusha iti sa yathakamo bhavati tatkraturbhavati yatkraturbhavati tat karma kurute yat karma kurute tat abhisampadyate/ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV. 4.5
  - 5 कम्मस्सका सत्ता कम्मदायादा , कम्मयोनी कम्मबन्धू कम्मप्पटिसरणा,...  
kammassaka satta kammadayada, kammayoni kammabandhu kammappatisarana,...  
Majjhima Nikaya III. 5.289, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1994, p. 280
  - 6 Jara (जरा) and Marana (मरण) brings in Shoka (शोक grief), Parivedana (परिवेदना lamentation), Duhkha (दुःख suffering), Daurmanasya (दौर्मनस्य feeling of wretchedness and miserableness) and Upayasa (उपयस feeling of extreme destitution) at the prospect of one's death or the death of the dear ones. All these make up suffering as the result of Jati (जाति birth).
  - 7 Chandrakirti is considered to be the most faithful commentator on Nagarjuna's work and an erudite dialectician. His work Madhyamikavritti deals much on this aspect. This is the commentary on Nagarjuna's Madhyamikashastra.
  - 8 आवां एवैतस्य वेदिष्यावः न नावेतत् सजन इति तौ ह यद् ऊचतुः  
कर्म हैव तद् ऊचतुः अथ यत् प्रशशंसतुः कर्म हैव तत् प्रशशंसतुः  
पुण्यो वै पुण्येन कर्मणा भवति पापः पापेनेति...।  
avam evaitasya vedishyavah na navetat sajana iti tau ha yad uchatuh  
karma haiva tad uchatuh atha yat prashashamsatuh karma haiva tat prashashamsatuh  
punyo vai punyena karmana bhavati papah papeneti.../  
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad III.2.13
  - 9 यत् कर्म कुरुते तदभिसंपद्यते ...।  
yat karma kurute tadabhisampadyate.../  
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4.5

- 10 यत्क्रतुर्भवति तत् कर्म कुरुते ...स यथाकामो भवति तत्क्रतुर्भवति.../  
yatkraturbhavati tat karma kurute ... sa yathakamo bhavati tatkraturbhavati.../  
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4.5
- 11 The word 'Ayatana' (आयतन) is found in many places in the earlier Upanishad-s in the sense of 'field or place' such as Chandogya Upanishad I.5, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad III.9.10. But Shadayatana (षडायतन) does not occur.
- 12 Majjhima Nikaya 3. 215, tr. Thannisaro Bhikkhu, Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta : An Analysis of the Six Sense-media, Pali Text Society : 137, Oxford, 1997
- 13 Samyutta Nikaya op.cit., II.5

# **Buddhist Culture in Asia**

## **Unity in Diversity**

*Delivered in* : the International Conference

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, Dept of Philosophy, University of Mumbai, Dept of Pali, University of Pune, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar, India and the Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, China

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

13 January 2008

# Buddhist Culture in Asia

## Unity in Diversity

I have the privilege to preside over this unique conference on 'Buddhist Culture In Asia – Unity in Diversity' since I have traveled almost to all the countries where Buddhism had made an impact. I admire the Buddha 'who could make his teachings as practical as ever and so relevant in any part of the globe and at any period of time.'<sup>1</sup>

We all know that the Buddha was born in a small kingdom in the foothills of the Himalayas over two thousand years ago. Within 500 years of his Mahaparinirvana (महापरिनिर्वाण), his teaching has spread far beyond the confines of India. How did the teaching of one man influence Asia so profoundly? What was the role of Buddhism in the geography of ideas and was Buddhism in Asia the vanguard of globalization? 'Yes', could be the emphatic answer. One may call it Sri Lankan (Sinhalese) or Thai or Myanmar or Chinese or Korean or Japanese Buddhism. These are the adjectives added to the original Indian Buddhism which can never be challenged. The original Indian Buddhist ethos has assimilated the native culture and practice of that geographical area where it has reached. Hence the title of the conference is so relevant as 'Unity in Diversity'. Another important and interesting aspect is that Buddhism flourished and spread all over the world; not based on bloodshed or on the path of war, but purely based on 'Universal Compassion', true to Buddha's saying, "O Monks, keep moving (for the propagation of Dhamma धम्म), for the welfare of many, for happiness of many."<sup>2</sup>

All civilizations whether primitive, ancient, medieval or modern have in the course of their development produced cultures. In the name of culture they have created religion,

philosophy, art and architecture, language and literature, and other fine arts like music and dance, customs, codes of ethics and behaviour, and laws. It is by examining a civilization's cultural contributions to the world that we can gain some idea and appreciation of its achievements.

Every civilization's religion too, in the course of its history contributes something to the world in general and to the world of art and architecture in particular. Religious beliefs, ideas and ideals are sometimes given visual expression in the form of art and architecture and sometimes are expressed in the form of literature as well. In a sense art and architecture provide mirrors to reflect a civilization's religion. In this respect Buddhism is no exception.

To contribute means to give. What Buddhism has given to the world is not only a profound analysis of and a practical solution for the problem of human suffering but also a monumental and rich legacy to the world of art and architecture. Much of this legacy is visible even today in its homeland of India and in much of the Southeast and Eastern world. The Indian legacy of Buddhism spread and expanded the cultural tradition of South, Southeast and East Asian countries, mainly because of the geographical position.

Buddhism spread both by sea route and by land route. According to me the kind of Buddhism that spread via sea route to South and Southeast Asian countries is Theravada (थेरवाद) and Mahayana (महायान) Buddhism spread to East Asian countries via land route known as Silk Route. All this was possible because of the conducive geographical position of Bharat (India).

Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Shastri writes, "The Indian Ocean is not a closed basin like the Mediterranean Sea; on the South it opens on an infinite expanse of water. Yet the prevalence of currents and of periodical winds conducive to navigation has maintained here, since very early times, a system of exchanges in which the African coast, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, Insulinda, Indo-China, and beyond it, China and even Korea and Japan, continuously gave and received their quotas. And in this system, India held a privileged, if not a preponderant place by the advantage of her situation and the great length of her coasts; she is the centre towards which the many lines of this system converge. Doubtless, the documents are rare for the ancient period; but the race which carried civilization by the sea to Burma, (present Myanmar) to Siam ( present Thailand) to Cambodia, Indo-China and Java ... was a race of navigation."<sup>3</sup>

He adds, "On the landward side again India was equally active in communication with

China. The route taken by Fa-hein, and Yuan Chwang was followed by many others, and trade was at least as good an incentive to this intercourse as religion; I-tsing has preserved a record of sixty of his contemporaries who visited India for religious study, but we have no account of the mercantile intercourse of the same period.”<sup>4</sup>

As the history goes, King Ashoka was the pioneer to send his daughter Sanghamitra and son Mahendra as early as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to Sri Lanka for the spread of his Silaparakka Dhamma (सीलपरक्कधम्म) which applies to every individual, a group in a society, a nation and so on. The ethical character of an individual makes the country prosperous. This ethical character, gaining which or failing which results in its fruit (effect). This core philosophy of ‘Inter Dependence’ (Dependent Origination – Patichchasamuppada पटिच्चसमुप्पाद) is depicted in Jataka (जातक) stories, that is, life of previous births of the Buddha for which the art has given a visual expression for us to live through the experience that applies to every individual, a group in a society, a nation, and so on.

### **Sri Lanka**

I would like to say a few words about my admiration for Abhayagiri, the centre for all the three schools of Buddhism, Hinayana (हीनयान), Mahayana (महायान) and Vajrayana (वज्रयान) where great masters like Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra and others had visited, stayed and proceeded to Java (Indonesia). When we visit Anuradhapura where the sapling of Bodhi (बोधि) Tree was sown thousands of years ago being taken from Bodhagaya, India, we see a massive tree with huge branches. After many centuries, we got the sapling from Anuradhapura to have our Bodhi tree now at Bodhagaya. I can never forget my visit to Sigiriya, a sculptural grandeur, where the gigantic Claws of the Lion (Simha सिंह) beckons us. After climbing the mountain (Giri गिरि), I felt for one second whether I am at Ajanta. The fresco paintings at Sigiriya gracefully smile at us reminding us of Padmapani of Ajanta fresco paintings. I did visit the Temple where Tooth Relic of the Buddha has been preserved with great reverence, little away from Kandy. If one wants to relive the days of Buddhism in its peak, one has to be in Sri Lanka.

### **Cambodia**

Angkor Wat is a temple which I have been longing to visit right from my college days. The dream was fulfilled after I became the Chairman of this institute. The reflection of

Angkor Wat in the river Mekong, at sunrise and sunset, is a sight to behold. I understand that King Srindravarman in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century decided to convert the official religion of the empire from Hindu to Buddhist. Angkor was converted from Hindu to Theravada (थेरवाद) Buddhism, which continues till today. One can observe the assimilated trend in this massive sculpture where scenes from Ramayana (रामायण) and Kurukshetra war of Mahabharata (महाभारत) are depicted on the side parapets where the huge standing Buddha-s are in the midst of the hall surrounded by Apsara-s (अप्सरा) on the walls.

### **Borobudur**

This is one of the greatest Buddhist Monuments that I have visited and has been a memorable experience for me. Prof. Timbul from Gajamada University accompanied me and explained about each base of that huge monument which took more than 80 years to complete. I was highly impressed with the architectural structure with the reliefs and the textual sources which were explained to me. I was very much curious to know more about the hidden base where the different Niraya-s (निरय hell) are depicted showing in such a detail with reference to the kind of hell for a particular sin being committed by the individual. As we climb with great difficulty reaching the fourth gallery seeing the Meru depicted at such a height, one can understand the very teaching of the Buddha. Passing through the depiction of Jataka-s (जातक) and Avadana-s (अवदान), I remembered Professor de Casparis who suggested that Borobudur is a symbolic representation of the more standard ten-fold path described in the Dashabhumika Sutra (दशभूमिकसूत्र). I was also told that this massive Stupa (स्तूप) is the representation of three spheres of Buddhist cosmology, the Kamadhatu (कामधातु), the Rupadhatu (रूपधातु) and the Arupadhatu (अरूपधातु).<sup>5</sup> I felt so humble and small in front of this huge Buddhist monument and to realize how the teachings of the Buddha had not only influenced the life of the people of that time but how the ruling dynasty had given importance to show its reverence by patronizing Buddhism. The great teachings of the Buddha expressed through literary sources had been depicted so well in the galleries of this Stupa (स्तूप).

### **China – Dazu Rock**

This visit is a memorable one for me. Dazu Rock is in Szechuan province, Chengdu. The steep hillsides of the Dazu area contain an exceptional series of rock carvings dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They are remarkable for their aesthetic quality,

their rich diversity of content, both secular and religious, and the light that they shed on everyday life in China during this period. They provide outstanding evidence of the harmonious synthesis of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. The Dazu Rock Carvings are a magnificent set of Buddhist sculptures carved in stone cliffs in Dazu. I climbed this rock with great difficulty but my efforts were fruitful when I saw the sculpture of Avalokiteshvara with thousand hands. I bought the replica of this image being completely carried away by the serenity of the look on her face. I was told that in East Asian countries, Avalokiteshvara is known as the female Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व), Kuan-yin in Chinese and Kwannon in Japanese. Though I visited many other Buddhist Temples in China at Beijing as well as at Shanghai, this visit to Dazu rock carvings is the best of my experiences.

## **Japan**

Though I had visited Japan many times as part of my business, my association with Buddhist Centre as the Chairman made my visit to Japan a unique one. Visit to Todaiji temple at Nara, seeing one of the tallest Buddhist images and the big bell that is there, makes one feel being greeted to the world of Japanese culture. I owe my memorable experience during my visit to Japan to unforgettable Professors, namely, Prof. Ichijo Ogawa, President, Otani University, Prof. Yoritomi Motohiroa, President, Shuchin University, Kyoto and of course Prof. Shoshu Hiraoka who was responsible for my entry into the world of Japanese culture as preserved in Kyoto, and the Buddhist assimilated culture as disseminated from India by an Indian Sojo Bodhisena in 8<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## **Conclusion**

I thank you all for listening patiently to whatever I wanted to share with you of my experiences more as a layman and not as a learned scholar. But I have to admit one thing that listening to scholars gives me the greatest opportunity to learn more. Once again I thank you all and look forward to the academic sessions that are to be followed.

Domo Arigato Gozaimasu!!

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Endnotes:

- 1 Anguttara Nikaya, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1995, p. 131
- 2 चरथ, भिक्खवे, चारिकं बहुजनहिताय बहुजनसुखाय ...  
charatha, bhikkhave, charikam bahujanahitaya bahujanasukhaya...  
Dighanikaya, Vol. II, Mahavaggapali, Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1993,  
p. 35
- 3 Sastri Nilakanta K.A., Foreign Notices of South India, From Megasthenes To Ma Huan,  
Madras University Historical Series 14, Madras, 1939, p. 1
- 4 Ibid., p. 2
- 5 Borobudur, History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument, ed. by Louis Gomez and  
Hiram W. Woodward Jr., Berkley Buddhist Studies Series, University of California, USA,  
1981, p. 9

# Borobudur Monument

*Delivered in* : the International Conference on Rediscovering of the Hidden Base of Borobudur Monument

*organized by* : Department of Culture and Tourism, The National Research and Development Center of Archaeology Government of Indonesia  
at Yogyakarta, Indonesia

1 July 2008

# Borobudur Monument

**T**HIS is my fifth visit to Borobudur. Every time I look at this giant monument, I feel overwhelmed with joy to see how Buddhism with its teaching in the form of practical philosophy and art has reached Indonesia.

I begin with the saying of the great Archaeologist Prof. Dr. N. J. Krom<sup>1</sup>:

“The grandeur of Borobudur is something immense, sphinx-like, incomprehensible and yet so fascinating. It overpowers with a sense of our own incapacity to give a description. Its enigmas are too many and too great for us to solve, and yet it exercises such a powerful charm, lays such a hold on the mind that we are irresistibly compelled to use all our powers to discover something of its mysterious being.” Now to come back here and to talk on Borobudur is something which is very close to my heart because of its giant size and its marvellous preservation of the teaching of the Buddha in a structural form.

## **The Manner in which Buddhism Spread**

The expansion of Buddhism throughout most of Asia was peaceful and occurred in several ways. Shakyamuni Buddha set the precedent. Being a teacher by nature, he traveled to nearby kingdoms to share his insights with those who were receptive and interested. Likewise, he instructed his monks to go forth in the world and expound his teachings. Neither did he ask the monks to denounce other religions, nor appeal people to give up their own religion and convert to a new one, for he was not seeking to establish his own

religion. He was merely trying to help others overcome the unhappiness and suffering that they were creating for themselves because of their lack of understanding. Later generations of followers were inspired by Buddha's example and shared with others his methods that they found useful in their lives. This is how what is now called 'Buddhism' spread far and wide.

Sometimes the process evolved organically. For example, when Buddhist merchants visited and settled in different lands, some members of the local population naturally developed interest in these foreigners' beliefs, as with the introduction of Islam to Indonesia and Malaysia. Such a process occurred with Buddhism in the oasis states along the Silk Route in Central Asia during two centuries before and after the Christian era.

As local rulers and their people learned more about this Indian religion, they invited monks from the merchants' native regions as advisors or teachers and, in this manner, eventually adopted the Buddhist faith. Another organic method was through the slow cultural assimilation of a conquering people, such as the Greeks into the Buddhist society of Gandhara in present day central Pakistan, after the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

### **Borobudur**

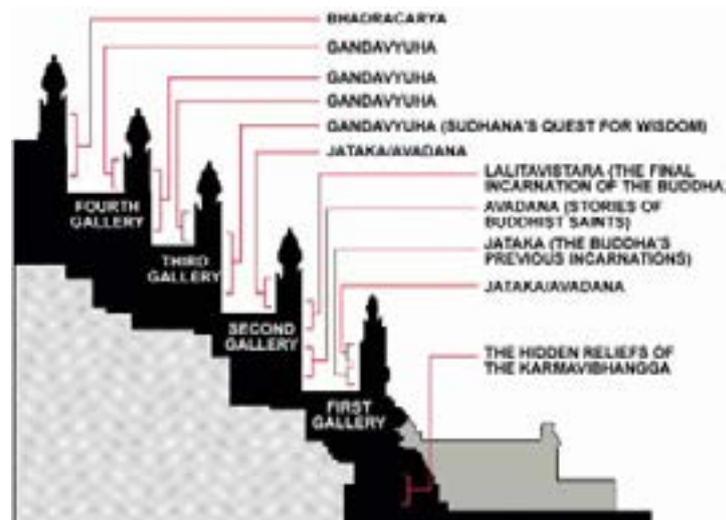
It is a well known fact that Borobudur is associated with the patronage of the Buddhist Shailendra royal family, a short-lived ruling lineage that encouraged an efflorescence of Buddhist monuments and sculpture during their approximately 50 years lordship in the area of Central Java. Borobudur then abruptly disappears from Javanese history. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch colonial scholars and archaeologists led a modest restoration of the then deteriorating monument. This was succeeded by a more extensive 10 year restoration project – which was completed in 1983 – under the auspices of the Indonesian Government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).<sup>2</sup>

Borobudur may be regarded as a monumental sculpture. It also represents a master work of sculptural imagery. There are 1460 panels of narrative reliefs, the base and four square terraces of the monument.

The reliefs of Borobudur are inspired from the descriptions found in Mahakarmavibhanga Sutra (महाकर्मविभङ्गसूत्र), Lalitavistara (ललितविस्तर), Jataka-s (जातक), and Avadana-s (अवदान), and Avatamsaka (अवतंसक) text of the Gandavyuha (गण्डव्यूह) ending in the Bhadrachari.

These reliefs represent the multiple stages leading to Vairochana. Karmavibhanga (कर्मविभङ्ग) represents the most fundamental level of the operation of Karmic cause and effect. The Jataka-s (जातक) and Avadana-s (अवदान) are the perennial efforts of the Buddha-s and Bodhisattva-s to liberate beings from the bonds of Karmic causation. Lalitavistara (ललितविस्तर) is the immortal story of the Buddha Shakyamuni's discovery of the noble eightfold path from the inexorable law of Karma (कर्म), its cessation by the path leading up to Buddha Shakyamuni to its sophistication in Avatamsaka (अवतंसक) (Gandavyuha गण्डव्यूह) where Sudhana – the eternal pilgrim is exhorted by Manjushri to resort to Samantabhadra (Bhadrachari), and transcending them all, is the Supreme Buddha (Jinapati) also known as Vairochana who becomes Abhisambuddha.

The base and the four square terraces of the monument<sup>3</sup>-



Practically all panels have been identified and their sources may be found in various Sutra-s (सूत्र teachings of the Buddha) and Buddhist texts; however, no extant recension of this literature corresponds to Borobudur's interpretation of these stories. The base of the monument is sculptured with 160 reliefs illustrating the Mahakarmavibhanga (महाकर्मविभङ्ग), or 'The Great Classification of Action / Law of Cause and Effect', which describes the rewards for those who perform specific meritorious deeds, as well as the Buddhist hells meant for those guilty of a Buddhist sin.<sup>4</sup> This area is also known as the Hidden foot, as series of large undecorated stone blocks completely cover these narratives.

In 1814, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the then British Lieutenant Governor of Java, sent a survey team to investigate incredible rumours about a great ruined sanctuary located at the geographic center of the island of Java off the southern coast of the Southeast Asian mainland. It took six weeks for a crew of two hundred men to clear away the soil, volcanic ash and vegetation under which the monument had been buried. The discovery turned out to be one of the greatest archaeological finds of the modern era.

Upon clearing the site, the discoverers were able to discern the foundations of the stepped pyramid that serve as the framework for a series of interior corridors. These galleries collectively present a total of 1,460 narrative bas relief carvings, which if placed end-to-end would span a distance of over 3 kilometers. In addition, the gallery walls support a total of 432 cave-like niches, each of which once contained a statue of the Buddha. At the apex of the pyramid, the explorers uncovered three round terrace platforms – each of which supports a series of bell-shaped chambers called Stupa-s (स्तूप). Hidden within each of these 72 structures is the statue of Buddha displaying the symbolic hand gesture known as the Turning of the Wheel of the Law (Dharmachakrapravartana धर्मचक्रप्रवर्तन).

Representing the existence of the universe, Borobudur perfectly reflects the Buddhist cosmology, which divides the universe into three intermingled separate levels. The three levels are Kamadhatu (कामधातु world of desire), Rupadhatu (रूपधातु world of forms), and Arupadhatu (अरूपधातु world of formlessness). The hidden base of Borobudur was originally the first level, which contains the gallery of Kamadhatu (कामधातु) level. It is thought that during construction Borobudur experienced a landfall that threatened the entire building. To prevent the whole monument from collapsing, the Kamadhatu (कामधातु) level was closed and made into a new base that holds Borobudur steady. This level of Kamadhatu (कामधातु) pictures the world of passion and the inevitable laws of Karma (कर्म). The first 117 panels show various actions leading to one and the same result, while the other remaining 43 panels demonstrate the many results that follow one single action. At least 160 relief panels were carved around this level, based on the manuscript of Karmavibhanga (कर्मविभङ्ग). What is left of these can be seen in the Southeast corner of this level.<sup>5</sup>

I always feel wondered about this giant size monument. Who was responsible for this monument and why did he build it?

Built during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, Borobudur was probably the largest and most elaborate Buddhist monument in the world. But who exactly was the builder of Borobudur and

what was the intention to build a monument of such immense size and stature?

Borobudur was built during a period when Buddhism was just being introduced to Java and beginning to make its reputation in that region. One puzzling point is whether Borobudur was actually initiated at the early age when Buddhism had reached Java and not when it was most popular and prevalent in Java. This is very unusual as most of the monuments were normally built during the 'golden period' of whatever period or era they were trying to commemorate. So what was actually the intention of building Borobudur, a monument of such immense size and stature when it was not to commemorate Buddhism in its grandest era in Java? Or did the person who built Borobudur already foresee that Buddhism would eventually one day be dominant in Java? Was the builder simply a devoted Buddhist who wanted to use Borobudur as a means to further spread and strengthen Buddhism? For whatever intentions, it was certain that Borobudur had acted as a timeline to witness the rise and fall of Buddhism in Java.

Who exactly was the builder of Borobudur? Is the person who built the Borobudur also the designer or architect of this monument? The answer is difficult to establish as Borobudur was actually built over a period of about 70 years and it was also over the course of the rise and fall of various rulers. The design of the monument was most probably changed many times as different rulers reigned during this period. As a result the intention of the monument could have also changed several times during its construction.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism was less popular than Hinduism in ancient Java, but it was closely related to the Shailendra-s, an influential elite family who claimed themselves to be the 'Lords of Mountains'. Although it is difficult to establish which ruler ordered the construction of Borobudur, it can be safely deduced that the initial stages of works are by the Shailendra-s. From the periods of the stages of construction of Borobudur, it can be roughly deduced which stages of construction were carried out during a particular ruler's reign. The initiative of the first period of Borobudur appeared to be contemporary of the reign of Vishnu, a Shailendra king during 780 A.D. The second and third stage seemed to be carried out during Indra's reign, Vishnu's successor. The fourth stage of no great importance under the rule of Samaratunga marked the decline of the Shailendra dynasty and the fifth stage around 833 A.D. was carried out by the Sanjaya-s who were initially under the Shailendra's reign but later freed of its control. The last two stages showed a profound change in conception, not only architecturally but also doctrinally.

Now having known which stages of construction of the Borobudur were built by whom, the motives and intentions of building Borobudur could now be studied. Why did the Javanese choose to devote such a major portion of their resources and time to build this monument? Is it entirely for religious purposes; or to state that the area around Borobudur was a prosperous farming area; or to communicate with ordinary people or with the gods; or to fulfill the ruler's ambitious aim? Could the answers be found in the five stages of construction? Could the reliefs carved on Borobudur reflect the intentions?

The clearest intention seen is in the religious context. Built at the beginnings of influence of Buddhism in Java, the Shailendra ruler, a Buddhist monarch probably desired Borobudur to serve as a means to spread and strengthen Buddhism in his empire. It was also to be a tool to educate his people on the philosophy of life. In a way, it strengthened his role as a Buddhist king. Even the reliefs carved on the hidden base and the first level gallery reveal this intention. The bas reliefs depicted a version of a Sanskrit work known as the Mahakarmavibhanga (महाकर्मविभङ्ग) or 'Great Classification of Action.'

The reliefs depicted men and women performing both good and evil deeds and then being rewarded in heaven or punished in hell for their actions. These served as moral lessons for the people who visited Borobudur. The reliefs on the first gallery showed the Lalitavistara (ललितविस्तर), telling the life story of Buddha, from the birth, his early life, his marriage, his four encounters of life, death, sickness and suffering, and his enlightenment. This shows that Borobudur was not a monument solely for the worship of the Buddha but also a means of educating people and teaching them to become Bodhisattva-s (बोधिसत्त्व).

However, it could not be denied that the construction of Borobudur clearly reflected the degree of prosperity and civilization in that empire during that time. To build such a huge monument, a great deal of material and manpower were needed. This showed how rich the empire was, producing enough surplus food and labour to support this great deal of activities that did not generate any economic benefits. This also showed that the empire had a talented population and was a highly civilized society. There must be many skilled craftsmen to produce such an impressive and beautiful monument. There must also be well-organized institutions to coordinate such an ambitious and complex project. Although the design and material support could have come from the ruler, there must be people to offer their labour. But the question remains whether these people did it willingly to earn religious merit or were they compelled by the institutions?

Borobudur could also be a platform for the ruler to communicate with his people or

the gods. As mentioned earlier, the relief-carvings on the galleries served as a means to educate the people and convey certain messages that the king would want his people to know. But what about communicating with the gods? Ancient kings of Java claimed to be able to call upon gods to bring about fertility of the soil and to conquer their enemies. Does the Borobudur work like the Tian Tan in Peking where the ruler would make a pilgrimage to the holy site to pray for fertility, prosperity and welfare of the empire?

And what about satisfying the ambitious aim of the ruler? Surely a monument of this size would confer on its builder a great amount of prestige for having the wealth and capabilities to embark on such a complex and immense project. However, in this case, the possibility of building Borobudur to satisfy the ruler's personal desire to be the object of hero-worship seemed slightly less as there were hardly any vivid evidences or carvings that were deliberately left so that the future descendants know who initiated or built this project. Neither were there many historical records about stating clearly who built it. It was very much like the medieval art whereby the maker or artist is not supposed to be known as the art is used solely for the celebration of God. However, it cannot be ruled out that the later rulers who took over this project had such desires. This can be seen from the change of relief carvings on the galleries of Borobudur. On the second, third and fourth gallery, carvings were attributed to a single text, Gandavyuha (गण्डव्यूह). It was about the pilgrim of a young man, Sudhana, a rich merchant's son who had chosen the path of a Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व). Striving after supreme wisdom, and seeking teachers, he visits a long series of sages. This text actually had taken up the most relief panels in the entire Borobudur. This showed that this text held a very special importance to the Borobudur builders. But is this text chosen to remind pilgrims that they are like Sudhana seeking for wisdom and enlightenment, or is Sudhana seen as the king who is seeking wisdom and enlightenment to become a better leader to lead his people into a life without sufferings, like a Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व)?

Borobudur was designed to be modelled like a mountain. It was supposed to symbolize the cosmological Mount Meru. But it so happened that the Shailendra-s also called themselves 'Lords of the Mountains'. So, was Borobudur modelled after a mountain to symbolize Mount Meru or was it designed for the hero-worship of the Shailendra-s?

And what was the intention of building Borobudur after the Sanjaya-s took over the construction? Why was there such a stark contrast in building form and architectural details between the galleries and the circular platforms for the Stupa-s (स्तूप)? The galleries were squares in plan and were very elaborately decorated with carvings. But towards the

summit, the plans became circular and were very plain and simple. Why did the later builders not follow the same architectural language as the base of Borobudur? There were beliefs that the plain circular platforms for the Stupa-s (स्तूप) were to symbolize Formlessness and Enlightenment. As such the design was the way it is now. But could it be that the Sanjaya ruler faced pressure from his people to complete the construction of Borobudur? After all the Sanjaya-s were Hindu devotees. Probably they ordered the last stage of construction to be plain in contrast to the Shailendra's design.

In Borobudur, who was the hero to be worshipped here? It could be the Buddha or the kings of the different period of constructions. Probably Borobudur itself is the hero we are looking for. Many archaeologists and historians had tried to come up with a single concept to explain the design and construction of the Borobudur. But is a single concept possible for such a huge monument which had spanned a period of 70 years that underwent the changing reigns of different rulers? Would the initial concept that had inspired the building of Borobudur be able to continue and not undergo changes and evolutions with time? So, is the question of a single concept a relevant one?

However, whatever could be the reason to build the world's biggest monument, I humbly accept the reason that could possibly be as elucidated by the Buddha when he spoke to Shuka, the young Brahmin. According to the Buddha, there are eighteen benefits of building a Tathagata Stupa (तथागत-स्तूप) which are as follows:

“One will be born as the child of a great king.

One will have a noble body.

One will become beautiful and very attractive.

One will have sharp sense faculties.

One will be powerful and famous.

One will have a great entourage of servants.

One will become a leader of men.

One will be a support to all.

One will be renowned in the ten directions.

One will be able to express oneself in words and verses extensively.

One will receive offerings from men and gods.

One will possess many riches.

One will obtain the kingdom of a universal monarch.

One will have long life – (as this greatest monument stands majestically till date).

One's body will be like a collection of Vajra-s (वज्र).

One's body will be endowed with the major marks and the minor signs (of a Buddha).

One will take rebirth in the three higher realms.

One will swiftly attain complete Nirvana (निर्वाण).”

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Endnotes:

- 1 Krom N. J., Archaeological Description of Borobudur (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1927), Vol. I, The Hague: Nijhoff, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, p. 108
- 2 Cecelia Levin, Borobudur, Central Java, Harvard University, Boston, pp. 185-186
- 3 The picture is taken from Miksic John, Borobudur, Golden Tales of the Buddhas, Shambala Publications, Boston, 1990, p. 43
- 4 Kudo Noriyuki, Mahakarmavibhanga, ed. by Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica VII, The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soko University, Tokyo, 2004, p. 4
- 5 Louis Gomez and Hiram W. Woodward Jr., Borobudur, History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument, Berkley Buddhist Studies Series, University of California, 1981, USA, p. 104

# **Buddhism and Modern Trend**

*Delivered in* : the occasion of the Release of Sanskrit CD

at Colombo, Sri Lanka

9 December 2008

## Buddhism and Modern Trend

I feel immensely happy and privileged to be here today in this wonderful historical country Sri Lanka which is a great centre for the Sinhala Buddhist Culture, one of the greatest cultures in the world.

It is my privilege and honour to be a part of this programme of Book Release on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sri Lankan Association of Buddhist Studies (SLABS) International Conference on 'Buddhism and Modern Trend'. I have very fond memories of Prof. Asanga Tilakratne participating in the International Conference held at Somaiya Vidyavihar Campus in 2002 and Prof. Kalupahana in the recent conference held in 2008. I came to know about him and his erudite scholarship in the panel discussion on 'Buddhism – A New Paradigm for World Peace and Social Order'. When he presented me his book 'A Source Book of Early Buddhist Philosophy' in 2008, I came to know about his interest in Nagarjuna, and also about his book on 'Nagarjuna- The Philosophy of Middle Way'. I really feel so elevated with the feeling to be here at Anuradhapura which is connected with our country through the Bodhi tree sapling. Abhayagiri is the centre of all the three schools of Buddhism, namely, Shrivakayana (श्रावकयान) (or Theravada थेरवाद), Mahayana (महायान) and Tantrayana (तन्त्रयान). Prof. Kalupahana in his work on 'Nagarjuna's Moral Philosophy and Sinhala Buddhism' has incorporated Nagarjuna's Suhrullekha (सुहल्लेख A letter to his friend and patron King Gautamiputra Satakarni) with an anthology in Sinhalese. The association between India and Sri Lanka goes back to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. of Ashoka's reign. Being part of this programme, the same ambience has been created by the scholars of Buddhism from all parts of the world assembled here. I also record my

reverence to the Minister of Agriculture, Government of Sri Lanka, for presiding over this function.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Buddhism has been forced to respond to new challenges and opportunities that cut across the regional, religious and cultural patterns which characterized the Buddhist world in the pre-modern period. A number of Buddhist countries were subjected to Western rule, and even those that were not, felt the heavy pressure of Western religious, political, economic and cultural influence. Modern rationalistic and scientific modes of thinking, notions of liberal democracy and socialism and patterns of economic organization were introduced and became also important elements in the thought and life of Buddhists and non-Buddhists in these countries. In this situation the Buddhists' response was twofold. They came to associate Buddhism with the religious and cultural identity that they sought to preserve and reassert in the face of Western domination. In addition they sought to initiate reforms that would make Buddhism a more appealing and effective force in the modern world.

### **The Buddhist Concern about the Challenges**

Western domination manifested itself specifically in both the religious and in the religio-political sphere. In the former, the Buddhists used a variety of measures to meet the challenge posed by the presence of Western Christian missionaries often adopting modern Christian practices such as the establishment of Sunday schools, the distribution of religious texts, and the like. They also attempted to strengthen the Buddhist cause through the initiation of Buddhist missions, including missions to the West, and through ecumenical cooperation among various Buddhist groups. Organizations such as the World Fellowship of Buddhists (founded in 1950) and the World Buddhist Sangha Council (1966) were established to promote cooperation among Buddhists from all countries and denominations.

In the religio-political sphere, many Buddhist leaders including many politically active monks sought to associate Buddhism with various nationalist movements that were struggling to achieve political, economic and cultural independence. These leaders and the nationalist movements with which they associated themselves have been successful (for example, in Thailand), consequently Buddhism has retained a central role in political life. Where they were superseded by other forces (as in China), Buddhism has been relegated to the periphery.

Three emphases have been especially important in the various reform movements. First, many Buddhist leaders have put forward a highly rationalized, protestant-type interpretation of Buddhism that deemphasizes the supernormal and ritualized aspects of the tradition and focuses on the supposed continuity between Buddhism and modern science and on the centrality of ethics and morality. This interpretation, according to its proponents, represents a recovery of the true Buddhism of the Buddha.

A second, closely related emphasis that has been prominent among modern Buddhist reformers represents Buddhism as a form of religious teaching and practice that provides a basis for social, political and economic life in the modern world. In some cases the focus has been on Buddhist ideas that supposedly provide a religious grounding for an international order supporting world peace. Other reformers have presented Buddhism as a basis for a modern democratic order or have advocated a Buddhist form of socialism.

Finally, Buddhist reformers have initiated and supported movements that give the Buddhist laity (and in some cases Buddhist women) a much stronger role than they had in the past. In the Theravada (थेरवाद) world, lay societies have been formed and lay oriented meditation movements have enjoyed great success. In East Asia an anticlerical, lay oriented trend that was evident even before the modern period has culminated in the formation and rapid expansion of new, thoroughly laicized Buddhist movements, particularly in Japan.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

The status of contemporary Buddhist communities and the kinds of challenges those communities face differ radically from area to area. Five different kinds of situations can be identified.

Firstly, there are a number of countries where previously well-established Buddhist communities have suffered severe setbacks that have curtailed their influence and seriously sapped their vitality. This kind of situation prevails primarily in countries ruled by communist governments where Buddhism has, for many decades, been subjected to intense pressures that have undercut its institutional power and weakened its influence on large segments of the population. This has happened in the Mongol areas of Central Asia, in China (outside of Tibet), in North Korea and to a lesser extent in Vietnam.

Secondly, there are places where well-established Buddhist communities have suffered

similar setbacks but have retained the loyalty of large segments of the population. Perhaps the most vivid example is Tibet, where the Chinese communists have implemented anti-Buddhist policies, which despite their brutality, have failed to break the bond between Buddhism and the Tibetan sense of identity. In Kampuchea and Laos, similarly, communist rule (including even the reign of terror imposed by the Pol Pot regime that controlled Kampuchea from 1975 to 1978) does not seem to have broken people's loyalty to Buddhism.

Thirdly, there are situations in which the Buddhist community has retained a more or less accepted position as the leading religious force and has continued to exert a strong influence on political, economic and social life. This is the case in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, where Buddhism is the dominant religion among the Sinhalese and Burmese majorities, and in Thailand, where more than 90 percent of the population is counted as Buddhist. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar ethnic conflict, authoritarian rule (especially in Myanmar) and economic stagnation have resulted in political instability that has had a disruptive effect on the local Buddhist communities. In Thailand, however, Buddhism has a firm position within a relatively stable and rapidly modernizing society.

The fourth type of situation is one in which well-developed Buddhist traditions are operating with a considerable degree of freedom and effectiveness in societies where Buddhism plays a more circumscribed role. This situation prevails in several parts of the Pacific Rim countries, including South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, and to a lesser extent in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where Buddhism is practised by significant numbers of overseas Chinese. The primary example, however, is Japan, where Buddhism has continued to play an important role. In the highly modernized society that has developed in Japan, many deeply rooted Buddhist traditions such as Shingon, Tendai, the Pure Land schools, and Zen have persisted and have been adapted to changing conditions. At the same time, new Buddhist sects such as Rissho-Kosei-Kai and Soka-gakkai have gained millions of converts in Japan and throughout the world.

Finally, new Buddhist communities have developed in areas where Buddhism disappeared long ago or never existed at all. Thus in India where Buddhism had been virtually extinct since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, new Buddhist societies have been formed by Indian intellectuals, new Buddhist settlements have been established by Tibetan refugees, and a significant Buddhist community has been founded by converts from the lower strata of the society. In the West (particularly but not exclusively in the United States), important Buddhist communities have been established by immigrants from East and Southeast

Asia. Buddhist influences have penetrated into many aspects of western culture, and communities of Buddhist followers are active.

For more than two millennia, Buddhism has been a powerful religious, political and social force, first in India, its original homeland, and then in many other lands. It remains a powerful religious, political and cultural force in many parts of the world today.

### **Bodhi Tree at Anuradhapura**

Right from early history, we know that spread of Buddhism outside India was of a great welcome. Dissemination of Buddhism from the land of its birth, was not at the cost of bloodshed or war but with its encompassing philosophy of universal love, non-violence and compassion.

Buddhist tradition recounts that while the Buddha was yet alive, in order that people might make their offerings in the name of the Buddha when he was away on pilgrimage, he sanctioned the planting of a seed from the Bodhi tree in Bodhagaya in front of the gateway of Jetavana Monastery near Shravasti. Moggallana (Maudgalyayana in Sanskrit) also known as Mahamoggallana (Mahamaudgalyayana in Sanskrit), played a major role in planting the first Bodhi tree. He was one of the closest disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni, a contemporary of famous Arhat-s (अर्हत्) such as Subhuti Sariputta, and Mahakassapa, who was considered as the second of the two foremost disciples of the Buddha, together with Sariputta.

Moggallana was the most accomplished of all the Buddha's disciples in the various supernatural powers. These abilities included being able to use mind-reading for detecting lies from truths, transporting himself from his body into the various realms of existence, speaking with ghosts and gods. He was also able to do things like walking through walls, walking on water, flying through the air, and moving with a speed comparable to the speed of light. For planting the tree, he took a fruit from the tree as it dropped from its stalk, before it reached the ground. It was planted in a golden jar by Anathapindika with great pomp and ceremony. A sapling immediately sprouted forth, fifty cubits high, and in order to consecrate it the Buddha spent one night under it, rapt in meditation. This tree, because it was planted under the direction of Ananda, came to be known as the Ananda Bodhi.

According to the Mahavamsa (महावंस), the Sri Maha Bodhi in Sri Lanka was planted in 288 B.C. making it the oldest verified specimen of any angiosperm. It is said, "In this year

(the twelfth year of King Ashoka's reign) the right branch of the Bodhi tree was brought by Sanghamitra to Anuradhapura and placed by Devanampiyatissa (देवानांपियतिस्स) in the Mahameghavana." The Buddha, on his death bed, had resolved five things. One of it was that the branch which should be taken to Ceylon should detach from the tree by itself. From Gaya, such a branch was taken to Pataliputra; thence to Tamralipti (Tamluk), where it was placed in a ship and taken to Jambukola, across the sea; finally it arrived at Anuradhapura, halting on the way at Tivakka. Those who assisted the king at the ceremony of the planting of the Tree were the nobles of Kajaragama, of Chandanagama and of Tivakka.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Trees of Previous Buddha-s**

According to the Mahavamsa (महावंस), branches from the Bodhi trees of all the Buddha-s were planted in Ceylon on the spot where the sacred Bodhi tree stands today in Anuradhapura. The branch of Kakusandha's tree was brought by a nun called Ruchananda, Kongamana's by Kantakananda (or Kanakadatta), and Kassapa's by Sudhamma.

The term Bodhi is in both Pali and Sanskrit and it is traditionally translated as 'enlightenment'. The word 'Buddha' means one who has achieved Bodhi. Bodhi is also frequently (and more accurately) translated as 'awakening'.

Bodhi is an abstract noun formed from the verbal root Budh (to awake, become aware, notice, know or understand), corresponding to the verbs Bujjhati (बुज्जति) (Pali) and Bodhati (बोधति) or Budhyate (बुध्यते) (Sanskrit).

In early Buddhism, Bodhi carried a meaning synonymous to Nirvana (निर्वाण), using only some different metaphors to describe the experience, which implied the extinction of Raga (राग greed), Dvesha (द्वेष hate) and Moha (मोह delusion). In the later school of Mahayana (महायान) Buddhism, the status of Nirvana (निर्वाण) was downgraded in some scriptures, coming to refer only to the extinction of greed and hate, implying that delusion was still present in one who attained Nirvana (निर्वाण), and that one needed to attain Bodhi to eradicate delusion. Therefore, according to Mahayana (महायान) Buddhism, the Arhat (अर्हत्) has attained only Nirvana (निर्वाण), thus still being subject to delusion, while the Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व) not only achieves Nirvana (निर्वाण) but complete liberation from delusion as well. He thus attains Bodhi and becomes a Buddha. In Theravada Buddhism, Bodhi and Nirvana (निर्वाण) carry the same meaning, that of being freed from greed,

hate and delusion. It should also be noted that in the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra (महापरिनिर्वाणसूत्र) 'Great Nirvana' (निर्वाण) (Maha-Nirvana महानिर्वाण) is equal in all respects to Bodhi and indeed is the state of perfect Buddhahood.

An important development in the Mahayana (महायान) was that it came to separate Nirvana from Bodhi (awakening to the Truth, Enlightenment), and to put a lower value on the former.<sup>2</sup> Originally Nirvana (निर्वाण) and Bodhi refer to the same thing; they merely use different metaphors for the experience. But the Mahayana (महायान) tradition separated them and considered that Nirvana (निर्वाण) referred only to the extinction of craving, passion and hatred, with the resultant escape from the cycle of rebirth. This interpretation ignores the third fire, delusion: the extinction of delusion is of course in the early texts identical with what can be positively expressed as Gnosis, Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

### **Abhayagiri**

This is one of the sites in the sacred city of Anuradhapura, greatest monastic city of the ancient world (437 B.C.- 845 A.D.), presently a World Heritage Site. Abhayagiri monastery is one of the most interesting and atmospheric quarters of Anuradhapura. The sheer scale of the ruins of the monastery is prodigious; the setting scattered amidst beautiful light woodland is magical; a lost city, a memorable sight particularly at the crack of dawn or at dusk.

Establishment of the Monastery in 88 B.C.

The third of Anuradhapura's great monasteries, Abhayagiri lies on the northern side of the city. The great monastery was founded by King Vattagamani Abhaya (Valagambahu) (104-76 B.C.). In 88 B.C. King Valagambahu had lost his throne to an army of marauding Dravidian invaders from South India. Whilst escaping from the city, the king was taunted by a Jain priest of the Giri Monastery, who shouted, "The great black Simhala lion is fleeing". The Indian Jain monk having a Jain hermitage in then capital of Buddhist Lanka itself is an outstanding indication of the religious tolerance of ancient Lanka. In spite of the religious tolerance in the island, the contempt of the Jain monk towards the Sinhalese people and their king brought nothing but the downfall of Jain monastery. The king even while fleeing, vowed to regain his kingdom and build a Buddhist monastery over the Jain hermitage. Fourteen years later, the lion-hearted king rescued his island from the

marauding Dravidian invaders, razed the Jain hermitage to the ground and established a Buddhist Monastery.

### **Creation in Destruction**

King Vattagamani Abhaya named the new Buddhist monastery with a combination of the second part of his own name (meaning fearless as in the Abhaya (अभय), or 'Have No Fear' as in Buddhist Mudra (मुद्रा) of the Buddhist statues) and name of the demolished Jain monastery 'Giri'. Although the king had the building of the Jain monastery wiped off the earth, he resolved to immortalize the name of Jain monastery in a Buddhist monastery. Even in the destruction, the Sinhalese seemed to have a tolerant aspect in their nature.

### **Abhayagiriya Dagoba**

The most striking feature of Abhayagiri is its Dagoba (Stupa स्तूप). In its glorious days, it is believed to have stood around 115 m. tall, only slightly smaller than Jetavana Dagoba. Following a restoration by King Parakramabahu the great, the Dagoba may have stood over 100 m. high. The loss of its pinnacle has now reduced its height to around 70 m. tall. The Dagoba, built over a footprint of the Buddha is 400 m. in circumference bears some similarities to the earlier Thuparama (थूपाराम). Restoration work, which took many long years, is nearing its completion at last.

### **Vahalkada-s (entrances)**

The four entrances of Dagoba are similar in design to those at the Golden Sand Stupa and are in various stages of renovation. The main entrance is flanked by two guardian statues of Padmanihi and Samakanihi, a pair of dwarf attendants of Kubera, the god of wealth. The eastern Vahalkada is flanked by low-relief carvings of classical-looking elephants, bulls and lions, all on their hind legs together with two winged figures looking like a pair of angels. The western Vahalkada (वहलकड) is flanked by delicate floral patterns.

### **The Glory of the Monastery**

Abhayagiri made tremendous progress at a pace to surpass the Mahavihara, the largest

and most influential monastery in Lanka; the area almost became a rival capital. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. it was home to five thousand monks and had become an important source of new Buddhist doctrine and a flourishing centre of artistic activity and philosophical speculation.

### **Deviation from Orthodox Theravada (Hinayana) Tradition**

While still remaining within the Theravada (थेरवाद) tradition, the great monastery adopted some elements of Mahayana (महायान) Buddhism and Tantric Buddhism much to the displeasure of Mahavihara monastery. The Mahayana (महायान) doctrine introduced Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व the Buddha to be) worship, in which the enlightened withholds his opportunity of entering Nirvana (निर्वाण end of suffering in the form of birth and rebirth) in order to help humanity.

### **Reorganization of the Monastery Complex**

Despite their deviation from Theravada (थेरवाद) tradition, the monks of the Abhayagiri sect recognized the monastery complex. All buildings were arranged systematically in concentric squares. An outer enclosure contained the monks' living quarters, refectory, bath-house and latrines. An inner precinct, on a raised platform, contained the Bodhi Tree and the Stupa (स्तूप). During the reign of King Mahasena (276-303 A.D.), the Abhayagiri monks rose to prominence and their precincts flouted palaces, bathing pools and sculpture of the highest artistic standards. However, when the power of this sect declined the monasteries went back to the comfortable informality of their old ways.

### **Conclusion**

Buddhism has given to the world not only a profound analysis of the problem of human suffering and a practical solution for the same, but also a way of life based on morality. Coming from the birth-land of Buddha to the country where Buddhism reached very prominently, I feel, I am following the tradition of the Buddha, who advised his disciples to wander spreading his teachings.

Buddha's teachings are 'The Light of Asia' shining over the world. Today majority of the human race in the world has embraced Buddhism and it has become the way of life for

many around the world.

May Buddha's spiritual heritage teach us how to conserve what we have inherited and to take other's Dukkha (दुःख) seriously forgetting our own!

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Endnotes:

- 1 Ahir D. C., Sri Lankan Buddhism, Sri Satguru Publication, Delhi, 2000, p. 25
- 2 Gombrich Richard F., How Buddhism Began, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 62
- 3 Ibid., p. 67

# Jainism and Ecology

*Delivered in* : the Prize Distribution Ceremony of Essay Competition on Jainism and Ecology

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Centre for Studies in Jainism  
at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

21 November 2007

# Jainism and Ecology

**L**ORD Mahavir represents the Jain tradition of India and that of nonviolence. The teachings of Lord Mahavir have universal and abiding influence even in modern times.

Lord Mahavir in modern parlance may be described as a great environmentalist. The world is facing a global ecological crisis today. The consciousness of humankind towards environment has awakened during last few decades. There are other problems such as global warming, pollution of air, etc. The present crisis of civilization is moral and spiritual. Perhaps, religions of the world may be instrumental in addressing moral dilemmas created by environmental crisis. Jainism advocates philosophy of ecological balance through its principle of non-violence. Mahavir proclaimed: "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, water, fire and air, and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them." Jainism can provide ethical directions. It is worthwhile to note the contribution Jainism has made to the philosophical foundations of sustainable development. It offers physical, moral and spiritual norms for healthy living. It is a system of good acts and attitudes. The latest technology and best of science can be incorporated in the Jain model while reviving the old tradition. It establishes the harmony between individual independence and ecological interdependence.

The view of the Jain-s on nature, her conservation and unity is remarkable. In this connection the Jain declaration on nature needs mention which was presented to His Royal Highness Prince Philip, President of the World-Wildlife Fund for Nature on 23<sup>rd</sup>

October 1990 at Buckingham Palace. This was to mark the formal entry of the Jain faith into the network of conservation and religion. A few key-concepts of Jainism which can lead to environmental conservation are as follows:

1. Non-destruction of life – even the earth, water, air and fire have life.
2. Recognition of right to live – preservation of biodiversity is necessary.
3. Inter-connectedness of living beings – support to programmes that educate others to respect and protect living systems.
4. Jain path of self-purification – observing vows of restraint – Ahimsa (अहिंसा), Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह), etc. It is an individual who by changing himself can change the world.
5. Code of conduct – the five vows.

The five fundamental teachings of Jainism and the five-fold code of conduct outlined in this declaration are deeply rooted in the Jain living ethos in an unbroken continuity across the centuries. They offer the world a time-tested anchor of moral imperatives and a viable route plan for humanity's common goal of holistic environmental protection, peace and harmony in the universe. The Jain code of conduct includes the five vows as its fundamental teachings. These are:

1. To practise non-violence in thought, word and deed.
2. To seek and speak truth.
3. To behave honestly and never to take anything by force or theft.
4. To practise restraint and chastity in thought, word and deed.
5. To practise non-acquisitiveness.

Jain ethics implies self-restraint and avoidance of waste. Wants should be reduced, desires curbed and consumption levels kept within reasonable limits. Using any resource beyond one's needs and misuse of any part of nature is considered as a form of theft. Indeed, the Jain faith goes one radical step further and declares unequivocally that waste and creating pollution are acts of violence.

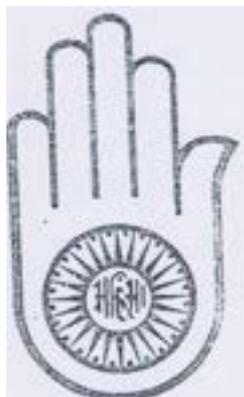
Jainism offers a world-view that in many ways seems readily compatible with core values associated with environmental activism. According to Jainism Ahimsa (अहिंसा) is the remedy for all miseries, sufferings, and cruelties of life. This Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in its manifold

aspects has found a full treatment in the Acharang Sutra (आचाराङ्ग-सूत्र), the earliest text in the Jain canon. Among the small vows prescribed for lay-persons are the following: refraining from movement beyond a limited area in order to avoid all harmful activities beyond that area; restricting movement to even more limited area so as to expand the area of immunity from exploitative activities; refraining from wanton destruction of the environment by thought, word or deed; and limiting the use of consumable and non-consumable goods. Wanton destruction includes five varieties: evil thought of conquest, subjugation, killing, mutilating, hurting, and so on; evil counsel to torture animals and indulge in harmful activities; negligent conduct, such as recklessly cutting trees, digging in flooding fields, or burning forests; applying lethal weapons; and malicious indoctrination. In brief, Jain ethics insists on maximizing beneficial interaction and minimizing the harmful interference with nature.

Ahimsa (अहिंसा) in Jainism is a universal law, a rational maxim designed to govern all of one's actions. Contemporary environmentalists in the developed world, particularly in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emphasize the interconnectedness of life as the foundation for developing an environmental ethic. On the policy level, the Endangered Species Act of the United States extends protection to even the smallest aspect of life, emphasizing the micro-phase as the key to ecosystem protection.

Jain philosophy of environment may be compared with Deep Ecology. Hopefully Jain world-view and environmental ethics may inspire an effective ecological vision and eco-friendly lifestyle.

The Jain Declaration on Nature<sup>1</sup>



परस्परपग्रहो जीवानाम् । parasparopagraho jivanam/ <sup>2</sup>

In this symbol, the hand signifies friendly re-assurance and the moral responsibility of every individual. The word Ahimsa (अहिंसा) appears in the centre of the palm. Parasparopagraho jivanam (परस्परपग्रहो जीवानाम्) means, “All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence.”

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Endnote:

- 1 The symbol is taken from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism)
- 2 Tattvartha Sutra V.21

# **Religious and Ethical Foundations of Family and Social Life in Hinduism and Christianity**

*Delivered in*

the International Interfaith Dialogue Seminar on Religious and Ethical Foundations of  
Family and Social Life in Hinduism and Christianity

*organized by*

K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham,

Interfaith Dialogue Centre, Sassari, Italy,

Department of Asian Studies,

University of Torino, Italy, and Interreligious Monastic Dialogue, Italy

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

27 February 2000

# Religious and Ethical Foundations of Family and Social Life in Hinduism and Christianity

I have great pleasure in receiving you within the portals of this institute, K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, which symbolizes the culture and tradition of our ancient land, a culture though old and hoary by the world's standards, is, in truth, young and vibrant, as while passing through the ages, it added stimulus for its growth and survival. It is rooted in the very soil of this land of ours so deeply that it has outlived many a culture or absorbed some of its superior values within itself, and thus prospered from century to century, till it has brought us to this new millennium and this new age.

What has been the secret of this story of our civilization and culture which has guided and inspired legend and song in our literature and influenced our very lives? What is it that has nurtured its very growth and its dimensions? What is it that has lent to it a glory and a name that is recognized everywhere? If I may say it in brief, it is the all-embracing, all-encompassing quality of its nature. It has never been isolationist, never has it spurned or endeavoured to crush the waves of alien influence or tried to turn the tide back; it has not fought it nor has opposed it. It has welcomed with open arms whatever was worth accepting, possessing it for itself and finally identifying itself with it.

This has been the quintessence of our culture over which the flow of time, and other influences cast their shadow; for years these have coexisted in harmony and peace and achieved in the ultimate analysis a fusion in spite of minor differences – stressing similarities in outlook, dwarfing what was irrelevant and dwelling only on the essentials.

It is a Herculean task but when there is goodwill, amity and determination, nothing can fail and we will not fail in our effort. We shall probe into these recesses of what has remained concealed for many a century and so substantially if not wholly find the silver bonds that have bound them together.

It is to the making of this great effort that I welcome you this morning. Svagatam (स्वागतम्) Benvenuto, Buona Fortuna, Successo (cordial welcome, good luck and success).

When two great faiths, Hinduism and Christianity, meet to have a dialogue the outcome is bound to be stimulating and fruitful. I am confident that we shall be able to profit considerably from this meeting of minds and souls and hence I look forward to the learned and scholarly papers which will be read at this seminar, to the lively and intellectual exchange of views and the wisdom and experience that will enrich the proceedings of this august assembly.

Our purpose is to consider family and society as inter-dependent institutions. What we shall be pondering over would be the 'Religious and Ethical Foundations of Family and Social Life in Hinduism and Christianity' and thereby studying and developing their scope and dimensions. It is apparent and acknowledged that without religion and ethics no society or family can hope to survive for long and be happy. These are at the root of those colossal pillars which have sustained life and progress through countless generations; without them they would be just blank intervals in the long and onward march of civilization, leaving 'long and level sands of futility, stretching far away'. For these periods would be nothing except poor and materialistic eras, when mere earthly possessions loomed large in the vision of man, in his brief hour of glory without realizing that "life is but a walking shadow, (he) a poor player, he struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more." He then does not realize that "life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing." It is in such hours that he forgets the Omnipotent, forgets to say "Thy will be done, not mine", forgets to ask God "to illumine what is dark and to raise and to support" the divine in him.

If ethical values are lost sight of, if it is forgotten that man does not live by bread alone, if dwarfish man decides to usurp God's place and bring in carnal and material values as a substitute, if he is lured into an illusion of power and strength and becomes guilty of action such as would make the very angels weep, he would be creating a situation for himself and his people which would always remain unenviable and obsolete.

We have been the unfortunate and unwilling witnesses of such periods in history. We have

seen the worship of Mammon, the idolizing of false Gods, the homage paid to power, to self-interest, to extortion and exploitation; there have been instances of intimidation, of mockery, of injustice and of frustration among the people. In place of the old maxim 'Derive pleasure by giving and never stoop to robbing others of their wealth' which has been forgotten 'get rich quickly by hook or crook' has become law of the day.

No society that has corruption and crime as its sheet anchors, which has set to face against morality and goodness, which has suppressed Truth and Godliness can ever hope to survive for long; its decline and fall may be a little delayed, but never too distant.

Society, whether Christian or Hindu has in essence the same principles that keep it going and these are known and recognized by all civilizations across the globe. To flout them is akin to taking a flight into danger. What may be obtained through ignoring the eternal principles is of short duration and even there is an apprehension that it is transitory and transient, devoid of the happiness and the tranquility that should legitimately be a part of it.

Why has many a civilization perished, even when for a time it possessed a sway and influence that seemed everlasting and unchallenged? Why are they so wiped out from the face of the Earth that even their relics are hard to find? It is because in their hour of glory, in their sessions of might, they became drunk with pride, with conceit, with arrogance, and trampled over the sublimity and sanctity of life in its myriad manifestations. Ethics and morality became for them subjects of ridicule. Vice paraded as Virtue and sinning became a seductive art. Once the feet were planked on this slippery soil, downfall was inevitable. Families which were themselves immoral and encouraged immorality were ultimately ostracized and these members were exiled from respectable society. They had to live with humiliation and disrespect, evil reputation and ignominy as their daily companions, with no courage to raise their heads bent with shame.

We do not wish to approach these problems with any complex of superiority or with any arrogance of higher or better wisdom; we are a part of this society, an inalienable part and have supported and endured its ills. It is this self-experience over the years, it is our close observation of conditions which prevail around us, conditions that have brought to society and the family, misery, agony and despair, that has prompted us to review the whole process and to see if we can in our own small, humble way lead it out of the chaos and the surrounding darkness into light and a happy cosmos. We have no idle dreams of bringing in a vast and revolutionary transition. In the words of Cardinal Newman, "I do not work to see the distant scene. One step is enough for me. Lead thou me to begin with."

Society has in most cases found the eternal values of the past not relevant and so has compromised to get material benefits. Thus there has been, the world over, a radical departure from the sacred norms inherited from the past, and a new outlook, new faces, new voices and new standards are becoming increasingly visible, great advances have been made in the area of Science; there are rocket launchers, fighter bombers, genocidal gases, radars, laser-guided ballistic missiles posing danger to man and to his hoary civilization, but on the ethical plane we have yet to see this same Science and advanced Technology making a matching contribution. Should this trend continue unheeded and unchecked, one shudders to think what the future holds in store for us! We feel like asking, as T. S. Eliot did, “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge; where is the knowledge we have lost in information; where is the life we have lost in the living?”

When society is in such bad straits, is it any wonder, if the institution of the family should be no better? We are confronted by the age-old joint family cracking up. It was this institution that was an insurance against old age, poverty, ill-health, loneliness; it was said that ‘the family that prays together, stays together’ but then man has hardly any time even ‘to stand and stare’. The security, the warmth and the affection, the sense of belonging, the refuge of the very old and the very young, mutual assistance and guidance – these are seen to be fading away. It is true that there are many reasons, not all unethical, to account for this – economic, social and personal. The aged senior citizens, the grandparents, the widows and the orphans feel utterly neglected, humiliated and miserable. The wisdom and the rich experience the seniors have garnered over the years lies unused. ‘Hum do hamare do’ (हम दो हमारे दो) has led to nuclear families wherein the parents have no place. The migration to cities, the impact of the West, the allure of residence abroad, the over-much consciousness of rights vis a vis responsibilities, the resolve to keep away from old values have served to erode the institution of the family. Even though Shri Ramchandra, Sita and Lakshmana are more paradigms than persons (as son, wife and brother); they are seen as mere idealistic characters. I am still hopeful that with an awareness that could be spread, this new century will bring forth men and women more dedicated to the ideals than they seem to be at present. We shall, with such departures as existing conditions may inevitably require, revert to the old order which seems to have yielded to the new. We have not reached a point of no return and it is yet not too late to mend.

We have assembled here today to review the twin institutions – Society and the Family – and to suggest such measures as may help in reforming their structure, to devise a strategy that would help to create a better, a richer and more ethical scheme of things.

It is not fully realized that accumulation of riches here where thieves can break through and steal is incompatible with the kingdom of heaven; nor is it recognized that they who live by the sword shall perish by the sword and that the meek shall inherit the earth. Man has dressed himself with brief authority and power and feels that he is unassailable and hence does not feel like uttering the words, "Thy will be done, not mine". Hence it is advisable to return to the rule of Dharma (धर्म) and once this is done Dharma (धर्म) again becomes the rocklike foundation of Society and Family and then we can be more confident of realizing our dreams.

Let us unite in our endeavour and look on one another with the eye of friendship.

It has ever been the endeavour of the Somaiya Vidyavihar and of its various constituents to encourage a study of our culture and heritage. That was the thought which our late founder, my father Padmabhushan Shri Karamshibhai Somaiya always kept in view and which has influenced all activities on this campus. It is indeed very sad that he is no longer with us today.

My revered father was one who spent his days and nights to further and to enhance this meritorious cause, I cannot imagine that his presence is not with us here today, to guide and to assist in our deliberations this morning. I am reasonably confident that the confluence of his counsel and our endeavours will bring our present mission to a happy consummation.

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# World Religions Together for Peace

*Delivered in* : the International Symposium for Hindu Christian Muslim Interfaith Dialogue on World Religions - Together for Peace

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

20 January 2005

# World Religions Together for Peace

**I**T is the World and the Traditional National Religions Congress held at Astana, Kazakhstan in September 2003 that inspired me to undertake the venture of organizing the present Interfaith Dialogue on 'World Religions – Together for Peace'. I extend you a hearty and warm welcome.

The main objective of the present Dialogue is to provide a platform and project the enlightened moderate voices of the Muslim, Christian and Hindu faiths. Keeping this core concept in mind we have arrived at an apt theme for the deliberations during the present Interfaith Dialogue – 'World Religions – Together for Peace'.

Religion essentially is a binding force. It binds the individual to the Divinity and to other fellow beings sharing the same faith. Apparently all religions reiterate more or less similar fundamental noble thoughts. Ideally there should not be any clash between the followers of different faiths. The diversity of the faiths should be a common legacy of the whole humankind. Unfortunately the idyllic uniformity of the message of the religion is obliterated by the bigotry and ignorance of the followers. As a result the aggressive forces dominate the world.

Each religion claims its superiority and wants to exert its supremacy over others. Some of the religions consider that they are the only civilized people and others are inferior to them. Such thinking leads to tensions and controversies which can be avoided. Jihads and crusades are fought in the name of religion. Peace and harmonious coexistence of people is threatened by extremism and terrorism. Hence the wise all over the world started to

make efforts to create an atmosphere that would be friendly and amicable towards each others' religion.

### **Basic Oneness of All Religions**

For the modern man living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the need is to comprehend and understand the basic oneness of all the religions. Gandhiji was very much conscious and aware of this fact. In 'Young India' September 25, 1924 he says, "The need of the moment is no one religion but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture." The great Vedic seers proclaim in a loud voice that the truth is one but the wise call it variously.<sup>1</sup> So it is very important to understand the underlying basic sameness in all sorts of thinking that are apparently of diverse nature.

Hinduism does not believe in any kind of regimentation. It offers a number of choices to its followers. Everyone is free to choose the path of his liking, suitable to his aptitude, instincts and sentiments.

### **The Concept of Dharma**

Dharma (धर्म) has various connotations such as duty, piety, obligation and essential nature of a thing. Cardinal virtues such as non-injury,<sup>2</sup> compassion<sup>3</sup> and truth<sup>4</sup> are equated with Dharma (धर्म). Different religions originated and flourished against the backdrop of regional, cultural, geographical, periodical and social diversity. Since people are unable to comprehend and accept the essence of diversity, they are easily misguided. Ambitious manipulators of religion impose their views on others resulting into terrible bloodshed and massacre.

### **The Past and the Present**

For centuries the Western people flaunted a superiority complex thinking that the rest of

the world is barbaric. They thought that Indians are primitive people worshipping stones and trees. Those self-appointed guardians of civilization had utter disregard for other civilizations. But with their exposure to the Eastern cultures, particularly to the Vedic thoughts they realized that the Veda-s (वेद) are the testimony of a much richer civilization.

In the history of Christianity also we see a notable change. The Church initially accepted only Latin as her official medium, gradually she started using English also for communication. Now even the local languages are used in liturgy. With growing awareness about the presence of non-Christian religious traditions, the Church has undertaken inculturation programmes. The Christian Church also has undergone a change as regards to her relation with other faiths.

### **Religious Extremism and Militancy**

Islam is seen by the non-Islamic world as aggressive and militant. There are many groups of fanatic Muslims in many countries including India. It is actually a distortion of Islam encouraged by the torrential flow of money from the Middle East. The terrorist and extremist groups of Islamic militants which get a negative but wide coverage in the media create an impression that moderate Islam is a myth. But there exists a large community of moderate Muslims in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.

A counter Hindu extremism which is a contradiction in itself has emerged as a reaction to this. Actually extremism is an unfamiliar and alien concept to Hinduism. Hinduism has never attacked other faiths but assimilated whatever good other faiths and cultures offer.

### **Interfaith Dialogue: Need of the Hour**

The Interfaith Dialogue has been a new dimension to the interaction between followers of different religions. The Second Vatican Council was held from 1962-65 in Vatican. In 1964, Pope Paul VI instituted the PCID now known as Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In the Second Vatican Council, in *Nostra Aetate*, the attitude of Church towards other religions has been made clear. It has been said, "The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture."<sup>5</sup>

### **About universal fraternity, it is said in the Nostra Aetate,**

“There is no basis, therefore, either in theory or in practice, for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people, arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it.”<sup>6</sup>

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has expressed the importance of the interfaith dialogue in the following words: “Neither the Hindu Dharma nor the Christian Faith teaches hate, contempt or disrespect for others. Hatred or disrespect on the part of religious believers only brings discredit on religion and its role in society. But the more we commit ourselves to promote the dignity of every human person the more our religious traditions will become credible in the eyes of others... Let us come together and share our common concerns, making an effort to listen to one another attentively. Let us speak honestly, aware of our own responsibility with regard to the choices that have to be made to resolve current problems in the world today.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Contribution of Islam to Indian Culture**

Islam has enhanced the glory of literature, art, music and architecture in medieval and modern India. Indian languages have borrowed a number of words from Persian and Arabic languages. The influence of the languages and also of culture is seen in every walk of life, in food, dress, furniture and other bare necessities. For example, doctrinal terminology like rasul (रसूल), namaz (नमाज़), zakat (ज़कात); administrative terminology such as darbar (दरबार), padshah (पादशाह), diwan (दिवाण); judicial terms such as qadi (काज़ी), munsif (मुन्सिफ), vakil (वकील); military terminology such as sipahsalar (सिपेहसालार), jamadar (जमादार); sartorial terms such as kurta (कुर्ता), shalwar (शलवार); the terminology relating to menu such as biryani (बिर्यानी), pulao (पुलाव); fruits such as anar (अनार), narangi (नारंगी); and ornaments such as pazeab (पाजेब), gulband (गुलबन्द) are used in day-to-day life.

### **Call for Peace in Religious Texts**

Christianity gave the world an insight in love and service. Christian saints were epitomes of peace and love. Saint Francis aspired for peace. He prays,

“Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.”<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Qur’an (कुराण) also speaks highly of peace that comes from faith. “He it is who sent down peace of reassurance into the hearts of the believers, that they might add faith to their faith.”<sup>9</sup>

The Hindus invoke peace that envelops the whole universe. They pray, “May peace be unto the Heavens! May peace be unto the Space! May peace be unto the Earth! Peace be unto the Waters! Peace be unto the Plants! Peace be unto the Trees! Peace be to all the Gods! Peace be to Brahman (ब्रह्मन्)! May peace envelop all! Peace, verily, peace! May peace embrace me! OM, Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!” (ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः)<sup>10</sup> It is peace on individual level, from great elements and from Gods.

### **The Challenges to Religions**

Hinduism, Christianity and Islam along with Buddhism and Jainism have added to the variegated beauty of the garden of spirituality in India. But the greatest danger that all these noble faiths encounter today is the tsunami tide of consumerism and hedonism. In the mad rush for material possessions man exploits nature and his fellow human beings.

He exploits nature out of his unending greed and takes pride in his achievements. However, the fury of nature in the form of tsunami has made him realize that nature is far more powerful and there are limitations to human achievements. They all can be destroyed in a few moments if nature wills.

### **Unity**

We have to combat the evil forces together. We have to re-awaken the faith in our respective religions, and also understand the richness of other religious traditions. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes, “If religion is to become an effective force in human affairs, if it is to serve as the basis for the new world order, it must become more inward and

more universal, a flame which cleanses our inward being and so cleanses the world. For such a religion the historical expressions of spiritual truth and the psychological idioms employed by religions to convey the universal truth cease to be rocks of offence. The barriers dividing men will break down.”<sup>11</sup> We hope that the reunion and integration of all, an altogetherness in which we walk together creatively can be realized through the unity of hearts. If we actualize it, mankind will survive.

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Endnotes:

- 1 एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।  
ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti/ Rigveda I.164.46
- 2 अहिंसा परमो धर्मः ।  
ahimsa paramo dharmah/ Mahabharata Anushasanaparva 116. 38-39
- 3 न दयासदृशो धर्मो न दयासदृशं तपः ।  
na dayasadrisho dharmo na dayasadrisham tapah/ Padma Purana V. 102.15
- 4 सत्ये धर्मः प्रतिष्ठितः ।  
satye dharmah pratishthitah/ Ramayana II.14.7
- 5 Nostra Aetate, 6, in Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, 1963-65, Francesco Gioia (ed.), Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 1997, p. 38
- 6 Ibid., p. 40
- 7 Message of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Hindus on the feast of Diwali 2003 by Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald, President
- 8 Shabda Shakti Sangam, Vandana Mataji (ed.), Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, Rishikesh, 1995, p. 271

- 9 Holy Qur'an 48.4
- 10 द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिर्वनस्पतयः शान्तिः । विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः । शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ।  
dyauh shantirantariksham shantih prithivi shantirapah shantiroshadhayah  
shantirvanaspatayah shantih/ vishvedevah shantirbrahma shantih sarvam shantih/  
shantireva shantih sa ma shantiredhi/ Shukla Yajurveda Vajasaneyi Samhita XXXVI.17
- 11 Radhakrishnan S., The Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan, Mc Dermott Robert (ed.),  
Jaico Books, Mumbai, 1996, pp. 294-295

# Interreligious and Intrareligious Dialogue

*Delivered in* : the Third International Conference on Religious Dialogue, Cultural Harmony and Sacred Secularity: Raimon Panikkar's Thoughts and His Contributions

*organized by* : Prof Young-chan Ro, George Mason University and Vivarium – Panikkar's Center of Intercultural Studies hosted by Yonsai University and Sogang University at Seoul, Korea

7-9 June 2007

# Interreligious and Intrareligious Dialogue

**T**HE present paper deals with what I gathered from my experience of dialogue as an educationist and the models prescribed by Raimon Panikkar. We all are aware that it is important to cultivate a 'Culture of Dialogue' in the minds of people, which is the urgent call of the day. Dialogue has become more imperative than ever before due to the circumstances in which we experience hostility among members of different religions. The occasional outburst endangers human life. Raimon Panikkar says, "Dialogue as a human and humane act has never been so indispensable in all fields of life as in our age of endemic individualism. All our glib talk of "global village" takes place on artificial screens under lock and key..."<sup>1</sup>

What do we mean by interreligious dialogue? Is it an academic discussion amongst university professors, academicians and philosophers that articulates theoretical and philosophical problems in various religions? Is it an intellectual process? Is it a debate? Is it an experience of living together? Is the living together a model of assimilation and breaking of walls of misunderstanding or is it like building a new house altogether?

To me a dialogue is not only a function of the brain or intellect but also mind-to-mind transmission, heart-to-heart conversation where positive sentiments become so powerful that they control the wild thoughts that lead man to fanaticism dragging the social organism to the edge of peril.

Religion is essentially a link between an individual and the Divinity. It also links man to other fellow beings. No wonder that all religions reiterate fundamental values in their

teachings. All religious traditions can be looked upon as a common heritage of mankind. Claims for superiority of any religion over others are uncalled for. What is needed is a change of heart that openly admits the treasures bestowed on all people – the different faiths, their sanctity and veneration for interminable quest for God.

It has been said, “It happened after some days, perhaps as the fruit of an intense and sustained meditation, that a vision appeared to this ardently devoted Man. In this vision it was manifested that by means of a few sages versed in the variety of religions that exist throughout the world it could be possible to reach a certain peaceful concord. And it is through this concord that a lasting peace in religion may be attained and established by convenient and truthful means.”<sup>2</sup>

While defining the functions of dialogue, Panikkar, the torch-bearer visionary in the field of Interreligious Dialogue says, “I foresee a new and fundamental function of dialogue in the encounter of religions. The first aim was to better each other, to dispel fears and misinterpretations. A second role was that of mutual influence and fecundation. I envisage now a third function: that of positively contributing to the new self-understanding of both sides. If this is the case, the dialogue will become an indispensable element in the very formation of the new identity of each religious tradition. We shall no longer sit facing each other, but sitting at a truly round table, or sitting cross-legged side-by-side (following the two physical ways of sitting), we will discuss together the deepening of our insights. The revolution this would accomplish should be apparent to all.”<sup>3</sup>

In the opinion of Panikkar, many a time the dialogue between the followers of different religions is either too rational or too sentimental; we deal with doctrines and opinions or we enter in ‘erotic dialogues’. Then the dialogue is lopsided; it is not balanced. These two types of dialogues independent of each other do not lead to full human realization. Human relationship is not limited to thoughts and emotions, it is more than that. ‘Being is relational.’<sup>4</sup> All living beings are connected to one another internally, though not externally. This link belongs to the very essence of man. Every living being is linked with every other living being. The other belongs to my Self. Panikkar points out that in human relationships, the other is not just a producer of ideas with which we agree more or less, or just a bearer of affinities that make possible a number of transactions; it is neither a mere (other) subject nor a mere (other) object. “It is a person who is not my ego, and yet it belongs to my Self.”<sup>5</sup> This awareness is the dawn of the ‘dialogical dialogue’. “The thou emerges as different from the non-I.”<sup>6</sup>

Panikkar remarks, “When this encounter touches the depths of our intimate beliefs, when

it reaches the ultimate questions of the meaning of life, in whatever sense, we have the 'religious dialogical dialogue'. Oftentimes this dialogue does not go beyond doctrinal levels or emotional projections. This is the 'interreligious dialogue', which is generally carried on by experts or representatives of different belief-systems or artistic sensitivities.”<sup>7</sup>

When one's ego is shaken off, the masks are removed and something comes from within, this is the beginning of intrareligious dialogue. It is relinking oneself to the transcendent reality or to the world of people who tread a different path. Panikkar considers the intrareligious dialogue as a religious act – an act that neither unifies nor separates but re-links us (in all directions). It takes place when we are in search of truth; it is transcendental and also empirical, for in a dialogue we look above, toward a transcendent reality, and we also look horizontally, toward the world of other people whose path is not the same that we follow.

Here I remember what Isha Upanishad (ईश-उपनिषद्) says. It declares that for a realized soul there is no ignorance, no suffering, for he perceives the unity of all souls within him. This realization is the foundation of the intrareligious dialogue. This dialogue is characterized with openness.

Panikkar in his 'The Sermon on the Mount of Intra-religious Dialogue' says, "When you witness to your faith, do not defend yourself or your vested interests, sacred as they may appear to you. Do like the birds in the skies: they sing and fly and do not defend their music or their beauty.

When you dialogue with somebody, look at your partner as a revelatory experience, as you would – and should – look at the lilies in the fields.

When you engage in intrareligious dialogue, try first to remove the beam in your own eye before removing the speck in the eye of your neighbour.

Blessed are you when you do not feel self-sufficient while being in dialogue.

Blessed are you when you trust the other because you trust in Me.

Blessed are you when you do not give up your convictions, and yet you do not set them up as absolute norms...

Woe unto you, you practitioners of religions, when you do not listen to the cries of the little ones...

Woe unto you, religious people, because you monopolize religion and stifle the Spirit, which blows where and how she wills.”<sup>8</sup>

## **The Vedic Dharma and Dialogue**

Religion should not come in the way of social relationships, for we are living in the world of plurality of religions. The deep and relevant insights which are abundantly present in the Hindu scriptures help us to understand the phenomena of religious pluralism and encourage communal harmony among people of different religious persuasion.

The Golden rule is found in the Mahabharata (महाभारत) as well as in the scriptures of almost all religions. Sage Vyasa declares, "A person should not do such thing to others which he does not like if done towards him by others."<sup>9</sup> Hinduism does not believe in any kind of regimentation. It offers a number of choices to its followers. Everyone is free to choose the path of his liking, suitable to his aptitude, instincts and sentiments. "As all rivers have the same destination, that is, the ocean, all the human beings aim at the same Supreme Reality, though their paths are different due to different starting stations."<sup>10</sup>

## **Triple Model in the Veda-s**

The Veda-s (वेद) are replete with various patterns of dialogue leading to social and religious harmony. They provide us the triple model, that is, dialogue in family, dialogue with other living beings and unity of hearts.

The Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) provides the high and lofty ideal of the unity of the whole of mankind whereas the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद) speaks about the dialogue in family. The seer says, "I will make you of one heart, of one mind and free from hate. Love one another as the cow loves the calf she has borne... Let not brother hate brother, sister hate sister; unanimous, united in purpose, speak words with friendliness."<sup>11</sup>

The Yajurveda (यजुर्वेद) says, "May all living beings look on me with the eye of a friend; may I look on all living beings with the eye of a friend; may we look on one another with the eye of a friend."<sup>12</sup>

The Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) says, "Go together, speak together. Let your minds agree in thought... Common be the counsel of these, common be your assembly, common your mind, common your thought... May your resolve be alike; may your hearts be alike; may your mind be one, so that you live happily in harmony."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, removal of hatred, establishing a bond of love, thinking alike, and unity of heart

make the dialogue progressive.

### **Models suggested by Panikkar**

Panikkar suggests a few models that include the Geographical model, the Physical model, the Geometrical Model, the Anthropological model, and the Mystical model.

#### **The Geographical Model: the Ways to the Mountain Peak**

Aspirants from all religions agree that on spiritual path there is some kind of summit to be reached. Religion is the way to reach it. The summit can be either transcendent or immanent. An aspirant may reach it either by individual effort or by the grace of God.

The wayfarer has to find his own way. If the gnostic attitude says that there is no way because 'Samsara (संसार) is nirvana (निर्वाण)', or 'Thou art that' then Panikkar says that it should also be remembered that the 'no-way' of the realization is also a way to be discovered by the wayfarer.

#### **The Physical Model: The Rainbow**

The different religious traditions resemble to the innumerable colours that appear on account of the Divine or the white light falling on the prism of human experience.

Panikkar has elucidated the inner true nature of religion. He says:

"Just as the color of a body is the only color generally not absorbed by that body, this model would remind us also that a religion similarly absorbs all other colors and hides them in its bosom so that its external color is in truth only its appearance, its message to the outer world, but not the totality of its nature. We come to this realization when we attempt to understand a religion from within. The real body that has received the entire beam of white light keeps for itself all the other colors so that it would not accord with truth to judge a religion only from its outer color ..."<sup>14</sup>

#### **The Geometrical Model: The Topological Invariant**

Different forms and shapes of religions are due to transformation. A primordial and original form assumes a number of possible transformations in course of time and

in context of place. Consequently religions appear to be different and even mutually incompatible in the absence of a topological invariant. Panikkar says, “Religions do not stand side by side, but they are actually intertwined. Vishnu dwells in the heart of Shiva and vice-a-versa. Each religion represents the whole for that particular human group, and in a certain way “is” the religion of the other group, only in a different topological form.”<sup>15</sup>

This model inspires one to understand the similarities and differences in different religions.

### **The Anthropological Model: Language**

This model compares each religion to a language. Any language that has the accuracy of expression and also the capacity of meeting new challenges in changing times is perfect, even so a religion that expresses the aspirations of people and fulfills the needs of the time is a perfect religion. Panikkar holds that the linguistic model can be of help in the problem of Comparative Religion, for a common language serves as a common background for mutual understanding. So one needs to understand the language of the religion, that is, the methodology of expression of the content of religion including the symbols.

### **The Mystical Model: Silence**

In this model Panikkar does not refer to a silence of indifference as well as a silence of skepticism. He speaks about the silence “that does not deny the word but is aware that the silence is prior to the word and that the word simply words the silence that makes the word possible”. Shankaracharya says, “The Guru (गुरु), the Master is silent. The disciples are free from doubt. They find a sermon in silence.”

### **New Models**

I would like to suggest a few models based on the Vedanta (वेदान्त) philosophy. These are based on the Absolute Monism of Shankaracharya, the Qualified Monism of Ramanujacharya and the Dualism of Madhvacharya.

The Absolute Monism model obliterates all differences among religions by providing a primordial religion. Religions are considered as appearances of one religion that is infinite but manifests itself in different names and forms as gold appears different in different

ornaments. Every ornament has its own beauty.

The Qualified Monism model gives separate status to each religion along with its identity to the primordial form. Each wave on the ocean is true as a wave though finally it is not different from ocean. Each spark of fire is different at the same time it is nothing else than fire. So each religion represents truth.

The Dualism model presents a view that each religion in its very nature is different from other religion. It preserves its identity and highlights it than anything else. This model is used commonly; however, I would like to say it has to be used with caution.

Whatever model of dialogue we choose and commit ourselves to its fulfillment; it is an uphill task. The Katha Upanishad (कठ-उपनिषद्) says, “The path is impassable as a sharp razor’s edge, which is difficult to tread on.”<sup>16</sup> With this warning, we, the pilgrims of religion must traverse the difficult path.

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#### Endnotes:

- 1 Panikkar Raimon, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, Revised Edition, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, Preface, p. XV
- 2 Nicolai de Cusa, *De Pace seu Concordantia Fidei* I.1, in Panikkar Raimon, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. IX
- 3 Panikkar Raimon, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, Revised Edition, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, pp. 142-143
- 4 Panikkar Raimon, Alfred DiLascia (tr.), *The Fullness of Man – A Christophany*, Orbis, New York, 2006, p. 62
- 5 Panikkar Raimon, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, Revised Edition, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, Preface, p. XVI

- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Panikkar Raimon, The Intra-religious Dialogue, Revised Edition, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 1
- 9 यदन्यैर्विहितं नेच्छेदात्मनः कर्म पूरुषः ।  
न तत्परेषु कुर्वीत जानन्नप्रियमात्मनः ॥  
yadanyairvihitam nechchedatmanah karma purushah/  
na tatpareshu kurvita janannapriyamatmanah//  
Mahabharata Shantiparva 259.20
- 10 रुचीनां वैचित्र्यादृजुकुटिलनानापथजुषाम्  
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ॥  
ruchinam vaichitryadrijukutilananapathajusham/  
nrinameko gamyastvamasi payasamarnava iva// Shiva Mahimna Stotra 7.2
- 11 सहृदयं सांमनस्यमविद्वेषं कृणोमि वः ।  
अन्यो अन्यमभि हर्यत वत्सं जातमिवाघ्न्या ॥  
अनुव्रतः पितुः पुत्रो मात्रा भवतु संमनाः ।  
जाया पत्ये मधुमतीं वाचं वदतु शान्तिवाम् ॥  
मा भ्राता भ्रातरं द्विक्षन्मा स्वसारमुत स्वसा ।  
सम्यञ्चः सव्रता भूत्वा वाचं वदत भद्रया ॥  
sahridayam sammanasyamavidvesham krinomi vah/  
anyo anyamabhi haryata vatsam jatamivaghnya//  
anuvratah pituh putro matra bhavatu sammanah/  
jaya patye madhumatim vacham vadatu shantivam//  
ma bhrata bhrataram dvikshanma svasaramuta svasa/  
samyanchah savrata bhutva vacham vadata bhadraya// Atharvaveda III.30.1-3
- 12 मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम् ।  
मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे ।  
मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे ॥  
mitrasya ma chakshusha sarvani bhutani samikshantam/

mitrasyaham chakshusha sarvani bhutani samikshe/  
mitrasya chakshusha samikshamahe// Yajurveda XXXVI. 18, XXVI. 2

- 13 Rigveda X. 191
- 14 Panikkar Raimon, The Intra-religious Dialogue, Revised Edition, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 16
- 15 Ibid., p.18
- 16 क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया दुर्ग पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ।  
kshurasya dhara nishita duratyaya durgam  
pathastatkavayo vadanti/ Katha Upanishad I.3.14

# **Contribution of H H Pope John Paul II to Interfaith Dialogue**

*Delivered in* : the Interfaith Dialogue Seminar on the Contribution of Late H H Pope John Paul II to Interfaith Dialogue

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai and Pontifical Urbaniana University, Vatican

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

27 August 2005

# Contribution of H H Pope John Paul II to Interfaith Dialogue

**H**IS Holiness Late Pope John Paul II was one of the luminaries who strived for bringing the mankind together for peace and harmony. While addressing the Muslim and the Hindu representatives of Kenya in 1985, H. H. Pope John Paul II says, “Our presence together today – Hindus, Muslims and Christians gathered in friendship – is a hopeful sign in a pluralistic world filled with tensions. No religious group can afford to live and act in isolation. While respecting one another’s convictions, we need each other’s help. In the Holy Bible, St. Paul encourages us to seek the ways of brotherhood and unity: ‘Agree with one another’, he says, ‘Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you’ (2 Corinthians 13:11). Our challenge today is to help the world to live in peace and harmony, with respect for the human dignity of all. In this effort the God of love and peace will be with us.”<sup>1</sup>

The second Vatican Council held between 1962-1965, in its Declaration *Nostra Aetate* speaks about the approach of the Catholic Church to other religions. Accordingly the Church has undertaken the task of fostering unity and love among individuals and nations. Pope John Paul II reminds us that the document makes a special reference to Hinduism and the values cherished by the practitioners of Hinduism.

His Holiness was aware of the dire need of dialogue amongst different faiths. For him it is a common quest. “Dialogue”, he says, “is a central and essential element of ethical thinking among people, whoever they may be. Under the aspect of an exchange of communication between human beings that language makes possible, it is in fact a common quest.”<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of H. H. Pope John Paul II, dialogue is the search for what is true, good and just for every person, for every group and every society. The first and foremost characteristic

of dialogue in his view is 'openness and welcome'. Each party should not only express its thought but should also give a patient listening to what the other party says. The efforts to establish peace would be futile unless one party is aware of the conditions of the other.<sup>3</sup>

His Holiness felt it necessary that the 'difference' and the 'specific nature' of the other party should be known before one enters into dialogue. There are certain characteristics that are peculiar to a particular religion which separates it from the other. He also warns us about the risk of tension arising out of it. He does not want us to make compromises on account of cowardice or constraints. One should respect the intelligence, freedom and responsibility of the other party.<sup>4</sup>

Thus having given the idea of risks and tensions in dialogue, His Holiness throws light on the positive factors in dialogue.

"Dialogue is at the same time the search for what is and what remains common to people, even in the midst of tensions, opposition and conflicts. In this sense, it is to make the other party a neighbor. It is to accept its contribution, to share with it responsibility before truth and justice. It is to suggest and to study all the possible formulae for honest reconciliation, while being able to link to the just defense of the interests and honor of the party which one represents the no less just understanding and respect for the reasons of the other party, as well as the demands of the general good which are common to both."<sup>5</sup> His Holiness brings to our notice that all peoples share mutual interdependence on the economic, political and cultural levels. Those who have no concern for the solidarity will ultimately suffer.

His Holiness thinks of dialogue not only on spiritual or intellectual levels; he also coins a term 'dialogue of life' and envisages actual living in dialogue in which the participants "witness the spiritual values... collaborate with men and women of goodwill to build a more just and fraternal society."<sup>6</sup>

Means and end have been the subject of perennial debate in philosophy. In the opinion of Mahatma Gandhi the means also should be pure however noble the end. Similarly His Holiness Late Pope John Paul II emphasized that true dialogue is the search for what is good 'by peaceful means'. One should resolve to adopt 'all the possible formulae of negotiation, mediation and arbitration'. He advocates triumph over the factors of division and hate. "True dialogue", in the words of His Holiness is, "a recognition of the inalienable dignity of human beings. It rests upon respect for human life. It is a wager upon the social nature of people, upon their calling to go forward together, with continuity, by a meeting

of minds, wills and hearts toward the goal that the creator has fixed for them. This goal is to make the world a place for everybody to live in and worthy of everybody.”<sup>7</sup>

His Holiness was convinced that besides spiritual value, dialogue has political value that bears the fruit of peace. It is not an illusion, it is the only possibility when the world is on the edge of war.

H. H. Pope Paul VI proclaims, “Openness to dialogue which is disinterested, objective and frank, is in itself a declaration in favour of free and honest peace. It excludes pretense, rivalry, deceit and betrayal.”<sup>8</sup>

While His Holiness Pope John Paul II highlights the spiritual aspect of religion, he does not ignore its practical aspect. In his call to the members of all religions to come together he elucidates both the aspects and admonishes one and all to maintain a balance between temporal and social well-being on the one hand and the deep spiritual longings of man on the other hand.

He says, “In the world today, there is a need for all religions to collaborate in the cause of humanity, and to do this from the viewpoint of the spiritual nature of man. Today, as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsees and Christians, we gather in fraternal love to assert this by our presence. As we proclaim the truth about man, we insist that man’s search for temporal and social well-being and full human dignity corresponds to the deep longings of his spiritual nature. To work for the attainment and preservation of all human rights, including the basic right to worship God according to the dictates of an upright conscience and to profess that faith externally, must become ever more a subject to interreligious collaboration at all levels. This interreligious collaboration must also be concerned with the struggle to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit. Religion is the mainspring of society’s commitment to justice, and interreligious collaboration must reaffirm this in practice.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Hinduism the ultimate aim of human life is freedom from bondage. This state signifies experience of eternal peace. A Hindu aspirant seeks peace on physical, mental as well as on spiritual level. An additional dimension to peace is found in the prayers of Vedic seers who fervently pray for peace on the cosmic level. Peace between men is sought on social level by avoiding pretense, rivalry, deceit and betrayal. The ideal of man of steadfast wisdom (Sthitaprajna स्थितप्रज्ञ) in fact delineates the characteristics of the messenger of peace in the Hindu tradition. The Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ) is equal to

a friend and foe, and is himself an ocean of peace.

“Peace (is the supreme), say the silent monks in the forest. Therefore they rejoice in Peace”, says the Mahanarayaniya Upanishad (महानारायणीय-उपनिषद्) .<sup>10</sup>

“A man of faith, absorbed in faith, his senses controlled, attains knowledge, and knowledge attained quickly finds supreme peace”, says the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता).<sup>11</sup>

“These five sense organs, with the mind as the sixth, within my heart inspired by Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), by which the awe-inspiring is created, through them to us be peace!”, says the Atharvaveda (अथर्ववेद).<sup>12</sup>

His Holiness Pope John Paul II believes that peace is a gift. However peace cannot be taken for granted. Man has to make efforts to establish peace. The community is equally responsible to maintain it. “Even the difficulties, failures and tragedies of the past and the present must be studied as providential lessons from which we may draw the wisdom we need in order to find new ways, more rational and courageous ways, for building peace. By drawing inspiration from the truth of God we are given the ideal and the energy we require to overcome situations of injustice, to free ourselves from ideologies of power and domination, and to make our way toward universal fraternity.”<sup>13</sup>

In Hinduism peace is not just an absence of war. It is nurturing appreciation and respect for other's values. It is to sow the seeds of a strong fellow-feeling. The intricate mosaic of diverse faiths, beliefs, traditions and languages in India is indeed amazing. She is the birthplace of many faiths and has accommodated and nourished multiple religions. She has provided a common roof to major world religions for their sustenance and growth. His Holiness admires the Indian constitution for its official recognition of religious liberty. While addressing the people of India in New Delhi on February 1, 1986, he says, “I note with admiration how the Indian constitution, through its official recognition of religious liberty, honors the dignity of each person in his or her most sacred dimension, and at the same time allows the promotion of genuine spiritual values, which are so fundamental for all social living.”<sup>14</sup> He also shows keen interest in the art and architecture, literature and customs of India.

I would like to refer to the touching words of His Holiness Pope John Paul II when he paid a visit to Rajghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi whom he mentions as the ‘Hero of Humanity’. His Holiness says, “In this place, as we meditate on the figure of this man so marked by his noble devotion to God and his respect for every living being,

I wish also to recall those words of Jesus recorded in the Christian Scriptures – with which the Mahatma was very familiar and in which he found the confirmation of the deep thoughts of his heart:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matthew 5:3-10) His Holiness adds, “May these words and other expressions in the sacred books of the great religious traditions present on the fruitful soil of India be a source of inspiration to all peoples, and to their leaders, in the search for justice among people, and peace among all the nations of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

The last hymn of the Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) gives the message to walk together, to speak unanimously and to establish a concord. I find the echo of the hymn in the feelings of His Holiness Pope Paul John II when he says solemnly, “May God guide us and bless us as we strive to walk together, hand in hand, and build together a world of peace.”<sup>16</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, Francesco Gioia (ed.), The Magisterium of John Paul II, 464, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, 1997
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., 412
- 5 Ibid.

- 6 Ibid., 712
- 7 Ibid., 412
- 8 Ibid., 413
- 9 Ibid., 495
- 10 शम इत्यरण्ये मुनयस्तस्माच्छमे रमन्ते ।  
shama ityaranye munayastasmachchhame ramante/  
Mahanarayaniya Upanishad XXI.2
- 11 श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।  
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥  
shraddhavanlabhate jnanam tatparah samyatendriyah/  
jnanam labdhva param shantimachirenadhigachchhati//  
Bhagavadgita IV.39
- 12 इमानि यानि पञ्चेन्द्रियाणि मनःषष्ठानि मे हृदि ब्रह्मणा संशितानि ।  
यैरेव ससृजे घोरं तैरेव शान्तिरस्तु नः ॥  
imani yani panchendriyani manahshashthani me hridi brahmana samshitani/  
yaireva sasrije ghoram taireva shantirastu nah//  
Atharvaveda XIX.9.5
- 13 Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, Francesco Gioia  
(ed.), The Magisterium of John Paul II, 387, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, 1997
- 14 Ibid., 481,482
- 15 Ibid., 486
- 16 Ibid.

# **Peace and Harmony in the New Millennium**

*Delivered in* : the Interreligious Assembly

*organized by* : Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican

at Vatican

22 October 1999

## Peace and Harmony in the New Millennium

**T**ODAY I feel we are united in a sacred bond – a bond of love, fraternity and of a common goal of united, harmonious and superior humanity. This great occasion enriched by prayer and meditation has led me to the silent regions of self-exploration and introspection. I feel deep in my very existence a call towards pure spirituality shining like a jewel spreading its rays towards one and all.

The world, today, is poised to enter the new millennium. The last century of this millennium has been an era of science and technology. The achievements in the various fields of life brought in by technology have taken man to such heights as to make him dizzy but in their turn, they have resulted in some moments of agony and distress. It can be compared to a roller-coaster ride which takes the rider soaring to the heights of exhilaration and joy and the next moment dives down with the same speed making the rider's heart sink. After that heady experience, one needs rest, and some moments of peace. Humanity at this particular juncture of history is longing for peace and harmony.

Dr. Dag Hammarskjold, the former U.N. Secretary General concluding one of his speeches said, "History places a burden on our shoulders. It is for all of us, denying neither the good nor the ills of the past to look ahead and not to permit old conflicts to envenom the spirit of the creative work before us..." Wise words as they are that sum up the crisis of our times, it is imperative that we should seriously ponder over how to redeem the world from its tensions and follies. The widespread gloom, the misery, the conflict and the

desolation all around narrate a tale not of success of humanity but of a dismal failure of ours because of the dominance of the forces of the evil that sways the world order today. The quest for the Divine Light seems to be overpowered by the material and superficial pursuits.

There are only a few basic goals or values in life that we can pursue. These can be enumerated as pleasure, wealth, power and knowledge. The value or goal we seek determines our life pattern. If we choose pleasure as our primary goal, we pursue immediate sensation and gratification. But there is no end to the gratification of senses. Ancient Indian seers have explicitly said that the thirst for pleasures can never be satiated by enjoyment. Life, then, remains without a plan or purpose through which we could otherwise master our destiny.

If one considers the wealth as his primary goal, one develops a commercial attitude. One, then, tends to manipulate the world and exploit other people to gain more for himself. If we seek power in life, we nurture ambition to become somebody, to gain recognition. We create followers and subordinate them. Even knowledge does not fare better. In the quest for knowledge we develop the intellect. We think little about body, senses or outer world; but still we try to gain control over others through our accumulation of ideas.

There are no outer goals for us in life than these. We may develop new and more exciting forms of pleasure, but the experience of pleasure is essentially the same. It may vary in degree – a little more or a little less – but qualitatively it cannot become different. We have expanded these horizontally but we nonetheless remain under their rule. These values in life serve to divide us. When they come into conflict we find ourselves as daggers drawn at each other. As long as we pursue lower values for personal gains, strife is inevitable. It spreads out to culminate into social and political conflicts.

There are inner values which are religious and spiritual in nature which can provide lasting happiness, abundance, energy and wisdom. We can be truly united through such values which transcend human differences. In fact the Indian tradition has defined a human being as having 'Dharma' (धर्म), that is, righteousness as his distinguishing feature. It condemns those who are without the sense of religion as being equal to beasts.

Religion, thus, has been a strong force which has been a determining factor in the history of the humanity. However, it is now being said that religion has failed to fulfill the innermost call of the soul. The charge leveled against religion is that it tends to be dogmatized and transformed into dull ritual practice. Instead of elevating human beings, it brings rigidity and orthodoxy. It can be distorted and twisted to change it into

fanaticism. However, religion in its pure and essential form cannot be condemned for the shortcomings of the followers of that particular religion. We, the Hindus, believe that religion protects one when one protects it by proper practice.

Though we have revolutionized our material lives, we are yet to witness a revolution in religious thinking. While we have profoundly altered man's political, social and economic life, little has been achieved in altering man's inner life. Due to the revolution in media-technology the world has indeed shrunk but have our minds expanded? Have we expanded our consciousness so that the individual consciousness can relate itself easily to world consciousness? Beyond the mind is a whole field of consciousness which alone can transmute intellectual awareness and knowledge into wisdom and a spiritual reality. Ancient Hindu philosophers called it 'Anubhuti' (अनुभूति) – experiential realization. We now talk of emotional intelligence, of the role of intuition in managerial decision-making and of the areas in man's psyche hidden to the surgeon's knife, but a certain entity as seen by ancient thought systems. All these are indicative of the future directions of humanity. In short the need of the hour is the expansion of human consciousness. This is what I mean by the revolution in religious thinking.

The new religious revolution should emphasize the common mystical experience of all faiths. Dean Inge said long back that the centre of gravity in religion has shifted from authority to experience. The paradigms of religious belief must shift from sectarian doctrines and forms to the vision of the Universal Soul. The time has come for us to look into the world's religions with fresh eyes, free from hatred, fear and distrust. Swift said, "We have enough religion to hate one another but not enough to love one another." As we herald the next millennium we should resolve to go to the mystical roots of religion and religious experience – salvation lies here.

This interreligious assembly and scholarly deliberations in interreligious meetings make us aware of the fact that the basic foundations of all religions are same. Love, truth, selfless assistance to the weaker section, compassion, kindness are ascribed great value by all the religions. The Mahabharata (महाभारत), the great epic, declares, "Just as the milk of the cows having different colours is uniformly white, the principle of religions though apparently different is one and the same."

One who understands and realizes this, awakens to the unity of all humanity. He helps each individual to pursue his appropriate path and does not attempt to create a single standard religion for all. He creates a wide field of experience in which each can grow.

We have to elevate our thinking and quicken the phase to usher a spiritual dawn, to an awakening to the primordial fact that every man to whatever community or race he may belong is essentially an expression of that eternal Divine Consciousness. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said, “The contemporary situation is pregnant with great possibilities, immense dangers or immeasurable rewards.” It is for us to choose.

Let us mould ourselves to shoulder this great responsibility. Let us travel beyond the apparent divisions and distinctions that delude us. Let us make efforts to attain that in which all differences meet and merge. Let us advance towards Light of Divinity and Harmony which will bring in a new millennium of peace based on mutual respect and understanding. Let us pray together for the dawn of spirituality which will obliterate the darkness of inner conflicts – thus fulfilling the divine task entrusted to us by the destiny.

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# **Hinduism and Christianity**

## **Some Meeting Points**

*Delivered in* : the occasion of the visit of Madam Chiara Lubich, Founder and President of the Focolare Movement to K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

14 January 2003

# Hinduism and Christianity

## Some Meeting Points

I feel extremely happy and overjoyed in welcoming you. It is a privilege possible only by the grace of God to meet and be in the company of Revered Chiara Lubich, a divine person with whom we have a strong bond of friendship. With the Focolare Movement it has been a common walk on the path of spirituality and love ensuring a deep and long friendship.

Very recently, in the month of June last year, I had an opportunity to witness how Chiara Lubich has rendered a magical touch of love to the Focolare Movement. During my stay at the Mariapolis Centre, at Castel Gandolfo, Rocca di Papa, Rome for the International Symposium on Bhakti (भक्ति) I witnessed how a heart filled with love for God and neighbour finds thousands of ways to express it.

The seminar has become an unforgettable experience for us. Revered Chiara Lubich set an example for us by being present for all sessions, listening attentively to all presentations by the Indian delegates, asking probing questions, trying to reach out for commonalities, respecting the differences of opinion and intervening only when a mother's hand, loving but firm, was required. And again, it was indeed a moment to be treasured deep in our hearts when she spoke about the glorious experience of God-realization – a very personal, intimate, mystical experience which transcends words which only a realized heart can transmit and only a sensitive, earnest heart can receive.

The memories of warm hospitality that I enjoyed at New York in June 2002 when the Luminosa Award for Religious Peace through Education was conferred on me by Focolare,

still linger in my heart.

Respected Madam Chiara, I welcome you with a heart beholden by your spirituality and divine love.

### **On Hinduism**

The Indian civilization and the Hindu religion have maintained the spirit of unity in diversity and also of the harmony of contrasts. Hinduism believed in unity of all life as the expression of the Ultimate Reality – immanent as well as transcendent; it synthesized intellect and emotion in its approach to the Reality; it rendered sacredness to all forms of life and connected all forms of sectarian, communal as well as provincial mentality through its urge to combine apparently disconnected fragments of life.

Over the centuries during the periods of stagnation several healthy reform movements took place. Through the response to several challenges, the very best of substance (Tattva तत्त्व) was refined and the trivialities were rejected. Thus emerged the most liberal way of life, a way of assimilation of each and every shade of thought. A sympathetic attitude towards ideas, actions and behavioural patterns of many different peoples who came to India and settled here resulted into an all-embracing character of Hinduism.

The seers of India wish welfare and happiness of all living beings. In consonance with the Vedic thought, they have always prayed, “May all cross safely the difficult places of life, may all see the face of happiness, may all reach that right knowledge, may all rejoice everywhere.”<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate prayer of the most compassionate aspirant is,

“O Lord, I do not long for the attainment of kingdom, neither heaven and nor for personal salvation. What I seek earnestly is the removal of suffering of all sentient beings.”<sup>2</sup>

### **East and West**

It is the need of the hour to come together and walk on the path of spirituality. In his message for the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 Sri Aurobindo says, “August 15<sup>th</sup> is the birthday of free India... The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India’s spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time, more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope

and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.” In another message given to America, he says, “It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics; the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with Life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before. There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Similarities**

I want to highlight some similarities in Hinduism and Christianity. In both the religions devotion and love is the easiest way to realize God. In Hinduism, love, that is, Bhakti (भक्ति) is regarded as the supreme attainment which is a path as well as the goal. The doctrine of love and devotion has been expounded by the great sages like Narada, Shandilya and others.

Narada defines Bhakti (भक्ति) as the greatest love for God.<sup>4</sup> It is a sublimation of deep spiritual knowledge coupled with continuous detached service offered to human beings as an agent of God at His behest. Thanks to the poetic compositions of saints, the spirit of Bhakti (भक्ति) has permeated into life of common man. All poet-saints like Tulasidas, Suradas and Kabir, have sung beautifully the glory of love which has reached the hearts of the common people. Kabir says in an eloquent way, “Mere bookish knowledge never makes a man learned. One becomes wise when one understands the value of Love – Prema (प्रेम) – a word comprising of two and half letters.”<sup>5</sup> Persons of such conviction and action are seen in all great faiths. Christianity also has a great tradition in this regard. In recent times Mother Teresa was a living example of love and compassion and Focolare Movement

founded by Revered Chiara Lubich is a meaningful expression of selfless love coupled with service. Love has an important place in Christianity. Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>6</sup> One has to extend love to enemies too; and in a special manner to the poor. It is said, "If you love those who love you, what is special about that?"<sup>7</sup> Thus love is not reciprocal. One should be more humble than the blade of grass and more tolerant than a tree; being free from pride one should always remember the glory of God.<sup>8</sup>

Devotion, love, prayer and repetition of holy and sacred names are common to Hinduism and Christianity. Faith and devotion uplift the soul to communion with God in both the religions. The Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) opens the portals of devotion to one and all irrespective of caste and gender. The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण) gives everybody the right to love God. Remembrance of the Name is a fundamental practice in the spiritual sadhana (साधना practice) in both, Hinduism and Christianity. In Hinduism it became more fundamental than the exterior discipline of worshipping an idol in a temple as repetition of name of God was associated with a mental image.

Regarding the prayer of the name of Jesus, Evelyn Underhill says that its technique is simple, within the reach of the most humble worshippers and yet it penetrates so far that it can introduce those who make use of it with faith into the most profound mysteries of contemplation. It expresses the devout peasant's childlike, simple appeal to God as well as the great contemplative's endless yearning.

Meditation on the name of Lord is considered as an essential part of the spiritual practices in Christianity. Hinduism emphasizes Namasmaraṇa (नामस्मरण) – chanting the name of Lord – as the most common and easiest means of attaining God. Thus repeating the name of God is considered as an important device in both Hinduism and Christianity. The name of God purifies and takes the devotees to the highest spiritual experience. In Hindu mysticism name is a symbol that carries with it the divine power. The famous devotees in both Hinduism and Christianity stand testimony to this fact. Namadev says, "The name of God is sacred. Nothing else can be more sacred than that."<sup>9</sup>

## Mysticism

In the field of mysticism also, we find some meeting points. The tradition of mysticism in India has an unbroken chain right from the days of Rigveda (ऋग्वेद) upto this day. Mysticism is timeless and limitless. The Veda-s (वेद), the Purana-s (पुराण) and writings

of saints like Namadev, Ekanath, Tukaram, Narasi Mehta, Mirabai, Tulasidas, Kabir, Nanak, Suradas, etc. are replete with the references to mystic experience. The literature of Christian mystics is also very vast and scattered through countries such as Greece, Germany, France, Italy and England. St. John tells us, “God is love.” “God is light or spirit.” Indian saints also say that God is love; He is light. Saint Francis of Assisi was a great mystic. Saint Ekanath and Saint Teresa of Avila belonging to the same century speak on parallel lines. St. Teresa’s ‘Interior Castle’ has similarities with Bhavartha Ramayana (भगवार्थ-रामायण) of Saint Ekanath.

Expressions of many great mystics from the West and the East are strikingly similar. St. Paul says, “Whether we live or whether we die, we are of the Lord.” Saint Tukaram reiterates, “May this body sustain or perish I hold onto Thee, O Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

We have a rich time-tested spiritual heritage profound with its illuminating wisdom, life sustaining moral values and splendid aesthetic expressions. We believe in harmony of religions. Hindu religion offers a number of ways to seek union with God. All religions are different paths which lead to Divine. We all are sons and daughters, of the same Father, same Divine which has brought forth the knowledge in different parts of the world at different times, to different people when it was needed. If we see from a new angle, a new vision, all the religions contain human values, love, compassion and joy.

Indian tradition believes in the omnipresence of the Supreme Reality in every individual. So it teaches tolerance and universal harmony. “Eternal peace is for those – and not for others – who are wise and who realize in their hearts Him who – being one, the controller, and the Inner Self of all makes a single form multifarious.”<sup>11</sup>

K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham is imparting value-oriented education. It aims at spreading the message of universal brotherhood and promoting understanding and harmony among faiths. Mahatma Gandhi has illustrated a way to practise universal brotherhood in his life. Great Indian teachers such as Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, and Swami Muktananda have been talking about the similarities and harmony in Hinduism and Christianity. Our collaboration with the Focolare Movement is an important step in this direction. Madam Chiara, you have always led people to the service of Lord. You have understood the hearts of all those who came in your contact

and helped them to develop their merits. You believe in the maxim, to love the man is to love God. You belong to the galaxy of the God-realisers who, in the words of Dr. R. D. Ranade, “constitute a blessed community and on account of their intense love for the afflicted in mankind; they live only for its benefaction and betterment proclaiming from pole to pole like a rumbling cloud, the eternal gospel of God.”<sup>12</sup> Let us walk the path of Peace and Harmony joining our hearts and hands.

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Endnotes:

- 1 सर्वस्तरतु दुर्गाणि सर्वो भद्राणि पश्यतु ।  
सर्वस्तद् बुद्धिमाप्नोतु सर्वस्सर्वत्र नन्दतु ॥  
sarvastaratu durgani sarvo bhadrani pashyatu/  
sarvastad buddhimapnotu sarvassarvatra nandatu//
- 2 नत्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नापुनर्भवम् ।  
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥  
natvaham kamaye rajyam na svargam napunarbhavam/  
kamaye duhkhataptanam praninamartinashanam//
- 3 Sri Aurobindo on Himself, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 26, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 400, 403, 413-414
- 4 सा त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा ।  
sa tvasmin paramapremarupa/ Narada Bhakti Sutra I.2
- 5 पोथी पढि पढि जगमुआ पंडित भया न कोय ।  
ढाई आखर प्रेम का पढे सो पंडित होय ॥  
pothi padhi padhi jagamua pandit bhaya na koya/  
dhai akhar prema ka padhe so pandit hoyo//
- 6 Matthew 22:36
- 7 Matthew 5:46

- 8 तृणादपि सुनीचेन वृक्षादपि सहिष्णुना ।  
अमानिना मानदेन कीर्तनीयः सदा हरिः ॥  
trinadapi sunichena vrikshadapi sahisnuna/  
amanina manadena kirtaniyah sada harih//
- 9 नाम पावन पावन । त्याहून पवित्र आहे कोण ?  
nama pavana pavana/ tyahuna pavitra ahe kona? Dr. R. C. Dhere (ed.), Sakalasantagatha,  
Part II, Namdevgatha 333, Varada Prakashan, Pune, 1983
- 10 देह जावो अथवा राहो, पांडुरंगी वृढ भावो ।  
deha javo athava raho, pandurangi dridha bhavo/ Dr. R. C. Dhere (ed.), Sakalasantagatha,  
Part IV, Tukaramgatha 4225, Varada Prakashan, Pune, 1983
- 11 एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा एकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति ।  
तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरास्तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥  
eko vashi sarvabhutantaratma ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti/  
tamatmasthan ye'nupashyanti dhirastesham sukham shashvatam netaresham//  
Katha Upanishad II.2.12
- 12 Ranade R. D., Pathway to God in Kannada Literature, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay,  
1960, p. 314

# My Experience of Hindu-Christian Dialogue

*Delivered in* : the Interfaith Dialogue Symposium on Bhakti in Hinduism and Christianity

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai, and Abba School, Focolare Movement, Italy

at International Mariapolis Centre, Castel Gandolfo, Rome, Italy

14 June 2002

# My Experience of Hindu-Christian Dialogue

I am happy that we have assembled here for the international symposium on Bhakti (भक्ति) – the way of Love, Union with God and Universal Brotherhood in Hinduism and Christianity. This is a joint venture undertaken by the Center for Inter-faith Dialogue, Focolare Movement, Rocca di Papa, Rome, Italy and K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai, India.

I am happy and feel privileged to be in the company of Revered Chiara Lubich, the Foundress and President of the Focolare Movement. All of us know that Madam Chiara is a great spiritual leader. Her spirituality makes man aware that prayer and love are two wings to fly to the Eternal One. Her interpretation of spirituality has blended practice with precepts. It has given light and life to many. Chiara has unfolded the secret meaning of the Kingdom of the Heaven, which according to her encompasses every heart. So without exaggeration, permit me to say that the new world Chiara has built is a sweet union of heaven and earth.

The Focolare movement is a meaningful expression of love coupled with service. It has cemented priestly life with that of common people who equally partake grace of God while shouldering responsibilities of day-to-day life. The Movement not only spreads the message of spirituality but also enables people to move into it.

With this event of a seminar on Bhakti (भक्ति) in Hinduism and Christianity we reiterate our mission of dialogue. Hand in hand we march ahead to bring into reality the art of living together in love and peace.

## Italy – the Centre of Culture

Your country has been notable in the annals of human history, not merely for political and spiritual reasons, but also for the great contribution it has made to the World of Literature, the Fine Arts, and indeed, to civilization itself. It was from the Renaissance in Florence, centuries ago, when it was the intellectual eye of Europe, that the message went forth of a new learning, a new outlook and a new philosophy. This brought renowned scholars to your threshold, eager to profit by the experience available. So they came here to meet Petrarch and Dante, Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, Boccaccio and others, their counterparts from the Western world, and were inspired to a large measure. They carried back with them the message of light and hope, which kindled many a lamp in their respective countries. In fact, Florence lifted the then Western world from the limbo of the so-called Dark Ages, brought it into the modern arena of science and of progress. This brought about the dynamic change that has reduced our world to the size of a global village. Thus, men staying miles away from one another have come in close proximity – but this has not, in many a case brought them together in amity and goodwill. Their minds are still on either side of a great divide. It is here in their minds that the seeds of peace and harmony can be, and have to be sown, and that is why, I submit, we meet to build bridges that would link our countries strongly in bonds of brotherhood and familiarity.

K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham with its emphasis on value-oriented education is dedicated to the endeavour of spreading the message of universal brotherhood to promote understanding and harmony among faiths. It believes that the world is a close and well-knit family. It aims at the reawakening of our ancient civilization and heritage in the global perspective.

In consonance with the spirit of coexistence, harmony and peace K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham provides its students an opportunity to study outlines of all prominent religions of the world. We believe that all faiths, howsoever different they might be in their appearance, lead human beings in proximity of God. Vemana, the Telugu mystic-poet, sang, “Kine are of diverse colours but all milk is alike; the kinds of flowers vary, yet all worship is one; systems of faith are different, but the Deity is one.” The Bible (बायबल) says, “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

## **Devotion**

There are amazing similarities in the course of devotion in Hinduism and Christianity, for example, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (बृहदारण्यक-उपनिषद्) it is said, “Verily, O Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be seen, heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. Verily when the Self is seen, heard of, reflected on and understood, all this is known.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise the author of The Cloud of Unknowing suggests similar methods in devotion, using a different terminology. He says “All the same, intermediate activities do exist in which an apprentice in contemplation ought to be occupied, and they are these: Lection, Meditation and Orison. For your better understanding these may be called Reading, Thinking and Praying. In a way, reading and listening are the same: scholars read books, and the uneducated ‘read’ scholars when they listen to them preaching the word of God.”<sup>2</sup> These methods, I would like to point out, are close to Shravana (श्रवण hearing), Manana (मनन reflection) and Nididhyasana (निदिध्यासन meditation) in the Hindu tradition.

Prayer is a prominent feature common to all religions. Prayer in itself, to put it exactly, is nothing but a devout intention directed towards God for the attainment of good and the removal of evils. While elucidating manner of praying the author of The Cloud of Unknowing says, “For this reason we should pray in the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of our spirit; and that not in many words, but in a little word of one syllable.” Though brevity of prayer is highly recommended here, that does not mean that frequency of prayer is to be avoided. “It should never cease until the moment when it has fully obtained what it longed for.”<sup>3</sup>

The best prayer asks for the proximity of God. Agony of separation from God is the same for Kabir and St. John of the Cross. Kabir says,

“Water is the life of the lotus flower;  
A moment’s separation and it is scorched.  
By the sun’s fiery rays, so does my soul burn,  
In endless agony, part from you, my beloved.”

Repeating the name of God is considered as an important device in both Hinduism and Christianity. The name of Jesus, Mother Mary, Lord Shiva or Shakti (शक्ति) is the purifier of the lowest and lowliest of men. One who repeats the name of God incessantly has no fear. The name takes the aspirant to the highest spiritual experience in life. The eminent devotees in both Hinduism and Christianity stand testimony to this fact.

In the Hindu tradition of devotion Guru (गुरु), that is, spiritual teacher is almost inevitable.

He preaches the devotee the technique of repetition of name to develop divine love in him. He burns the flames of desire; quenches the fire; pours the elixir of devotion and makes the devotee placid and cool. Just a glimpse of him, a touch from him removes all evil tendencies of his disciple.

### **Interreligious Dialogue**

With these few words on Bhakti (भक्ति), now I shall express my thoughts on the necessity of interreligious dialogue. At present we are virtually torn asunder by religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism sometimes gives birth to extremism. Fundamentalists strongly believe that the scriptures of the religion they follow alone contain the truth and they have the responsibility to defend them. Their standpoint is non-negotiable. Be it Islam or Christianity or Hinduism there are groups all over the world which are fiercely dogmatic and express their dissent through hatred and violence. The pity of it all is not merely in their fanatical expression but in their receiving approval and commendation from the highest religious bodies, government and even some spiritual heads. We need to ponder over all this like responsible citizens of a civilized world.

When I look back at history, I wonder whether religious persecution has ever been able to bring the Kingdom of God on earth. All religious wars have left only a trail of woe and misery, I wonder what has been really achieved by asserting the superiority of one religion over another, while we keep on saying that the temple of God is within us. I wonder whether we have really understood the meaning of such esoteric statements, for if we had, there would be no question of spilling blood in the name of God. The tragedy is that in spite of 5000 years of ancient wisdom of Hinduism and message of non-violence from Buddhism and Jainism, in spite of Jesus who walked amidst people propagating love and compassion, in spite of Mohammed preaching Islam, the gospel of brotherhood, we have not been able to subdue our narrow minded bigotry and elevate ourselves to understand that, Truth is one, and that differences exist only because our perceptions have not expanded.

To me it seems the mistake basically stems from our perceptions. While we talk of the world today as a global village technologically and scientifically, ironically in the case of religion we do not see the intimacy that exists in a village. The church and the temple, the synagogue and mosque, still have their differences. One of the things that has appealed to my heart and mind most is the concept of interfaith temple. The Ramakrishna

Mission, for instance, has interfaith temple where pictures and portraits of the founders of all religions adorn the wall – an appropriate ambience to underpin the unity of all religions. And so it is with the Yogoda Self-Realization Society founded by Paramahansa Yogananda where the pictures of Lord Krishna and Jesus – the Christ, adorn the altar of the society's meditation centers. These indeed are means of expressing our reverence for all the prophets of all faiths, whatever be their respective denominational differences. We have to break the dividing walls and that is what religion is really meant to do. Could it ever be that Krishna, Buddha and Christ wanted to erect barriers between man and man, between community and community? The fallacy in our perception is that we see only differences, which lead only to further multiplication of differences.

What is it that takes one from ignorance to wisdom and from darkness to light? It is the expansion of understanding, of consciousness. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is what I have learnt from the Hindu-Christian Dialogue. Differences exist only in the mind but beyond the mind, if only we can see beyond it, there would be no place for strife and division. It is then that all of us will be in the image of God. Therefore all our attempts to understand Hinduism and Christianity should lead us only to the understanding of the underlying oneness of all religions and not to exaggerate their seeming differences. Once we understand this there is no room for vain debates, and for sinister and pseudo intellectual attempts to assert the superiority of one religion over another.

God is everywhere and we, in our narrow perceptions and dogmatic beliefs, try to imprison Him in the four walls of a temple or church, attribute to certain directions divinity and to others profanity – all certainly manifestations of improper understanding.

We, the people of India are the inheritors of the timeless Upanishadic tradition of oneness of all, so beautifully encapsulated in the oft-quoted aphorism: "Truth is one, the wise men call it in many different ways."

As an educationist I fully agree with the expression of Cardinal Francis Arinze in his message to Hindus for the Feast of Diwali 2001. He says, "Education and training in promoting better relation between the followers of religions is an urgent priority. Growing awareness of religious pluralism should not lead to indifference."

We, in this Dialogue, have built a bridge of mutual understanding. To me personally, the Hindu-Christian Dialogue has been a rich spiritual journey.

I must not forget to mention the contribution of Msgr. Felix Machado\* to whom we owe

a lot for establishing and continuing the pioneering work of Hindu-Christian Dialogue. We consider him as our family member.

Our one-year-old friendship with Revered Madam Chiara Lubich and the Focolare is rejuvenated through the symposium on Bhakti (भक्ति). May it further generate fruitful work for mutual understanding.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad II.4.5.
- 2 The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works, A. C. Spearing (tr.), Penguin Books, 2001, ch. 35
- 3 Ibid., ch. 39
- \* At present Felix Machado is the Archbishop of Vasai, Maharashtra.

# **The Focolare Movement**

*Delivered on* : the occasion of receiving Luminosa Award  
at Mariapolis, New York, USA

7 July 2002

# The Focolare Movement

**I**T is indeed a privilege for me to be with you today and receive the prestigious Luminosa Award conferred by Focolare Movement. I feel all the more honoured that I, coming from the business family from India have been selected for this prestigious award. In a fragmented society that longs for unity, wholeness and peace, Luminosa is a piece of the world that has come together to signify unity. Its ripple effect on the global community is already apparent and visible. I have been involved with various religious activities in India and abroad and have participated in many interreligious dialogues and other initiatives aimed at bringing peace and unity among people world over. I am thankful to the Focolare for honouring me with the Luminosa Award. At this juncture I can only assure those assembled here that this award will make me dedicate myself further to work with added vigour for the cause for which Luminosa stood.

On this occasion, I admit that my association with this Movement has been only brief. It goes back to over two to two and half years when I came in contact with Madam Chiara Lubich during her visit to India. What impressed me was the deep faith of followers of this Movement in God, which has made the Focolare Movement extremely popular. It has its origin in the midst of the destruction and hopelessness of the Second World War. A group of young women, bound together by their faith and their experience that God is love, took this initiative, which changed their lives. They resolved to live as persons whose actions and thoughts would be based on the Gospel. This message spread far and wide over a period of time. Soon a community of 500 people of all ages came to live around

them. Today Luminosa is a centre for spirituality. It has grown beyond expectations of everyone. This Movement has fascinated all alike. Those who come in contact with it bring their friends. It is a matter of pride that today thousands of people participate in weekend and weeklong programs of spirituality sponsored by Focolare.

One naturally asks why people get attracted to the Focolare. The reason is not far to seek. There is something new in this Movement. It is both a reality and an experience, which fills you with the desire to go out and do something for the people around you, the first step towards building a more united world. What is more, there is a lot of flexibility for your belonging to this Movement, which may range from collaboration in its various activities to a more committed lifestyle in small communities. Another distinguishing feature of this Movement is that members of the world's religions as also persons with no religious affiliation can and do participate in the life of the Movement in varying degrees.

What brought me nearer to this Movement was the interreligious dialogues which I have also participated, professed and supported. My belief in commonality of all religions and the scope for bridging the differences between people of various religious beliefs and faith made me participate in such interreligious dialogues which over a period of time brought me nearer to Focolare Movement. I was impressed by the amount of efforts made by this Movement towards promoting interreligious dialogues and establishing fruitful contacts between Christian members of the Focolare and members of other religions with a view of bringing amity and peace among various religious followers. The Movement views the cooperation of all believers in God as the most important factor in bringing about world-wide solidarity and peace. This belief provided the meeting ground for interreligious dialogues.

Many of the preachings of this Movement are similar to Hindu way of thinking on religions and their differentiating factors. The need to iron out perceptible differences and to inculcate the spirit of communal peace and harmony among people of various faiths is underlined by both.

What, however, really impressed me was the culture of giving and the economy of communion that this Movement not only preached but also put in practice. It was found that the ideal of the communion of goods, and of being 'one heart and one soul', echoed in the teachings of Jesus had lost momentum while its practice was maintained in monasteries and convents. Some of the lay people connected with this Movement began to think as to how to encourage the culture of giving and the economy of communion.

Those involved with the economy of communion – the business community and the workers – are inspired by the radical principles of a culture which is different from the prevailing theory and practice of economics, the antithesis of a culture of giving. What struck me was that this economy of communion is similar to what Mahatma Gandhi called the Trusteeship Philosophy. The same way as Mahatma Gandhi believed, here also the giving of a financial donation is an expression of ‘self-giving’ on the level of ‘being’. Thus, it reveals an anthropological concept which is neither individualistic nor collective, but one of the communion. According to this Movement, the culture of giving is something more than philanthropy or a way of distributing welfare benefits, the two virtues derived from individualism.

The Focolare Movement elevated this theory of giving to higher levels. There may be a ‘giving’ which is contaminated by the desire to have power over the other; which seeks dominion and even oppression of individuals and peoples. There may be another type of giving, which seeks personal gratification, which may be an egoistic expression and for the recipient it is an offence, a humiliation. Similarly, there may be giving based on expediency which uses people and may be opportunistic. The neo-liberal philosophy, which uses giving for its own advantage falls under this category. The Focolare Movement does not approve of this type of giving. This theory of the Movement is on the same plane as what Gandhiji preached. The giving, which this Movement favours is what Christians call ‘evangelical’. This giving has the capacity to generate, even in the business arena, the Gospel experience of “Give and it will be given to you”. This reciprocal giving and receiving opens up to others, deep respect of their dignity, and often the return comes in the form of an unexpected income, of the discovery of a new technique or the development of a successful marketing area.

As pointed out earlier, Mahatma Gandhi professed that business houses are the trustees of the wealth they owe. The same type of thought process was the basis of the economy of communion theory propounded by the Focolare Movement. The members of the Movement also felt that this theory, which gives prominence to the values of quality interpersonal relationships and staff motivation, could be successfully applied in their production process.

The application of this theory can have many ramifications for the businesses and corporate houses. They can use this theory for eliciting better and more cooperation from their workers by giving them a role in the running of the business and making suggestions for improving the performance of the company in which they work. It may

be that initially they may be diffident and disoriented and may even refuse. But with patience and trust, a peaceful dialogue can take shape and bring out collaboration with one another.

At present, the people in business always think that there can be no meeting ground between them and their competitors and all they should concentrate on is how to eliminate them. This is a traditional view of doing business. But the communion theory takes a totally different approach. The members of communion no longer see their competitors as potential enemies from whom they have to defend themselves in order to secure their slice of the market. They start looking at the competitors as colleagues working in the same field with whom they would like to establish a partnership. Thus there is no scope for misgivings and suspicions.

Thus I have found many similarities between the teachings of Focolare Movement and those of Gandhiji. Possibly this has helped this Movement to gain ground world-wide. Today it has over 87,000 members and about two million friends and adherents in over 180 nations. Its publication 'Word of Life' is translated into 84 languages and reaches more than 15 million people.

In conclusion, I would like to share my happiness on receiving this Luminosa Award which I receive as the humble servant of God engaged in making my own contribution to this world torn of strife and dissensions by working for ways and means which can go a long way in bringing peace, harmony and brotherly feelings in persons from various religions and culture. I can only assure you that I shall endeavour to contribute my mite to the best of my ability to the cause for which Focolare Movement was started.

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# **Hindu-Christian Dialogue Our Common Experience of the Last Seven Years**

*Delivered in* : the Interfaith Dialogue Symposium on God-Man-Nature in Hinduism and Christianity

*organized by* : Abba School, Focolare Movement, Italy

at Castel Gandolfo, Rome, Italy

26 May 2008

# Hindu-Christian Dialogue

## Our Common Experience of the Last Seven Years

**D**EAR friends from Focolare Movement, I am happy that we have assembled here for the International Symposium on God, Man and Nature in Hinduism and Christianity. This is our third symposium here at Castel Gandolfo. The first was held in 2002 and the second in 2004. The present one is quite different from the earlier ones because it is held when Revered Chiara Lubich is not with us as she has left for the heavenly abode. However, in another sense she is everywhere, now that she is not bound by the limitations of time, space or form. The spirit she has instilled among us has brought us together here and we continue our march for peace and harmony through Interreligious Dialogue.

To me personally, the Hindu-Christian Dialogue has been a rich spiritual journey. As the Chairman of the Somaiya Trust and K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham I have organized a number of Interreligious Dialogues on our campus in Mumbai. With a strong belief in the true spirit of tolerance and reverence for all faiths, we, at Somaiya Vidyavihar have been carrying forward efforts for the International Interfaith Dialogue since 1997. K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham has successfully organized a number of International Seminars that delve deeply into themes such as 'Hindu-Christian Mahavakya-s' (महावाक्य), 'Meditation in Hinduism and Christianity', 'Religion and Secularism', 'World Religions – Together for Peace'. Three of the seminars were held in Rome of which two were in collaboration with the Focolare Movement.

It was in January 2001, that we opened a new page, a golden page in our attempts of

fostering peace and harmony through revitalizing religious foundations of the society when we came across the Focolare Movement. Madam Chiara, at that time, was on a visit to India. Archbishop Felix Machado, who was then the Undersecretary of Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at Vatican gave us the news about Madam Chiara's visit to India. We invited her to our campus. She came, we met and it was the beginning of a long, steady and deep relationship of mutual respect and love. We had the good fortune of having Madam Chiara amongst us again in January 2003. As a tribute to her services to Hindu-Christian Dialogue, we published the proceedings of the Hindu-Christian Symposium on 'Bhakti (भक्ति) – Pathway to God' which was held in 2002 at Castel Gandolfo.

It is said in the Mahabharata (महाभारत) that the virtuous people develop friendship with seven strides taken together.<sup>1</sup> Here we have been marching together for more than seven years and I can say that we are not just friends but intimate members of a family bound by the ties of divine love and the spirituality of Chiara.

To me the Focolare Movement is a meaningful expression of love coupled with service. It has struck a wonderful balance between priestly life and worldly life of common people by sharing the grace of God while shouldering responsibilities of day-to-day life. The Movement has set up model towns and centres called Mariapolis to translate the philosophy of Chiara into practice. Our visit to Lopiano, a model town near Florence, where people of different religious traditions live in perfect peace and harmony and the youth are initiated in the spirituality of Chiara has proved to be instrumental in giving me some novel ideas about training youth for service to community.

My efforts in Hindu-Christian Dialogue led me to become the Leader of the Hindu Delegation in the 'Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions' held in 2003 and later in 2006 both at Astana, Kazakhstan under the dynamic leadership of H.E. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan. I was impressed by the great initiative and personal interest shown by him in every detail of the Congress.

These efforts in the field of Interfaith Dialogue made me fortunate enough to be blessed by H. H. Pope John Paul II five times in private audience. I had the privilege of being a special invitee to represent Hinduism at the Pontification of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2005; and the following day I was among the first few to be granted private audience.

A new dimension was added to our Interreligious Dialogue in the year 2005 with inclusion

of Islam in our seminar. The unique and wonderful nectar which emerged through the churning of the pious thoughts of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity enhanced our spirituality. This has been captured in the publication of the dialogue proceedings Tridal, signifying three petals. All religions are just different paths to reach the Ultimate Truth. The Almighty God has an action plan ready for each and every soul. Man just happens to be an instrument of this plan. In the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) Lord Krishna enjoins upon His disciple Arjuna to become His instrument to accomplish His plan.<sup>2</sup>

We live in a world of plurality of religions. We, the people in India have an age-old tradition of deep and relevant insights for helping us to understand the phenomenon of religious pluralism.

For us diversity of faiths and religious practices is the manifestation of the same truth which manifests differently in the context of time and space. So building bridges of understanding and nurturing admiration for people of different religious persuasion came very naturally to Hindus who followed the Vedic tradition. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, “Religion speaks to us in many dialects. It has diverse complexions. And yet it has one true voice, the voice of human pity and compassion, of mercy, of patient love, and to that voice we must do all we can to listen.”<sup>3</sup> However history has witnessed attempts of violence, coercion and severing cultural, ethnic and religious roots of people in India by external forces.

As against this background dialogue with Focolare Movement was a conversation where no difference prevailed and what remained is only reciprocal appreciation. It had a spirit of assimilation and adaptation, inclusion and not exclusion, cooperation and not conflict, sharing and not dominating. We have seen the light and the spark of truth in the religious traditions of each other without betraying our own faith. These interreligious dialogue meetings are always conducted with complete faith in God as His Holiness Pope John Paul II has said solemnly, “May God guide us and bless us as we strive to walk together, hand in hand, and build together a world of peace.”<sup>4</sup>

Today when all the world has come closer we need to open up ourselves to others with an attitude of reverence. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says, “Today, all the peoples of the world form a close neighbourhood, thanks to the inventions of science and the devices of technology. Transport and communication have resulted in the meeting of cultures, races and religions. The only attitude that we can adopt in the present context is an attitude not of exclusiveness but of comprehension, not of intolerance but of understanding, not

of hatred and fanaticism but of appreciation and assimilation of whatever is valuable.”<sup>5</sup>

The world is now ripe for this new culture of Dialogue. The same process of globalization which has created problems has made it a necessity and reality that people of different faiths can know each other better. They may learn to overlook the external differences of rituals that many a time veil the spirit of religion so that they stand to share the variety of faiths as a common legacy of the humanity.

“Every religion,” Swami Vivekananda said, “helps us to reach the Divine.” He says, “I do not simply say I tolerate religions. That is an insult to God. I accept all religions. I worship all religions. Every religion which helps us to reach God and realize His nature is something which is very dear to me. I am not prepared to reject any of them.”<sup>6</sup>

In past the Asian traditions such as Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, Confucian and Tao, etc. have spread their message over the length and breadth of Asia through a process of dialogue and discussion. People accepted new religious traditions on the basis of reasoning and conviction and not through bloodshed and coercion. These traditions can provide insights into peaceful coexistence of religions. The message from the Interreligious Assembly held in October 1999 in Vatican says:

“We are conscious of the urgent need to create a new spiritual consciousness for all humanity in accordance with the religious traditions so that the principle of respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience may prevail.”

The first step to put this into practice is to introduce the essential unity of religions through educational programmes. We, at Somaiya Vidyavihar, our educational campus are trying to do this in our own way. And it was Focolare Movement who took cognizance of our work by conferring the prestigious Luminosa Award on me in July 2002.

We have committed ourselves to an uphill task. We, the pilgrims of Interreligious Dialogue have to traverse the difficult path. No other light, but one that shines within, will illumine our path. We always bear in mind, “We must come closer together, not only through the modern means of communication, through press and radio, through steamships and jet planes – we must come together with our hearts, in mutual understanding, esteem and love. We must meet not merely as tourists, but as pilgrims who set out to find God – not in buildings of stone but in human hearts. Man must meet man, nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God.”<sup>7</sup>

The present symposium is a step ahead in our journey together to understand each other

more intimately. The theme of this symposium 'God, Man and Nature' is very significant because God has always been the ultimate goal of most of the religious traditions. The relation that man envisages for himself with God determines his role in this vast universe and his attitude towards fellow human beings. Nature is nothing but the extension of man's surroundings. Man is not an island; he cannot survive in a vacuum. He needs other human beings and the sky, the stars, the trees, the rivers, the mountains – the different manifestations of the Nature. In a way he is internally linked to God and externally to the Nature. Therefore, it is not only interesting but also fruitful to look at the relationship between God, Man and Nature.

There is an intimate connection between God and man. But the world has a tendency to lure us away from God and to delude us by creating an impression that the world itself is all. We have to overcome this delusion and see through the veil. Man, of all the creatures of the world, is gifted with the highest intelligence; and hence has the highest possibility of unravelling the mystery of existence and knowing his real nature as one with God, the Absolute. The realization of his real nature is the goal of man. This is liberation (Moksha मोक्ष). God becomes the centre of the life of a liberated soul who still leads life in the world. He wears no special tag and yet becomes a light shining with the power of truth and helps others for their spiritual growth. He works for the uplift of the world; fortified by his rare divine vision struggles with the evil and imperfections; and tries to restore the world to its pure spirit. I think Madam Chiara was one such soul, a gift to humanity, personification of agape and service.

At last, to put my sentiments about the Interreligious Dialogue with Focolare in a nutshell, I quote a few lines from Rabindranath Tagore:

“Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not  
Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.  
Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.”<sup>8</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 प्राहुः सप्तपदं मित्रं बुधास्तत्त्वार्थदर्शिनः ।  
मित्रतां च पुरस्कृत्य किञ्चिद्वक्ष्यामि तच्छृणु ॥  
prahuh saptapadam mitram budhastattvarthadarshinah/  
mitratam cha puraskritya kinchidvakshyami tachchhrinu//

Mahabharata Aranyakaparva 281.22

- 2 निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन् ।  
nimittamatram bhava savyasachin/ Bhagavadgita XI.33
- 3 The Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan, Mc Dermott Robert (ed.), Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1996, p. 254
- 4 Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, 1963-1965, Francesco Gioia (ed.), The Magisterium of John Paul II, 486, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, 1997
- 5 Radhakrishnan S., Our Heritage, Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1987, p. 17
- 6 Ibid., p. 88 cf., The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1983, pp. 373-374
- 7 Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, 1963-1965, Francesco Gioia (ed.), The Magisterium of John Paul II, 200, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, 1997
- 8 Tagore Rabindranath, The Collected Poems and Plays, Collier Books Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1937, p. 23

# Christian-Muslim-Hindu Dialogue

*Delivered in* : the International Interreligious Dialogue Meeting on Religion and Society; Issues of Justice and Peace

*organized by* : Dept of Islamic Studies, Osmania University, Hyderabad, Interfaith Dialogue Centre, Sassari, Italy and Dept of Oriental Studies, University of Turin, Italy

at Hyderabad, India

8-10 March 2004

# Christian-Muslim-Hindu Dialogue

**A**N Interreligious Dialogue is the call of the hour as it is an endeavour to build a bridge between different religious traditions. It aims at breaking through the mist of misunderstanding and apprehension amongst different religions and hopes to usher a dawn of mutual acceptance and respect in this era of turbulence and strife.

A sincere and honest attempt to seek interreligious harmony has been made by K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham in collaboration with Institute for Interfaith Studies, Sassari, the Department of Oriental Studies, University of Torino, Interreligious Monastic Dialogue, Rome and Focolare Movement (Italy) through a series of seminars and publications.

Through these Dialogues we have realized that to be religious today is to be Interreligious. We have learnt not to exaggerate the seeming differences. We have realized that in a genuine Interfaith Dialogue there is no room for vain debates and for sinister and pseudo intellectual attempts to assert the superiority of one religion over another.

The response to the Interreligious Dialogue seminars and symposia we have received so far has reawakened the hope of achieving peace and harmony. The differences no longer threaten. A spirit of unity as the children of one Divinity is generated and the participants of the Dialogue stand together committed to the noble cause.

Religion ought to be a cementing force, bringing people together like pilgrims on a journey with the same destination. All religions are the pathways to God or the higher

power that controls this world which is variously wonderful and wonderfully various. One must not forget that wisdom lies in recognizing the fact that 'in hurting you I hurt myself and in helping you I help myself'. It is indeed significant that from ancient times in India, the thinkers have never spoken of any particular prophet because they recognized wisdom in all. Vivekananda rightly stated, "As in the social life the greater the number of occupations in every society the better for that society, the more chance is there for everyone of that society to make a living, so in the world of thought and of religion, it is most glorious dispensation of the Lord that there are so many religions in the world and the pathways to God that these would increase every day until every man has a religion unto himself."<sup>1</sup>

Plurality of religions need not be a hindrance to spiritual oneness. Swami Vivekananda learnt from his master – the revered Ramakrishna Paramahansa that religions of the world are not contradictory. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the three important religions of the world. Nevertheless it is true that followers of these religions are seen to be at variance with each other. What is the reason of this discord? Swami Vivekananda told a story to illustrate the cause.

"A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born and brought up in the well... Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and jumped into the well.

"Where are you from?"

"I am from the sea."

"The sea! How big is that? Is it as big as my well?" And the frog took a leap from one side of the well to the other.

"My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how do you compare the sea with your little well?"

Then the frog took another leap and asked. "Is your sea so big?"

"What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!"

"Well, then," said the frog of the well, "nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this. This fellow is a liar, so turn him out."

That has been the difficulty all the while.

I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that it is the whole world."<sup>2</sup>

Really speaking it is not a question of this religion versus that. Ideally it should be existence of this and that. As early as in 1922, Mahatma Gandhi declared in Young India, "I should love all the men, not only in India but in the world – belonging to the different faiths to become better people by contact with another and if that happens, the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the follower of that religion himself. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, that is, the wholly Hindu or the wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman; but I want it to be wholly tolerant with its religions working side by side with one another."<sup>3</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi did not see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता). Really speaking the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) has enunciated the doctrine of Love and renunciation in a scientific manner. The Sermon has spoken of the same in a different or rather wonderful language.

All people know that the atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion has been created only in recent days. The great poet Iqbal believed that the Hindus and the Muslims who have lived together long under the shadows of the mighty Himalayas and have been nourished by the waters of Ganga and Yamuna have a unique message for the world and that message is of unity and not to hate anyone. It can be actualized through dialogue or exchange of ideas so that we can know and understand one another better. This will create a climate of mutual respect enabling us to establish strong ties of affection and sympathy. Mind then will meet mind with one accord bringing about intellectual and spiritual unity.

Let us be God-fearing souls treating all religions as equal – the Hindus, the Christians and the Muslims as brothers. Every creature on this earth is the creation of God or Allah. As the sons and daughters of the same soil all should be equal before Law. It is indeed good to love God not for hope of reward in this or the other world, but it is better to love God for love's sake and the prayer goes, "Lord, I do not want wealth, nor children, nor learning. If it be Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth but grant me this that I may love thee without the hope of reward, love unselfishly for love's sake."

It is through the spirit of dialogue which recognizes the validity of the view of others that we can establish real international fellowship putting an end to strife and struggle that appears to be a serious problem today. As has been rightly pointed out by Dasgupta, "Never has there been in the past greater opportunities for understanding and realising

spiritual expression of man in diverse countries and ages and under diverse circumstances and conditions as in our modern times, when the whole world has been brought to our door and the separation of space and time has been dissolved.”<sup>4</sup>

The basic unity of all religions was really experienced by Swami Vivekananda who said, “If you are a Hindu try to be a better Hindu, if you are a Christian try to become a better Christian and if you are a Mussalman, crave for being a better Mussalman.” Awakening the spirit of fraternity among Hindus, Christians as well as Mussalmans is really a desideratum so that humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will march on the enlightened path of prosperity and peace. Let us remember the Upanishadic words full of wisdom, “Whatever is infinite, that gives joy.”<sup>5</sup> Centuries before the Christian era, Chandogya (छान्दोग्य), one of the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) declared, “By knowledge of one lump of clay we know all the clay in the universe.”<sup>6</sup>

A hymn by Guru Govind Singh highlights unity between the followers of different faiths. He says,

“Hindus and Muslims are one!

The same Lord is the Creator and Nourisher of all;

The Monastery and the Mosque are the same.

So are the Hindu Puja (पूजा) and the Muslim Namaz (नमाज)

Men are all one.”

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Endnotes:

- 1 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VI, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1985, pp. 16-17
- 2 Ibid., Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 5
- 3 [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy\\_god\\_gospeloffaith.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_god_gospeloffaith.htm)

- 4 Dasgupta Surendranath, Philosophical Essays, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p. 372
- 5 यो वै भूमा तत् सुखम् ।  
yo vai bhuma tat sukham/ Chandogya Upanishad VII.23.1
- 6 यथा सौम्येकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञातम् स्यात्... ।  
yatha saumyekena mritpindena sarvam mrinmayam vijnatam syat.../  
Chandogya Upanishad VI.1.4

# Spirituality, Spiritual Culture and Astana

*Delivered in* : the International Scientific – Practical Conference on Astana – a Spiritual  
Centre of the World

*organized by* : H E Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
at Astana, Kazakhstan

20 October 2008

# Spirituality, Spiritual Culture and Astana

**A**STANA is a vivid and living symbol of the independence of Kazakhstan. It is the architectural articulation of the aspirations of modern Kazakhstan. It is true that the task of bringing together the nomadic pastoral groups into a powerful nation requires great vision and grit. Kazakhstan is fortunate to have such a leader in H. E. Nursultan Nazarbayev. It is only a person like him who can dream on such a magnificent scale and realize the dream in its complete glory and grandeur.

I had the good fortune of visiting Astana for the Congress of World and Traditional Religions as the Leader of Hindu faith (confession) from India in the years 2003 and 2006. These conferences were highly successful and fruitful. They offered opportunities to the leaders and followers of different faiths to interact and understand each other better. It was a significant step towards a harmonious coexistence of different faiths. The proceedings of the Congress of World and Traditional Religions were illuminated with the initiative and personal conviction of Honourable President H. E. Nursultan Nazarbayev. I had the privilege of being in his august company during these Congresses. I was fortunate to witness his efforts and achievements.

My connection with Astana was further strengthened as I was invited to deliver a speech on 'Universality of Hindu Tenets' at the L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in April 2008. The University conferred on me Honorary Professorship and paved the way for on-going academic collaboration between the institutions.

Honourable President of Kazakhstan has now taken up the challenge of promoting

religious harmony and peace. Astana has been the hub of these activities under his able and dynamic leadership. The magnificent Palace of Peace and Concord, the diamond in the crown of Astana can inspire all great souls in the world. It is a dwelling place of thousand hearts beating in unison. The Palace of Peace and Concord resembles the deep cave of the heart which becomes one small nest for the entire universe. In short, Palace of Peace and Concord is the symbol of spirituality.

### **Spirituality**

At present, humanity stands at crossroads of religious bigotry and fragmentation on one side and the lure of hedonism on the other. The solution lies in nurturing the culture of spirituality. Spirituality is the golden thread that can hold humanity together notwithstanding diverse religious practices.

It is the search for the real nature of a human being, the search within for the innermost essence of man. This means even though man is leading his life amidst the objects of senses, he is aware that there is something beyond them, which is known variously as the Ultimate Reality, God, Truth or the true nature of a being. It culminates in attainment of inner peace for which man strives all through his life. This peace is not dependent on the external world of pursuit of desires and their fulfillment.

Spirituality can be translated as Dharma (धर्म). Dharma (धर्म) is a comprehensive term. Here by Dharma (धर्म) I do not mean any particular religion. In the Vedic tradition Dharma (धर्म) implies cosmic order, eternal principles and norms of behaviour in consonance with them. Thus Dharma (धर्म) goes beyond the limited notion of religious practices, observances, rituals, dogmas and authority. Indeed Dharma (धर्म) stands for spirituality and evokes the spirit of universal harmony. This universal aspect of Dharma (धर्म) is found in the scriptures of all world religions. For example, the New Testament says, "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets."<sup>1</sup>

### **Religion and Spirituality**

While religion is laden with external practice of rituals, spirituality is the sublimation of human mind and discovery of the unfathomable inner world. Religion is the sheath, spirituality is the grain. It can be a common link between all religions, for it is spirituality which takes man to a higher plane where petty differences among religions vanish and the

universal nature of man shines. Manifestation of the universal nature of man is possible when man channelizes his inner forces. It has been said, “The new world of peace, freedom and safety for all can be achieved only by those who are moved by great spiritual ideals.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Challenges to Spirituality**

Decline in moral values, materialism and hedonism are the challenges the world is facing today. Time has come that spirituality in all faiths is kindled to jointly face these contemporary challenges.

In this context, I would like to quote a message from the Interreligious Assembly held in October 1999 in Vatican which says:

“We are conscious of the urgent need

- to confront together responsibly and courageously the problems and challenges of our modern world (that is, poverty, racism, environmental pollution, materialism, war and the proliferation of arms, globalization, AIDS, lack of medical care, breakdown of family and community, marginalization of women and children, etc...
- to create a new spiritual consciousness for all humanity in accordance with the religious traditions so that the principle of respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience may prevail.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Spiritual Culture - the Remedy**

What is the obstacle in achieving peace both internal and external? It is not the lack of man’s intellectual power that hinders attainment of peace. It is a kind of cussedness in human nature, greed and vanity, the inability to cleanse oneself of all evil tendencies, and above all lack of spirituality. It is spirituality that brings an inward transformation and overcomes the discords within one’s nature and within the world. The great mystic Maulana Jalal al-Din-al-Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) says, “I was a mineral; I was a plant; I was an animal; I am a human being and I want to rise from my human level to a spiritual level. That is the end which is ahead of me.”<sup>4</sup>

Spiritual culture is a transition from darkness to light, an awakening in the infinite glory. Human being is more than flesh and blood. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, “Every

human personality may be compared to a glass globe. There is the same pure white light – an emission of the Divine Being – in the centre of each, but the glass being of different colours and thickness, the rays assume diverse aspects in the transmission. The equality and beauty of each central flame is the same, and the apparent inequality is only in the imperfection of the temporal instrument of its expression. As we rise higher and higher in the scale of being, the medium becomes more and more translucent.”<sup>5</sup>

Spiritual culture gives rise to noble qualities in mankind. These qualities are glorified in scriptures, for example, the Holy Qur’an (कुराण) says, “Give to your close relatives what they need, and also give generously to the destitute and to wayfarers.”<sup>6</sup> Compassion, charity and truth are the sublime qualities emphasized in Islam. The Holy Qur’an (कुराण) says, “Mix ye not the truth with falsehood and hide ye not the truth when ye know (it).”<sup>7</sup> Regarding forgiveness, Baba Farid (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), the Sufi saint, in one of his couplets says, “Turn thy left cheek before him who strikes on your right. Never think of retaliating. Remember it is all the play of the soul.” The same thought has been expressed earlier in the New Testament.

Such noble thoughts that foster spirituality are echoed in scriptures of world religions and are meant for all human beings.

### **Spirituality in India**

India is a living example of spiritual culture. With the multiplicity of faiths over the centuries India has maintained religious harmony. Article 14 of the Constitution of India confers the right of equality to all citizens before law. Article 15 of the Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives the freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion. Article 26 gives every religious denomination right to set up institutions and manage its own affairs in matters of religion.

If we go back to historical times, we find that in 1582 Akbar, the Mughal Emperor promulgated the Din-i-Ilahi (दीन-इ-इलाही). It was a religion without priests and books. It was influenced by Islamic, Hindu and Zoroastrian faiths. It emphasized the ideal of mystic union of the soul with the Divine based on the Sufi idea of absorption of the soul in the Divine Being. Among other things it enjoined ethical and social reforms.

The Din-i-Ilahi (दीन-इ-इलाही) proved to be an experiment of religious syncretism and an

example of spiritual culture.

The deep rooted spirituality results in broad outlook in religious matters. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the renowned saint in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could achieve the same fulfillment by following meditative practices of different religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Mahatma Gandhi could sing, “Ishvara (ईश्वर) and Allah (अल्ला) are thy names and temple as well as mosque are thy abodes.” The former President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan rightly said, “Only a moral and spiritual revolution in the name of human dignity can place man above the idols of economic production, technological organization, racial discrimination and national egotism.”<sup>8</sup>

Spirituality becomes effective in enhancing the spirit of unity in diversity, harmony in the discordant voices and peace in the midst of conflicts.

In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “The goal of the universe is a deep fellowship of the spirit. All religions which today are in a process of self-understanding and spiritual exchange are getting near each other. No one need give up one’s own religion and engage in a syncretism. We can learn from other religions in a spirit of mutual respect.”<sup>9</sup> This is possible through inculcation of spiritual culture.

At times, artificial barriers are created between religions. It is necessary to break them by emphasizing and encouraging the spiritual elements in different religions. The past experiences show that efforts in this direction by powerful political leaders can have a lasting impact. Emperor Ashoka and Emperor Akbar have contributed to harmony in religions. In more recent times we have the example of Mahatma Gandhi. The efforts of the Honourable President of Kazakhstan Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev to promote religious harmony and to elevate religious practices to the spiritual level would likewise have a far-reaching effect in promoting peace and mutual respect among followers of different faiths.

Therefore, I welcome the great initiative of the Honourable President of Kazakhstan and wish him all success. May his incessant efforts culminate in the glow of spirituality emanating from Astana enveloping the whole world.

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Endnotes:

1     Matthew 7:12

- 2 Radhakrishnan S., *The Present Crisis of Faith*, Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1983, p. 104
- 3 “Final Report from the Interreligious Assembly”, *Towards a Culture of Dialogue*, Vatican City, 25-28 October, 1999, Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, pp. 86-87
- 4 Quoted in *The Creative Life*, Radhakrishnan S., Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1987, p. 56
- 5 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1985, p. 191
- 6 Holy Qur’an XVII. 3.26
- 7 *Ibid.*, II. 5.42
- 8 Radhakrishnan S., *The Present Crisis of Faith*, Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1983, p. 14
- 9 Radhakrishnan S., *Towards a New World*, Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1989, p. 77

# **Freedom of Religion and Respect for Representatives of Other Religions**

*Delivered in* : the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

*organized by* : H E Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

at Astana, Kazakhstan

12 September 2006

# Freedom of Religion and Respect for Representatives of Other Religions

I am grateful to His Excellency N. A. Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan for giving me this opportunity to participate in the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. This is a unique meeting of its kind in the world where the President of a nation takes personal interest providing intellectual and physical inputs. I may mention that in the last conference he spent three full days with us. He wants to send a Message of Liberal Islam that believes in living with peace, in the spirit of coexistence and fellowship with the rest of the religions. To me the President is a role model for Interfaith Dialogue, for Brotherhood and for Universal Peace. I present my views on 'Freedom of Religion and Respect for Representatives of Other Religions'.

## Definition of Religion

Religion primarily deals with man's relation with divinity, the constant interplay between man and the Almighty. It also comprises the external aspect of beliefs and practices related to sacred things. It includes every aspect of human life and transcends it. Religion is the casket in which man has kept his most valuable treasures: the eternal values. It is the means to cleanse ourselves of all evil tendencies. "Religion is neither in books, nor in intellectual consent, nor in reason. Reason, theories, documents, doctrines, books, religious ceremonies are all help to religion; religion itself consists in realization"<sup>1</sup>, says Vivekananda.

## **Religious Leaders and the Challenges**

Today, world is divided and degenerated in the name of religion and stands at the edge of peril. What will be its fate? Will religion destroy the world or will it unite the world with its inbuilt strength? How do we interpret injustice that takes place in the name of religion? How do we protest against extremism? How do we face the explosive forces in the world? Here comes in the vital concept of the 'Freedom of Religion'.

Today people tend to test religious faith on the touchstone of reason. Those who give utmost importance to scientific and rational approach in their life are unwilling to accept the authority of religion.

On the other hand, in spite of a period of seventy years of the communist regime in the Soviet Union, there was a tremendous upsurge of Christianity when Communism was ousted. Similar was the case with Mongolia: the Communist Party had destroyed the Gumpa-s – the temples, slain the monks and destroyed the scriptures in the country. Yet Buddhism has survived and flourished there.

The absence of faith in religion which is misinterpreted as secularism is another challenge. This type of secularism is almost a synonym for hedonism, consumerism and materialism which is a threat to whatever is good, auspicious and noble in human life.

## **Responsibilities of the Religious Leaders**

The religious leaders should volunteer themselves to minimize the events of violence in the name of religion for the reason that religion is vitally concerned with social order. We find that even though there is law and order within a nation, there are some individuals who take the law in their own hands either to impose their views on others or to react to something which they strongly take as an encroachment on their freedom in religious matters. Avoidance of force in the matter of religion is the important rule that should be followed by one and all. Exclusiveness is to be avoided. This follows that religious leaders have to develop a spirit of cooperation and respect for one another, they have to encourage mutual understanding and appreciation for other's religion and assimilation of whatever is valuable. The religious leaders must now acknowledge that the era of conversion is over. Alluring hordes of people into the fold of one's religion is a misguided practice of conversion. It serves only worldly purpose. Conversion should take place only when there is a spiritual pursuit. The process of conversion should be very transparent and open.

The religious freedom of the concerned people has to be honoured.

In ancient India, there was a practice of Shastrartha (शास्त्रार्थ) – an open forum for philosophical debates and discussions in which even spiritual masters had to surrender themselves to other philosophical disciplines if they could not convince others the validity of their discipline through a series of arguments. Even today, Kumbhamela (कुम्भमेला), the great congregation of Hindus at certain holy places is a fine example of religious fair offering people an open platform for intrafaith exchanges. It has grown to be all-India institution. This large concourse of religious minded monks from diverse orders keeps up the religious enthusiasm of the people and prevents them from going on a wrong path.

We must learn from other peoples' beliefs and experiences. Religious leaders have a great potential to save the world from anarchy. They have to make a resolve to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of maintaining peace and harmony in the world. Terrorism which is founded on religious discrimination and ends up in persecution is one of the greatest threat for humanity. It arises from closed dogmatic interpretation of scriptures and ignorance about the nobility of thoughts in the scriptures on part of the masses. Religious leaders have to interpret the scriptures and remove the ignorance of the masses so that religion is not instrumentalized for terrorist activities. This is a great responsibility for the religious leaders in the changing world.

### **Education and Freedom of Religion**

The religious leaders have to work on the grass roots level to foster religious freedom in the citizens of the world. The representatives of various religious traditions at the Interreligious Assembly held at Vatican in 1999 to commemorate the eve of the Third Millennium noted, "Education is a key for promoting interreligious harmony, religious freedom, and respect for people of different religious traditions... Education is committed to seeking truth, justice, peace and reconciliation. A very practical programme, which already exists in various places, is the joint examination of textbooks, not only of religion, but also – and perhaps especially – of history. The lamentable ignorance and misinformation with which we sometimes bring up our children concerning other people's religious traditions need to be rectified... We must strive to present all religious traditions in an objective manner so that individuals belonging to these traditions can recognize themselves in that representation."<sup>2</sup>

### **Religious Freedom, Unity and Differences**

India is a land of diversity. We find in India a variety of race, language, dialect, social organization, soil, climate, physical feature and religious belief. It has been the quintessence of the Indian culture which makes it flexible. The secularism accepted by the constitution of India ensures the right to freedom of religion to every citizen. Everyone should be free to practise his religious faith. No one should try to thrust his religion on the other. This is the core of secularism in Indian context.

The differences are to be seen as the varied expressions of one single truth. The variety of creeds does not reject the truth of religion. The differences are related to the context of the historical and geographical perceptions of the age in which religions are formulated. No single religion should claim to possess the whole truth. According to Anekantavada (अनेकान्तवाद) of Jainism, reality has infinite aspects. No one can claim that he knows the Absolute Truth. One can know only the partial truth. Hence the judgments are relative, conditional and limited. This theory presupposes others' right to hold a different opinion, a different view than our own, which need not be criticised or discouraged.

Swami Vivekananda says that he accepts all religions and is not prepared to reject any of them.<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Qur'an (कुराण) also speaks about diversity. It has been said,

“Have you not seen how that God sends down water from the sky, and then we bring forth with it fruits of diverse hues? And in the mountains are streaks white and red, of diverse hues, and pitch black.

Men too, and beasts and cattle are of diverse colors...”<sup>4</sup>

Religion teaches man that the whole of the creation has one single root. “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?”<sup>5</sup> “O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you might know each other [not that you might despise each other]. Verily the most honored among you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous.”<sup>6</sup> The scripture of Sikhism tells us, “Know all human beings to be repositories of Divine Light.”<sup>7</sup>

This follows that all living beings are related to each other. They have a basic in-built unity. The religious leaders through their sermons and actions shape the minds of people. Since they command respect and reverence, they should present religion as a binding force and not as a divisive one. It is the duty of the religious leaders to stand above national politics and make an earnest appeal to people to change themselves.

Truth is presented in diverse ways. There are many pathways to God. Once the aspirant reaches the goal, once the Divinity illumines him, the pathway becomes insignificant while choosing a path. All persons are entitled to freedom which must be used with moral responsibility.

### **Respect to Representatives of Other Religions**

The glory of the religious leaders can be restored if they pledge to build a new world which is devoid of fanaticism; where everyone moves towards fundamental principles, gains strength from his faith and comes back to the world of peoples with a firm resolve not to shed innocent blood in the name of religion. Today, religious leaders are required to develop the concept of the world community instead of the Hindu community, the Muslim community, or the Christian community, etc. What is needed is the basic unity and harmony. What is not needed is thoughtless uniformity. Unless we preserve the differences which are the identities of different religions we will not cater to the different needs of the peoples of different nations and faiths. The religious leaders have to profess the positive approach to religious diversity and freedom. They have to rise above the fanatical zeal. Their loyalty is to God, the Ultimate Reality, to religion, and to the mankind.

With the onset of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium of the Christian Era, the world has become a 'Global Village'. Rigid barriers of different practices are disappearing, and I do feel that the world is ready for the birth of a 'Universal Religion'. The visionaries of different faiths want to break the narrow walls of religions or sects. Each individual should have freedom to practise his own faith. Further an individual should not be compelled to be tied down to only one faith and should be free to adopt the practices of various religions of his choice depending on his temperament, attitude and perception. If we agree that religion, in its essence, is based mainly on intuition and emotion and not purely on reason and it is inspired and nourished by faith and belief, there would be no great difficulty in appreciating the essence of any particular religious belief. This would create a climate in which all of us can live in peace and harmony.

### **Mutual Relationship**

When religion becomes organized and institutionalized, freedom of man comes in danger. The religious leaders should teach people to make a distinction between the essence

of religion and the external form. They have to teach people to do away with egoism, intolerance, exclusiveness, hatred, fanaticism and a sense of superiority. They should inculcate a sympathetic understanding of the needs of others and a willingness to take responsibility of the needy. They should not lose the sight of the fact that out of the six billion people on the earth two billion people live on the verge of poverty line. Hence there is the need for the social justice. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."<sup>8</sup>

What Shantidev, the author of Bodhicharyavatara (बोधिचर्यावतार), the Buddhist text from the Mahayana (महायान), describes as the Bodhisattva (बोधिसत्त्व) ideal can be described as characteristics of a religious leader.

"In reward for all this righteousness that I have won by my works, I would fain become a soother of all the sorrows of all creatures.

May I be a balm to the sick, their healer and servitor, until sickness never comes again.

May I quench with rains of food and drink the hunger and thirst of the needy.

May I become an unfailing store for the poor, and serve them with manifold things for their need.

My own being and my pleasures, all my righteousness in the past, present or future, I surrender indefinitely, that all creatures may win to their end."<sup>9</sup>

The respect for the representatives of other religions can be fostered only when we see others with the eye of a friend. In this context I would like to narrate a story. A master once asked his disciples, "When can they say that the night is over and the day has dawned?" When the disciples could not answer the question, they thought that the master must know the answer. They said, "Let him answer the question." Then the master said, "Listen attentively to what I say. When you look to your neighbour's eyes and recognize him as your brother or sister, then the night is over and the day has dawned. If that does not happen, no matter what time of the day it is, your night is not over, you are still in darkness, the light has not come into your life." Let all of us be able to see that light.

This is possible if the concept of universal brotherhood is translated into practice. Indians believe in the maxim that the world is a close and well knit family, Vasudhaiva kutumbakam (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्).<sup>10</sup> The same concept has been professed by Buddhism as Metta (मेत्ता).

Confucius gives us the word, 'Shu' (शु), as the rule of conduct for life which means 'to act

to others as one would act toward oneself', or as this is translated by his disciple Tseng Tze 'to love others with the heart with which one loves oneself'.

I conclude with what Prof. K. L. Seshagiri Rao, a renowned scholar says, "Religions, in cooperation with one another, can do a great deal to rehabilitate mankind and give to life meaning, purpose, and value. They can also do much for the establishment of peace in the world. Where politicians have failed, religions may succeed, provided they cooperate and recognize their mutual worth and potentialities; and provided they pool together the tremendous resources of religions and channel them in the direction of world peace. The major world religions, in cooperation with one another, may bring out the latent treasures hidden in each religion and help humanity at a time when it is facing one of the most acute spiritual crisis in history."<sup>11</sup>

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#### Endnotes:

- 1 The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Haridas Bhattacharya (ed.), The Ramkrishna Mission, Calcutta, 2001, p. 712
- 2 "Final Report from the Interreligious Assembly" Towards a Culture of Dialogue, Vatican City, 25-28 October, 1999, Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, pp. 86-87
- 3 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1983, p. 374
- 4 Holy Qur'an 35.27-28
- 5 Malachi 2.10
- 6 Holy Qur'an 49.13
- 7 Adi Granth Asa M.1

- 8 Amos V.23-24
- 9 Bodhicharyavatara III. 6-10
- 10 वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्।  
vasudhaiva kutumbakam/ Laghuyogavasishtha V.2.62
- 11 Seshagiri Rao K.L., Mahatma Gandhi and Comparative Religion, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1990, p. 124

# **The Role of Religious Leaders in Building Peace Based on Tolerance, Mutual Respect and Cooperation**

*Delivered in* : the Third Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

*organized by* : H E Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
at Astana, Kazakhstan

1 July 2009

# **The Role of Religious Leaders in Building Peace Based on Tolerance, Mutual Respect and Cooperation**

**I**T gives me great pleasure to be here in the magnificent Palace of Peace and Concord for the Third Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. I bring with me the earnest and heartfelt sentiments of the followers of the Hindu faith.

Today the world is in need of such a Congress. Misguided conflicts among nations, cultures and religions have become a threat to mankind. We see increasing violence and terrorism creating insecurity leading to anxiety and distrust among each other in every part of the globe. The basic values of life, such as peaceful living, freedom from fear, faith, respect for all forms of life and respect for environment are increasingly disappearing. The impact of the powerful force of the scientific and technological culture is also being felt today by every thoughtful person. Undoubtedly, science and technology have contributed greatly to the welfare of human society in the fields of medicine, agriculture, transportation, communication, aerospace, and so on. "Increasing inventions of machineries and crafts of ever-increasing material power and advantages, are fast demolishing the barriers and insulations of time and space and of natural obstructions", says Dasgupta.<sup>1</sup> However, this progress has led to the neglect of the timeless spiritual heritage. Therefore there is immediate need to apply spiritual knowledge and spiritual technique in our daily life and here the role of spiritual leaders is vitally important.

Time has come that spirituality in all religions is kindled to jointly face the contempo-

rary challenges. Religion binds the individual to divinity and to other fellow beings. No wonder that all religions reiterate similar values in their teachings. This follows that ideally there should not be any clash between the followers of different religions. However, we find that some people who claim that their religion is superior to all other religions want to impose it on others. Efforts in this direction lead to tensions in society. Violence erupts again and again disturbing the peace and harmony amongst people. Religion is often misused for this purpose. Hence the wise all over the world should be engaged in nurturing a friendly and amicable attitude towards other religions. Religious leaders joining their hands and spiritual forces in solidarity can bring a ray of hope for mankind. Thus the pristine meaning, purpose and value of human life can be retained. What is needed is a focussed attempt to channelize all resources of religion to fulfil the ideal of world peace. "No religion, ideology, culture, or tradition can reasonably claim to exhaust the universal range of human experience or even the total manifestation of the Sacred. Thus pluralism, as distinct from the mere coexistence of a plurality of worldviews, becomes today the paramount human and religious imperative. It thus precludes the attempt at domination by any master perspective or absolutely privileged standpoint. Pluralism does not call for a super-ideology or a super-system. It implies an almost mythical confidence that other perspectives are also plausible or, more correctly, a mystical respect for the other that authenticates one's own religious experience. Evil and error are not excluded but are robbed of the sting of absoluteness; they are contextualized", says Panikkar.<sup>2</sup> The major world religions, in cooperation with one another, may bring out the latent treasures hidden in each religion and help humanity at this juncture when it is being threatened by the most acute crisis in the history of mankind.

It is observed that although there have been several peace dialogues and international peace summits, the progress towards a workable global peace formula is not visible. These have been at NGO or Institutional level. "The dialogue has to take place on neutral ground, outside the city, in a conducive setting and a pleasant atmosphere: a nice orchard with its wholesome, sweet-smelling fruits. Above all, it must not be carried out in a situation of inequality, with one side owning all the dollars and all the political power, dominating the situation or imposing its language. Religious dialogue is not possible when some ride well shod and others walk barefoot. Geographical serenity is a symbol of historical equanimity. Man is a geological as well as a historical being."<sup>3</sup>

Now the time is ripe for a serious undertaking to launch a vision of lasting world peace through the interaction with spiritual masters. We have different beliefs and we see the nature of reality from different angles. However, we all believe that human life is sacred and its sanctity ought to be protected.

We all are aware that religious and spiritual wisdom can help in bringing peace and harmony. Time has come that we all, the leaders of world religions come together and unite forgetting petty differences and join our hands to fulfill the dream of establishing kingdom of peace in world. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a profound spiritual saint, who lived in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, provides us an important insight when he says that religion itself is not God, but a path. "All doctrines are so many paths; but a path is by no means God himself. Indeed one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholesome devotion." Thus we accept all religions and reject none. Some religious teachings or practices may prove to be more appealing to some people. This should be recognized and diversity of religions should be respected, like any other kind of diversity. In its absence the world would be devoid of magnanimity of spiritual resources.

S. Radhakrishnan has rightly pointed out, "Love of neighbour is taught by all religions but the capacity to love is difficult to attain. Growth in spiritual life is the only force which gives us the capacity to love our neighbour even when we are not naturally inclined to do so."<sup>4</sup>

I welcome the great initiative of the Honourable President of Kazakhstan His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev and wish him all the success. I have been coming here from 2003 when the first Congress was organized. Nowhere in the world such meetings have been organized at the Head of State level. I have been inspired by this most sincere and heartwarming initiative and action of His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev. I have seen the city of Astana growing. The commitment of the President to the cause of Peace and Religious Harmony is an example to be followed by other Heads of States. He has done a great job. He has shown the world the moderate face of Islam which elsewhere is often eclipsed by terrorist and extremist elements. The President of Kazakhstan is not intimidated by the magnitude of challenges. He is consistent in organizing the congress and preparing the ground for unity. He is truly a noble leader. His efforts deserve the attention of the Committee of Nobel Prize for Peace. May his incessant efforts culminate in the glow of spirituality emanating from Astana enveloping the whole globe.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Dasgupta Surendranath, *Philosophical Essays*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p. 21
- 2 Panikkar Raimon, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999, p. 106
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 113
- 4 *The Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, Mc Dermott Robert (ed.), Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1996, p. 303

# **Solidarity, Especially in the Time of Crises**

*Delivered in* : the Third Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

*organized by* : H E Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
at Astana, Kazakhstan

2 July 2009

# Solidarity, Especially in the Time of Crises

**T**ODAY we are living in a plural world. Nationalities, ethnic groups and members of different religious denominations have come closer than ever before on account of globalization. One cannot live in isolation. In spite of the fact that world has become a global village, do we experience the peace and harmony of village life? Is there a sense of a secure world? Do we experience harmony in our day to day life? Is there a powerful bond of love, brotherhood and family-feeling amongst mankind? A single answer to these questions is unfortunately 'No'.

Today we find that advances of science and technology have brought nations closer physically. However, science is still far from giving mankind a culture of peace and harmony. Unless there is a deep rooted spirituality, humankind will not come close in the true sense of the word. The sense of belonging to one family, and the sense of responsibility towards fellow beings must be cultivated and developed to build a strong solidarity. As Radhakrishnan says, "It should be our endeavour to look for the virtues of other individuals, of other cultures, and if we do that, we will get together."<sup>1</sup>

## **The Present Crisis**

It is seen that powerful nations are engaged in mass production of weapons for domination of mankind. These nations deliberately provoke conflicts in other nations and sometimes even create situations that result into civil wars, thus generating a market for the weapon industry. Other nations fall prey to this conspiracy and keep fighting with each other,

killing innumerable innocent people. Thus the entire world is held at ransom to fulfill the selfish motive of a few power-mongers. Many a time, religion is also used for justifying conflicts.

The sentiments of people are easily aroused in the name of religion. Consequently they are ready to kill others or become martyrs. In this way, the fumes and fires of strife, struggle and disharmony culminating into distress, destruction and death are kept burning. The chain of consequences moves on enforcing backwardness, exploitation and poverty on a major chunk of human population across the globe.

The abyss between developed and the underdeveloped, those who have and those who do not have widens day by day and becomes unbridgeable. The walls of division in humankind grow taller and become a barrier on which humanity dashes its head in despair. Hence we should remember what Swami Dayananda says, "If you are believers, all believers belong to the one family of God."<sup>2</sup>

### **Peace as the Fundamental Right**

Today there is a universal desire for peace in the face of the ghastly recurring invasions on humanity. In 1978 the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace. The Declaration states,

"... every human being, regardless of race, conscience, language or sex has the inherent right to life in peace. Respect for that right, as well as for the other human rights, is in the common interest of all mankind and an indispensable condition of advancement of all nations, large and small, in all fields." To protect the right to life in peace the leaders can preach their followers, "The force of arms cannot do what peace does. If you can gain your desired end with sugar, why use poison?"

### **Peacemakers**

On this background, I would like to applaud the clarity of thought and strength of purpose of religious leaders who are coming together on such platforms to find out some solutions to save mankind. These efforts give us hope and enthusiasm. They also remind us of the sacrifices and martyrdom of those who have given their lives in their struggle for peace. Renunciation of violence requires a strong commitment from people all over the world.

It is an uphill task to transform culture of war into culture of peace. Gautam Buddha, Mahavir and Emperor Ashoka were some of the prominent peacemakers in India. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of India could use non-violence as a powerful means to fight for Truth and Freedom. Thus the peacemakers give importance to reconciliation and freedom from the insanity of hatred that results in revenge. They conquer anger as they know, "If there were not men willing to forgive, and to subdue their anger, there would be no peace among men, for anger is the origin of all discord."<sup>3</sup>

### **Importance of Solidarity**

It is a well known maxim 'United we stand, divided we fall'. Similarly a popular verse in Sanskrit tells us, 'The grass blades are feeble, weak and meek, but the rope that is made by putting them together becomes so strong that it can bind even a mighty elephant. Solidarity, thus, accomplishes great deeds.'

Sometimes we mistake the external togetherness or grouping of people as solidarity. Animals in a herd or birds in a flock stay together but this solidarity is prompted by the primary instinct of survival and the need for protection. The solidarity we have to foster in the present times in mankind needs deeper and stronger foundations as it aims at establishing oneness of the human race on the earth. In a way we aspire to bring heaven to the Earth. For this challenging goal, we need to form an unshakable solidarity. Foundations for solidarity include common interests, common challenges and common goals.

### **An Approach towards Universal Harmony**

History is witness to the two approaches for spreading the message of peace. One has been, and unfortunately to this day is, the violent approach. The use of force through the perpetration of violence in the name of defending one's faith is seen as legitimate and religiously mandated. On the other hand, we have the peace-loving religions of the East that the world has today awakened to; which silently strived towards embracing all who came into their fold, offering peace and harmony to all. Without violent means, we see how Buddhism has spread to several countries of the East and today has an ever-widening following in the Western world as well.

India is a living example of solidarity. It is a land of diverse faiths. Asian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism were born on the soil of India. They prospered

and spread without coercion. Followers of diverse creeds and faiths have lived here a life of coexistence, of harmony and peace with a spirit of openness. They understand, “The language of the soul is one, the languages of nations are many; their customs and methods of life are widely different. Religion is of the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages, and customs. Hence it follows that the difference between the religions of the world is one of expression and not of substance; and their points of similarity and unity are of the soul, are intrinsic, as the language of the soul is one, in whatever peoples and under whatever circumstances it manifests itself. The same sweet harmony is vibrant there also, as it is on many and diverse instruments.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Universal Teachings of World Religions**

It is true that we are going through a difficult time. Still there is some hope, for the crisis itself makes man think about the remedy.

We all should solemnly pledge to build a new world which is devoid of fanaticism; where everyone moves towards fundamental principles of his own faith, gains strength and comes back to the world of peoples with a firm resolve not to spill innocent blood in the name of religion. This mission can be accomplished by dedicated men who can form the brigade for Peace. For this purpose, deep spirituality has to be ignited in the heart of each individual. The core teachings of world religions can offer a guiding light for this journey.

All the major religions underline the culture of peace. “Do not do unto others what you do not want to be done to you.” This ‘Golden Rule’, or the ethics of reciprocity often regarded as the most concise and general principle of morality, is found in the scriptures of nearly all religions.

### **Conclusion**

There are no shortcuts to the solution for the present crisis. There are some religious schools which instill hatred in the minds of children towards the followers of other religions. Hence there is an urgent need for public outcry to boycott such thinking. The confused issues must be disentangled, the conflicting aims have to be reconciled, the various influences for good should synergize into one supreme humane effort so that men become less selfish, less aggressive and less given to frivolity. It is the call of the hour that the intellectuals develop conscience to see the truth and the moral courage

to pursue it. Followers of different religions are to be trained to show respect towards other religions. As Mahatma Gandhi says, “The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, ‘Mine is the superior one’. None is superior; none is inferior to the other.”<sup>5</sup>

This has been the quintessence of Indian culture. So the ideal that this culture preserves is not victory but freedom from destruction. I will like to conclude with what Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “Even today we do not exalt military despots or industrial magnates. But a man in a loin-cloth, like Gandhi, or one like Vinoba walking barefoot from place to place, these are the people whom this country exalts. They are the examples to tell us that man in all his scientific glory is nothing comparable to a man who has established supremacy over his own nature. It is the Buddha who said, ‘Victory breeds hatred, the conquered live in sorrow.’ We should not aim at establishing any kind of material victory. Today, when the world is in a crisis, at a parting of the ways, when we are trying to find out how best we can harness these great nuclear powers, how we can use them for the development of human welfare and not for human destruction, it is the example which this country has put forward which we have to remember. What we have to realize is that man is intended for self-fulfillment, he is not intended for self-destruction.”<sup>6</sup>

I congratulate the Honourable President of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev for his initiative in organizing the Congress. His pioneering work and incessant efforts to bring peace and harmony in religions and across the world deserve no less than Nobel Prize for Peace.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Radhakrishnan S., *The Creative Life*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, p. 80
- 2 Radhakrishnan S., *Living with a Purpose*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, p. 44
- 3 Mahabharata Vanaparva 29.27

- 4 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VI, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 46
- 5 Harijan, 13.3.1937, p. 38, quoted in The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. VI, Narayan Shriman (ed.), Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1969, pp. 267-68
- 6 Radhakrishnan S., The Creative Life, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, p. 36

# Religion and Its Role in Moral Reform

*Delivered in* : the International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue and Its Impact  
in Disseminating Human Values

*organized by* : The Muslim World League

at Geneva, Switzerland

30 September 2009

# Religion and Its Role in Moral Reform

**R**ELIGION has been a tremendous force in the world over the millennia. It includes every aspect of human life. It has helped in shaping human psyche. It also moulds man's attitude and outlook towards life. Religion is the treasure of eternal values. It is the means to cleanse ourselves of evil tendencies. Hence it plays a major role in the formation of morality. Etymologically the word religion is derived from the verb 'religero' which means 'to execute painstakingly by means of repeated effort'. According to another etymology the term is derived from 'religare', that is, 'to bind together'. All religions help man to unearth meaning of life which is deeper than what we come across in our day to day life of the mundane world. Behind the material existence lies the Divine spring. Religion explains the relationship between man and the Divine spring, that is, God. It implies transcending the narrow grooved life for the realization of the Real.

## Concept of Dharma

The unique concept of Dharma (धर्म) goes much beyond the social mores, traditions, practices and customs prevalent for centuries. These are relative to time and space while the principles of Dharma (धर्म) are eternal. Dharma (धर्म) means obligation. It regulates life of an individual, maintains social order and nurtures the spiritual inclinations of man. It leads to the conquest of the lower self evolving further into the higher self.

Thus according to Manu, the first of the law-givers for Hindus, "Morality or right conduct (Sadachara सदाचार) is the highest Dharma (धर्म) ... the sages regard right behaviour as the

very root of all austerity.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bhagavata Purana (भागवत-पुराण), one of the Hindu scriptures, has given the following as the basic requirements of Dharma (धर्म) for the common folk in all walks and stages of life: “Non-violence in thought, word and deed; to abide by truth, not to commit theft, to control desire, anger and avarice and to do only such works as are pleasant and beneficial to all living beings [constitute Dharma (धर्म)].”<sup>2</sup>

Dharma (धर्म) is the pursuit of good. It is purification of character achieved through purification of mind (Sattvashuddhi सत्त्वशुद्धि). It prescribes basic values such as non-violence, compassion, truthfulness, honesty, charity, respect to elders and others. Dharma (धर्म) in addition to these rules involves prohibition of forcible and unjust possession of other’s properties and also continence of all kinds. These values have been upheld, preached and pursued by the great spiritual masters, prophets, religious leaders and saints all over the world.

In Hinduism besides being a tool for emancipation, Dharma (धर्म) is the goal in itself. It includes devotion to God, performance of religious duties, doing good to others, entertaining the guests, feeding the animals and birds and offering oblations to ancestors. All religions preach that one should not hurt others, should not lie, should not steal, and should not have unlawful sexual contacts.

### **Morality – Individual and Social**

Morality prescribed in religious texts has two aspects, individual and social. On individual level certain norms are prescribed. Control over senses, practising of truthfulness in thoughts, words and deeds are essentials of moral purity of an individual. The abjuration of deadly sins and conquest over lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy is a human obligation which everyone has to fulfill. The distinctive contribution of Hinduism to the concept of morality is renunciation of excessive attachment and hatred of all kinds.

A sage has to rise above all duality and attain the quality of equanimity so that he is not perturbed by any unfavourable situation and can retain composure of mind. The ideals of a Sthitaprajna (स्थितप्रज्ञ), that is, man of steadfast wisdom, that of a Yogi (योगी) and that of an ideal devotee, all these in the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) underline this unique aspect of morality. Man is expected to practise forgiveness and forbearance and much more. He should return good for evil, love for hatred, charity for miserliness and honesty

for deceit. This makes man a perfect being, a saint. Great sage Vyasa, the author of the epic Mahabharata (महाभारत) (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) taught: “Know this to be the essence of religion and then practise it: refrain from doing unto others what you will not have done unto yourself, which you may resent if done unto you.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the Hindu belief, the Supreme is immanent in all creation. Social morality is based on this belief. One should always design for others such things as one may choose for oneself.

The promotion of individual morality strengthens social morality that maintains the social organism. It results in promotion of a healthy, cultured and noble society. The social aspect of morality includes unity, peace and harmony. This kind of morality is based on the age-old conviction of Indian tradition – whatever creates conflict is not in keeping with Dharma (धर्म); whatever puts an end to conflict and brings about unity and harmony is Dharma (धर्म). The Isha Upanishad (ईश-उपनिषद्) lays stress on this aspect when it says, “For the one who sees his own Self in all beings, experiences unity in all living beings.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Morality and its Implication**

When we think of morality we should not confine ourselves to individual piety, nor to our standard of behaviour towards a particular group or a particular society. It should have a concern towards humankind. In this context we should remember what Jnaneshvar (13<sup>th</sup> century), a saint from Maharashtra has said, “Let the crookedness of the wicked be destroyed; let the evil disappear.” The saint does not speak of destroying the wicked persons; he speaks of the removal of their wickedness.

Morality can be effectively implemented when the presence of the Divine in man is felt. As Dr. Radhakrishnan, the former President of India and a great philosopher says, “The presence of the divine is one thing, the consciousness of the presence of the divine is quite another. And any kind of religious fulfillment consists in the process by which the presence is transformed into consciousness of the presence.”<sup>5</sup> Unless we recognize presence of the divine in others we cannot respect them.

According to Mahatma Gandhi morality and religion are inevitably interconnected. He says, “...an examination of the world’s religions shows that without morality, religion cannot subsist. True morality covers religions for the most part. Anyone who observes the laws of morality for their own sake and not for any selfish end can be regarded as

religious.”<sup>6</sup> Practice of morality needs courage and perseverance. “Besides, it is a rule of ideal morality that it is not enough to follow the trodden path. We ought to follow the path which we know to be true, whether it is familiar or unfamiliar to us. In other words, when we know a particular path to be the right one, we should set out on it without fear... Morality consists in doing what we ought to do ... If we take out the essence of all moral laws, we shall find that the attempt to do good to mankind is the highest morality.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Religion, Morality and Contemporary World**

Morality independent of religion is advocated in secularism. However, morality that follows religion makes no friction in personality of man. Dasgupta rightly mentions, “The lower parts of our nature will no doubt still continue to create the limitations and barriers, divisions and classes, and may raise nations, classes and religions against themselves. Still there will be some who in the milk of human sweetness will not only think that every man is equal but will regard him as a friend, and in the splendour of spiritual light will dissolve the darkness of all divisions and realize all cultures and all nations and people, the torch-bearers, as the diverse expressions of the same divinity that exists in all.”<sup>8</sup>

Man is essentially divine. Though an animal among animals, he is superior to all of them, for in mind and spirit he has the power to reflect, retrospect, think and discriminate between good and evil. His existence is not confined to physical and mental level but also prevails on spiritual level. In Hinduism, prescribed duties have a bearing on morality. Moreover virtues of fundamental importance and universal application set its criterion. “One should not touch the sore spots of another, never intend harm nor utter the unwholesome words which will make another shudder... Crooked and deceitful ways of livelihood must be eschewed.”<sup>9</sup> Such thoughts show the social dimension of morality.

### **Role of Religious Leaders in Moral Reform**

Religious leaders have to play a pivotal role in developing the right spirit of morality in the believers. These leaders mostly restrict themselves to preaching the supremacy of their own faith and impose a rigid code of external conduct resulting in the isolation of religious communities. The universal concepts of morality are degraded to cordoned denominative rules and regulations. The religious leaders have to come out of their cocoons and be open for adoption and adaptation of moral principles from different

traditions. The social customs and practices which may be justified in the context of time and region at the origin of a particular religion must be reviewed taking into account changed time and location. The external expression of such rules can be changed so that human dignity and honour are retained.

The challenge is tremendous and it demands openness, courage, and liberal attitude towards moral issues. The concept of religious freedom should be expanded in order to enable a person to participate freely in the celebration of festivals from different religions without disloyalty to his own religious tradition. He should also be free to adopt the best from other religions. The globalization and the new era of fast communication have offered us an opportunity in this regard. I can use the simile of a buffet to elaborate my point. In a buffet, one is free to choose from the lavish table spread out with different delicacies from different parts of the globe. Similarly a person can follow the notion of Unity in Diversity from Hinduism, Metta (मेत्ता) from Buddhism, Brotherhood from Islam, Charity from Zoroastrianism, love and service from Christianity, etc. and can still remain loyal to his own belief.

I am happy to find that a new awareness about promoting harmony among followers of different faiths is on rise and many platforms such as the Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions organized by His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan are coming up for the noble cause.

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Endnotes:

- 1 आचार : परमो धर्मः ।  
सर्वस्य तपसो मूलमाचारं जगृहुः परम् ।।  
acharah paramo dharmah /  
sarvasya tapaso mulamacharam jagrihuh param // Manusmriti I. 108a-110b
- 2 अहिंसा सत्यमस्तेयमकामक्रोधलोभता ।  
भूतप्रियहितेहा च धर्मोऽयं सार्ववर्णिकः ।।  
ahimsa satyamasteyamakamakrodhalobhata /  
bhutapriyahiteha cha dharmo'yam sarvavarnikah // Bhagavata Purana XI.17.21

- 3 यदन्यैर्विहितं नेच्छेदात्मनः कर्म पूरुषः ।  
न तत्परेषु कुर्वीत जानन्नप्रियमात्मनः ॥  
yadanyairvihitam nechchedatmanah karma purushah/  
na tatpareshu kurvita janannapriyamatmanah // Mahabharata Shantiparva 259.20
- 4 यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।  
तत्र को मोहः कः शोकः एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥  
yasminsarvani bhutani atmaivabhudvijanatah /  
tatra ko mohah kah shokah ekatvamanupashyatah // Isha Upanishad 7
- 5 Radhakrishnan S., The Creative Life, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1987, p. 56
- 6 The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. III, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2006, p. 7
- 7 Ibid., pp. 7-8
- 8 Dasgupta Surendranath, Philosophical Essays, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1990, p. 372
- 9 Manusmriti II.161, IV.11

# Religion and World Peace

*Delivered in* : the International Symposium on Persons of Peace in a Troubled World

*organized by* : Institute of Asian Studies, Sassari and DIM, Italy

at Parma, Italy

3 October 1998

# Religion and World Peace

**T**ODAY we are here, in Italy, to further and promote the Hindu-Christian Dialogue in a spirit of 'amicizia', 'buona volonta' (friendship and goodwill) and 'gratitudine' (thankfulness).

World has become a Global Village

In the history of religion and philosophy the spirit of inquiry and questioning became stronger day by day. It brought exploration into the unknown and into the unfamiliar, and voyages of discovery were undertaken, thus linking distant land and peoples with a chain of mutual respect and understanding. The inventions of the centuries accelerated the process and so in due course, even the barriers of time and space were made redundant. This brought about the dynamic change which has reduced our world to the size of a global village. Thus, men staying miles away from one another have been brought in close proximity but this has not, in many a case, brought them together in amity and goodwill. Their minds are still on either side of a great divide.

It is here in their minds, that the seeds of peace and harmony can be and have to be sown. It has been said, "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori", (It is sweet and heavenly to die for your country), but I would say that it is better to live for your country and bring about 'la dolce vita' (the good life), 'la vita nuova' (the new life) by bringing about an era of peace and understanding through mutual dialogue and exchange of ideas, and that is why,

I submit, we have met again, to build bridges that would link our countries strongly in bonds of brotherhood and friendship. Last year when some of you were with us in India, we had scholarly papers read on Adi Shankaracharya, on Hindu-Christian Cosmology and Anthropology and were thus able to understand each other's philosophy and way of life. We have come together again to pick up the threads of that dialogue woven last year, and to strengthen our bonds all the more.

#### How Best to Promote Brotherhood of Man

I feel privileged to exchange some thoughts with you on religion and world peace. In the present context of tension and discord seen in almost all forms of public activity, there is certainly a great propriety in addressing ourselves to the question of world peace, and how best the religions of the world can ensure harmony and the brotherhood of man. While the quality of material life has improved at an incredible pace, the spiritual sterility of the modern world is a cause of great concern.

In recent times lure of materialism, often disguised in the garb of progress, has increased the tendency to seek unlimited appeasement of our gross desires and has created in the words of T. S. Eliot 'bodies of men and women of all classes detached from religion, alienated from religion and susceptible to mass suggestion.' We are now greedy and puffed up with pride at our explorations into space but we have ignored the 'universality of knowledge' that lies within.

What use is it 'if man gains the whole world but loses his own soul?' The promises of Darwin's evolutionary theory and Karl Marx's Das Kapital are still elusive; the staggering advancement of modern science is beyond the comprehension of the human individual and leaves him dazzled and often bewildered. The rewards of materialism appear only as a flash in the pan, quickly giving way to disillusionment. In the words of T. S. Eliot again:

"Much is your reading, but not the word of God,  
Much is your building, but not the hours of God."

#### Age of Transition

This is not to decry the revolution in modern knowledge and modern thinking but to ask ourselves, why peace still eludes mankind. In a sense we are in an age of transition from science to religion, the traditional to the orthodox, but at the same time moving

towards a reappraisal of religion that is vital, universal and relevant to the crisis of the modern times.

It is difficult to accept religion as interpreted by the orthodoxy. If any religion were to stunt growth, create bondage and build walls between man and man, it cannot be the voice of God; neither can it stand the test of logical understanding. Religion, organized and institutionalized with all its rituals and ceremonies, sometimes drains it of all its spiritual content. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has said that where religion has not been herself the oppressor upholding darkness by violence, she lends her authority to the oppressors and sanctifies their pretences. That religion is worth little if the conscience of its followers is not disturbed when war clouds are hanging over us all and industrial conflicts are threatening social peace. Religion has weakened man's social conscience and moral sensitivity since there is always a universal tendency to emphasize 'the ritual' and to ignore 'the essential'.

#### No Doctrinaire Religion

The cancerous growth of religious fundamentalism, be it Islamic, Christian or Hindu which is currently raising its ugly head poses a serious threat to the brotherhood of man. It cuts at the very root of religion, the word of God, the dreams of the prophets and what the Rigvedic seers called the 'Sanatana Dharma' (सनातन धर्म). Truth is not the monopoly of any religion and if any religion arrogates to itself the sole authority to knowledge of God and righteousness, it is only suspect of religious fanaticism and bigotry. Such advocates do disservice to humanity. Different religions have come out of different traditions, social and cultural but faith arises out of human consciousness. The concept of God may differ but the essentiality of it is one and the same. Not recognizing this we continue to fight. Swami Vivekananda said, "Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion... Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals than religion."<sup>1</sup> Doctrinaire religion is not the answer to man's search for peace. It is of primary importance to separate the grain from the chaff, the essential from the non-essential.

#### India – A Shining Example of Eclecticism

It is important to note that while there has been recently no 'world war', or 'a world conflagration', in the last five decades, there have been frequent and sporadic, almost continuous, skirmishes and conflicts, ethnic and religious, in different parts of the world,

be it Africa, West Asia, South East Asia, parts of South America and the last Afghanistan. Permit me to state that India is the only nation which stands out as a shining example of a country and culture which has assimilated different faiths and beliefs, sects and practices and woven them into a silken web of Indian culture. It is here that people wedded to different faiths – be they Zoroastrians, or Buddhists, Muslims or Christians or Jews, Sikhs or Jains – they all live together in peace and harmony. Hinduism is the assimilation of the loftiest thoughts of the ancient Rishi-s (ऋषि) and men of learning. Unfortunately, reactionary elements do not appreciate this underlying unity and quite often, momentary aberrations get publicized which present a completely distorted picture ignoring the realities of our eclectic and composite culture.

### Eternal Verities of Religion

Friends, the eternal verities of religion are one and the same. Every religion reinforces the other. The Old Testament<sup>2</sup> says, “Is there anything new, whereof it, may be said, see, this is new? It hath been already of old time.” In the Bible (बायबल)<sup>3</sup> Christ says, “I come not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them.” Lord Krishna says that his teachings to Arjuna were given by Vivasvan to Manu, by Manu to Ikshvaku and then by several Rishi-s (ऋषि) from times immemorial.

Can we have a Universal Religion in the next millennium which would generate forces of peace? Yes, we can, provided we understand the unity of religious consciousness, stop denouncing beliefs other than our own, desist from religious conversions and from using religion for self-aggrandizement and political power. The Vedic seers made a timeless declaration, “The wise speak of one truth in many ways.” This could be the manifesto, the prime statement so that all intolerance, all barriers and partitions between men are destroyed and humanity is attuned to the Divine Law of Oneness.

### Function of Religion

As I am speaking to you now, my mind goes back to those distant periods of history, not many centuries ago, when men fought and killed one another in the name of religion, in the name of their God, whom they professed to worship. The Crusades were waged for years and people participated in them, considering that they had performed a holy act, and the then history glorified their contribution and afforded it a prominent place in

legend and song. But, today, the very idea of killing others, our fellow men, in the name of God repels us. We have through the ages learnt that religion, by whatever name it may be called, can never sanction such a bloodshed, such a holocaust. It has been realized now that the function of religion is to bind people together in faith, and teach us to look on others with a heart full of hope and charity. Religion teaches love and forgiveness; the Lord's Prayer, the 'Sermon on the Mount', hymns like Cardinal Newman's "Lead kindly light, lead Thou me on", emphasize these noble aspects of religion which have spread world-wide today. If the noble principles so enunciated, were to be universally adopted and followed, they would redeem the human mind from error and there would be no need for arsenals and forts. Swords would be then beaten into ploughshares and tranquility and fraternity would become possible. It would be obvious to one who has studied the subject of world religions that Hinduism has always spoken of peace – Shanti (शान्ति) everywhere, in nature, in men, in the universe, in the vegetable kingdom. 'Peace verily Peace' (Shantireva Shantih शान्तिरेव शान्तिः) is the reverberating echo that has rung down the corridors of India's history as well as in the scriptures of Hindu religion.

#### Love and Renunciation

Love and renunciation mentioned in Asian religions are not dissimilar from those in Christianity, the fact which underscores the unison in thinking adopted by thinkers in these creeds.

The Vedic seers believed, "Not by progeny nor by wealth but by renunciation Immortality was achieved."<sup>4</sup> Thus renunciation is yet another common factor between Hinduism and Christianity. The Upanishadic dictum, "Enjoy with detachment; covet not anyone's possession"<sup>5</sup> stresses the same spirit that underlies the Vow of Poverty. St. Teresa of Avila and Peter Waldo, Founder of a Christian Spiritual Movement of ages ago lived up to this vow of renunciation of worldly goods, of the joys and pleasures of riches to serve mankind. Both our religions also stress the need of love.

In the Bhakti (भक्ति) tradition Lord is the one whose nature is unspeakable love. Christianity's reference to charity points in the same direction. Such a combination of love and renunciation is indeed a feature unique to both religions. I am reminded at this moment of the question a rich young man asked Christ<sup>6</sup> "Good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" "Go my way", he said, "sell whatever thou hast, and give it to the poor and thou shall have treasures in heaven." Thus, these sentiments run like

a beautiful silken thread through the spirit of our religions.

In the spiritual world, therefore we are all one and in the spiritual consciousness alone, we can see that our relationships are eternal. This is true religion, not dogma and doctrines. We fail to perceive this unity of consciousness for “we see not through the eye, but with the eye” and distort the Heavens. The Bible<sup>7</sup> (बायबल) says, “You are the living temples of God”; and so does Prophet Mohammed, “Noblest religion is this – that thou should like for others what thou likest for thyself. And feel the pain of others as thine own.” And so do the Bhagavadgita (भगवद्गीता) and the Upanishad-s (उपनिषद्) preach. Thus, the living religions of the world have a great role to play in stressing the fundamental oneness beneath all the forms and in riveting man’s attention to the consciousness within him.

### **On the Tip of a Volcano**

I shudder to think of the consequences if hostilities were to break out once again, in our global village, the world that we inhabit today. It is now ready and may be willing to destroy its enemy without realizing that thereby it would be destroying itself also. With the technology and science that we have learnt today, we are living on the tip of a volcano. And even a small thoughtless word or deed can usher in another Armageddon. No words, no pious wishes and no futile hopes can save us from this looming catastrophe.

### **A New Message to go forth**

It is therefore the universities, from which the message must go forth. It is here that the banner of world peace must be unfurled, for it is here that the torch of knowledge is still burning. It is this acknowledgement of the essential unity of all religions that must guide all our actions and all our thoughts, if we have a sincere desire to realize the “Utopia”. Sri Aurobindo in his study of the evolution of man saw that he was progressively moving forward and upward through the several millennia and that he would one day reach the still higher stature of the Superman. It is towards this ideal that we must set our sights. This can best be done, I submit, by bridging the yawning gulf that lies today between different faiths. Our academic contribution in this field of bringing humanity under one roof may be for us a small step, but it would be a quantum and giant leap for mankind.

### **Conclusion**

I trust that this session, inaugurated by the Rev. Abbot of St. John Monastery of Parma, Cipriano Carini, will further cement our relationship and cast an illuminating light on subjects that will be discussed here for the betterment of all of us. The words that will reverberate through this august hall and before this eminent audience of this solemn conclave would recall to the minds the enduring wisdom of our ancestors, both of the East and of the West and would show that it is by a return in spirit to their teaching and precepts that we can hope to reshape our lives for the betterment of humanity and of the world now on the edge of a new millennium.

With these words, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to conclude my observations, and wish you 'addio' – Good bye and would say 'grazie' – Thank you.

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#### Endnotes:

- 1 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1983, p. 360
- 2 Ecclesiastes 1.10
- 3 Matthew 5:17
- 4 न कर्मणा न प्रजया न धनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः ।  
na karmana na prajaya na dhanena tyagenaike amritatvamanashuh/ Mahanarayaniya Upanishad X.5
- 5 तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्य सिद् धनम् ।  
tena tyaktena bhunjithah ma gridhah kasya svid dhanam/ Ishavasya Upanishad 1
- 6 Mark 10:17
- 7 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

# Cardinal John Newman

*Delivered in* : the Interfaith Dialogue Seminar

*organized by* : K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham

at Somaiya Vidyavihar, Mumbai, India

26 March 2007

## Cardinal John Newman

**T**HERE are great souls in all religious traditions who are prompted by the call from within that makes them take a steep and difficult path. Their journey in the pursuit of their goal, the trials and turbulence they have to face and the price they have to pay for their conviction is a saga that inspires all, irrespective of creed or caste.

As we understand, Cardinal John Henry Newman was one of the most brilliant and far seeing visionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is remembered as a saintly gentle figure and as a great literary man as well. He led an illustrious yet controversial life which was full of commitment with a purpose. His conversion to the Roman Catholic Church from the Anglican Church created a lot of bitterness; he lost his friends and the respect he had in the community. His deep ties with his beloved Oxford University were severed but his faith did not waver. He was the leader of the Oxford Movement which gathered many intellectuals who eventually joined the Roman Catholic Church.

A great and prolific writer, Cardinal Newman made a contribution to the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a novelist and poet. Besides he has written many books on theology, history and religion. His autobiography, *The Apologia Pro Vita Sua* is a masterpiece of moving prose, which embodies all of Cardinal Newman's gifts, certainly his personality and powerful charm. The challenge that he offers to one's assumptions is so lively and so real, his sense of the world is so subtle and coherent, and his psychological perception is so complete that a reader is indebted forever to Newman for the exhilaration he experiences.

Newman's two most famous poems are *The Pillar of the Cloud* and *The Dream of Gerontius*. The first was written when he was at sea in June 1833, voyaging from Sicily to Italy to Marseilles, when the boat carrying him was becalmed for a whole week in the famous 'Straits of Bonifacio'. It became a well-known hymn which says:

“Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home  
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene, – one step enough for me.”

The fervour, humility and the surrender of intellect to emotion in this poem remind us of the Upanishadic prayer: “Lead me from darkness to light.”<sup>1</sup>

As an Anglican, that is, during the first half of his long life, Newman helped to make the Church of England conscious of her historical roots and of her essential catholicity. As a Roman Catholic, part of his major work was to oppose the extravagances of other converts. He resisted the attempts to introduce exuberant worship with all the power of his influence and rhetoric.

He was the most illustrious of English converts to the Roman Catholic Church and attracted the support of many old Catholic families. He wanted Catholics to accept responsibilities in the world, exert their influence for the good of the people, broaden their minds to see the truth. He wanted them to follow their conscience, their reason, which was enlightened. He championed the laity at a time when it was not acceptable to do so. In fact, he appealed for an intelligent, well-instructed laity. He wrote in his *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*,

“I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it.”<sup>2</sup>

He pursued what he saw as right, what he saw as the truth, even when it incurred

the disfavour of powerful people, both in London and in Rome. Pope Benedict XVI, while still Cardinal Ratzinger, gave a speech in 1990 on the occasion of the centenary of the death of Cardinal Newman. There he referred to the importance for Newman of following a right and well-formed conscience in all his decisions. This expresses a personal relationship between man and God, a relationship which seeks truth above everything else. Benedict XVI said in that speech, "Newman had become a convert as a man of conscience; it was his conscience that led him out of the old ties and securities into the world of Catholicism, which was difficult and strange for him. But this way of conscience is everything except a way of self-sufficient subjectivity: it is a way of obedience to objective truth."<sup>3</sup>

Cardinal Newman has been described as possessing a sort of prophetic charisma, as one who, because he knew of only two absolutely luminous realities, God and his own soul, was able not only to diagnose the evils of his own day but to see beyond them to the abiding purposes of God. He managed to interpret history and to foresee some historical facts which were not so evident to his contemporaries, as for instance the loss of temporal power by the Church which became a reality some years later. As someone wrote many years ago, "Of all Christians then living this great genius had the deepest insight into the future; but to his own generation he became as Jeremiah announcing the fall of Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup>

When in 1879 Newman was raised to the dignity of Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Leo XIII, he chose as a motto for his coat of arms, an expression coined by St Francis de Sales: *cor ad cor loquitur*, 'heart speaks to heart'. This expression basically refers to three important dimensions of human life: that God speaks to man, that man speaks to man, and that man speaks to God. Thus dialogue was an essential part of his life. In those years the practice of interreligious dialogue as an institutional activity of the Church was not yet present. In fact, it became a reality several decades later when the Second Vatican Council made it possible for the Roman Catholic Church to invite other Christians to join the dialogue and gradually to bring about an approach towards unity within the Christian Church. In a way, Newman was the symbol of such a proposition. He knew dearly two Churches, and in his time was a leader of both. Opposed to extremes, he served, and his ideas still serve, as a bridge towards the understanding of different religious traditions.

Newman's way of dialogue was essentially through friendship, thus expressing the truth

contained in his motto that 'heart speaks to heart'. In fact, Newman had numerous friends whom we know from his abundant correspondence. For him, friendship was not mere formality. On the contrary it was an opportunity to show the truth of his convictions. He got to know people by spending time with them and by corresponding with them when they were apart. Thus, he built lasting friendships with Catholics, Anglicans, Agnostics, and so on.

Dialogue does not mean that there is always agreement between the parties. This was also shown in the life of Newman who knew how to disagree without giving up dialogue. Perhaps a very significant friendship, among so many others, is the one between Newman and Henry Wilberforce, the son of the famous abolitionist of the slavery act, William Wilberforce. As we know, William Wilberforce was the driving force behind the Abolitionist Movement, which forced the British Government to enact the Slave Trade Act which abolished slave trade in the British Empire in 1807. I find it quite revealing that Newman became friend of the son of this great man.

Even though Newman was by temperament shy and a retiring man especially when surrounded by large groups, he was able to convey his affection and his openness to dialogue in his letters. He understood that a friend is like a teacher, one who guides in truth. Only by friendship, loving one another, we can gently lead others to God, the greatest Love.

It is undeniable that his motto perfectly captures the idea of friendship, where people speak heart to heart, in a sincere, simple, and affectionate manner. This was the way of doing dialogue by Newman and is a lesson for all of us who are engaged in dialogue at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cardinal Newman, besides being a preacher, was a great educationist. In 1854, at the request of the Irish Catholic Bishops, he went to Dublin as rector of the newly established Catholic University of Ireland. He remained there for four years, during which he founded the 'Literary and Historical Society'. Fruit of that experience was the publishing of one of his most famous works, a volume of lectures entitled *The Idea of a University*.

In those years, Catholics were still not allowed as students at Oxford University. Newman wanted to contribute to solve that injustice both from his times as an Anglican and later as a Catholic. Thus, when finally Catholics did begin to attend Oxford from

1860s onwards, a Catholic Club was formed and, in 1888, it was renamed as the 'Oxford University Newman Society' in recognition of Newman's efforts. The purpose of this society is to promote Catholic faith and culture within the University, and has served as the model for Catholic student societies throughout the English-speaking world.

In 1859, when Catholic schools were not considered prestigious in England, Newman established a school for the education of children – particularly the sons of the converts from Anglicanism – in accordance with the principles and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and with the same quality as that of the Public English Schools at that time. It was a day and boarding senior school and today is the last Catholic all-boys boarding school remaining in Great Britain.

The study of the life and writings of Cardinal Newman shows that his work had a tremendous influence on the religious life not only of England, but of every country associated with the Roman communion, and that influence still lives on. His passion for intellectual life developed together with his love for people. As a priest fully dedicated to his pastoral ministry he also cared for those in need by visiting the sick and the poor, comforting the bereaved, caring for those in prison. It is not surprising that on his death, on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1890, his funeral was a great public event and many thousands of people lined the local streets as his body was taken to its place of burial. On Newman's\* epitaph it is written, 'Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem' ('From shadows and symbols into the truth').

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Endnotes:

- 1 तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।  
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya / Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.3.28
- 2 Cardinal John Henry Newman, Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England, Vol. I, The Birmingham Oratory Millennium Edition, 2000, p. 390
- 3 Presentation by His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on the Occasion of the First Centenary of the Death of Cardinal John Henry Newman, Rome, 28 April 1990

([www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19900428\\_ratzinger-newman\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900428_ratzinger-newman_en.html))

- 4 Barry William, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. X, C. G. Herbermann, et al. (eds.), Robert Appleton Company, New York, 1911
- \* Cardinal John Henry Newman was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010 in a Mass celebrated at Birmingham during the first official state visit to the United Kingdom by a Roman Pontiff.

# **Sharing Wisdom in Search of Inner and Outer Peace**

The speech was proposed to be delivered in Parliament of World Religions, at Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

Unfortunately it remained undelivered as Dr S K Somaiya was hospitalized in Melbourne till he departed for his heavenly abode.

# Sharing Wisdom in Search of Inner and Outer Peace

**S**INCE the first manifestation of creation, peace and harmony have been sought by humankind on the earth. Man has dreamt to lead a peaceful life; yet conflicts and warfare have stained human civilization and brought the world to the threshold of disaster and ruin. Hatred, malice and violence have overpowered mankind in spite of genuine and priceless efforts of Lord Mahavir, Lord Buddha, Moses, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Mahatma Gandhi and others.

Peace and harmonious coexistence of people is threatened by extremism and terrorism. Wars are fought in the name of religion. So here is an attempt to draw words of wisdom from prominent religions so as to start a pilgrimage towards peace, both inner and outer. Science has worked miracles and brought dramatic change in the lifestyle of humankind. On one side it has made man's life comfortable; while on the other side miserable. Wordsworth says,

“Science appears but what in truth she is,  
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,  
But as a succedaneum, and a prop  
To our infirmity.”<sup>1</sup>

Science, even though indirectly, has become an instrument for destruction of life whereas religion, though apparently a cause of discord, can still prove as an effective tool for establishing peace in human life as it is a binding factor. Positive understanding

and proper practice of religion can bring 'heaven's kingdom' on the earth. Religion has tremendous power in it. Its pious and saving instruction can shape human life and transform it into meaningful and peaceful existence. Consequently it can give solace and relief to those who are oppressed in the name of difference in race and colour, sects and isms, communities and nations.

The Sanskrit word for peace is Shanti (शान्ति). In the Vedic religion the term Shanti (शान्ति) was used in a wider sense. It included peace on the physical, spiritual and cosmic level. This was indicated by utterance of the word Shanti (शान्ति) thrice at the end of every Vedic prayer. Shantimantra-s (शान्तिमन्त्र) are Vedic invocations beseeching the Divinity to bring peace in and around. These are time-tested expressions of noble thoughts that reach beyond the boundaries of time and space. It is believed that the chanting of the Shantimantra-s (शान्तिमन्त्र) vibrates the physical body, revitalizes the inner soul, cleanses the environment and brings tranquility and peace.

The ancient Indian sages have given the foremost place to non-violence (Ahimsa अहिंसा) in the set of universal values. These also include truthfulness (Satya सत्य), non-stealing (Asteya अस्तेय), abstinence from sensual pleasures (Brahmacharya ब्रह्मचर्य), and non-accumulation of unnecessary objects (Aparigraha अपरिग्रह). Patanjali, the propounder of the Yoga (योग) philosophy, has enumerated these under the rules of restraint – Yama-s (यम). Jainism enjoins the same ethical code as the vows to be practised by a pious layman (Anuvrata-s अणुव्रत) as also by a monk (Mahavrata-s महाव्रत). Buddhism calls similar vows Panchashila (पञ्चशील).

Buddhism lays emphasis on compassion, Christianity on love and service while Islam on equality. Zoroaster prescribed good thought (Hu-mata), good word (Hu-ukta) and good deed (Hu-varshata) as the essential virtues or duties for every religious man.

The ways and means to attain peace for an individual have been prescribed in the Suttanipata (सुत्तनिपात), the Buddhist text which says,

“This a man should do who knows what is good for him,  
Who understands the meaning of the Place of Peace  
He should be able, upright, truly straight,  
Kindly of speech, mild, and without conceit.  
He should be well content, soon satisfied,

Having few wants and simple tastes,  
With composed senses, discreet,  
Not arrogant or grasping...  
In his deeds there should be no meanness  
For which the wise might blame him.”<sup>2</sup>

If we want to usher peace in the troubled world we should find out the obstructions. Fear is the first enemy of peace. Fear and peace cannot coexist. Mind polluted by doubt is suspicious even of a friend; it is much more obsessed by fear from a foe; it is perturbed by fear from known and unknown sources. Freedom from fear is a prerequisite for peace. Being aware of this phenomenon, the Vedic seer says: “May I be fearless of the friend, fearless of the foe, fearless of the known, fearless of the unknown; may our nights be without fear; our days without fear. May all the directions be my friends.”<sup>3</sup>

There are some factors that disturb peace in the external world. Economic disparity creates imbalance and ultimately results in unrest. Social discrimination gives rise to discord. Clinging to the past sows the seeds of animosity and revenge. Distortion of religion and claiming the superiority of one’s own religion is also at the root of growing disharmony amongst the people.

Lasting peace can be achieved only if people and nations realize the importance of non-violence and harmonious coexistence. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized that one can put an end to suffering and oppression not by warring against an enemy but by showing compassion and sympathy and by practising active non-violence which is the only path to the ultimate peace.

We all are aware that religious and spiritual wisdom can help in bringing peace and harmony. Time has come that we all following different world religions come together and unite forgetting petty differences and join our hands to fulfill the dream of establishing kingdom of peace on the earth. It is observed that although there have been several peace dialogues and international peace summits, the progress towards a global peace formula is not visible as these efforts are all on external level and the inner core that gives strength to the outer manifestation is ignored.

In spite of differences, all religions agree that man’s incessant pursuit of the objects of five senses obstructs him to reach the inner mansion of his body where he can experience

infinite peace. This can be obtained only when man has control over his senses and greed – the root cause of evil. Prayer and meditation are the two effective tools to look inward.

Prayer, dipped in the feeling of surrender, is a direct access to the Divine. In Islam Salat (सलात) is an important observance which is practised five times a day. H.H. Pope John Paul II defines the role of prayer as an instrument of peace. He says, “We must reaffirm the need for intense, humble, confident and persevering prayer, if the world is finally to become a dwelling-place of peace... Prayer is the bond which most effectively unites us. Through prayer, believers meet one another at the level where inequalities, misunderstandings, bitterness and hostility are overcome...Prayer, as the authentic expression of a right relationship with God and with others, is already a positive contribution to peace.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of meditation as a means of mental purity is emphasized by most of the religions and philosophies. A life without meditation is compared to a horse without reins or a boat without a rudder. Sufism says that if you constantly remember God, world does not exist for you. It comes into being only when you begin to be unconscious of Him and exists only as long as you remain so. Every culture on earth has produced some sort of mental practice. These practices are recognized by all religions. Yoga (योग) is one of the popular techniques in this context. Zen is spread all over the world. Spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius in Christianity, Vipashyana (विपश्यना) technique in Buddhism, and Kabbalah (कब्बालह) – the Jewish technique are also significant in this context.

For outer peace a serious undertaking to invoke the lasting world peace through the interaction amongst religions should be a priority. We have different beliefs and we see the nature of reality from different angles. However, we all believe that human life is sacred and its sanctity ought to be protected. Hence all of us, the followers of different religions should come together in our efforts to establish peace.

The Universal formula to bring in peace can be:

May no being deceive another

Nor in any way scorn another

Nor in anger or ill-will

Desire another's sorrow.<sup>5</sup>

In his Chicago Parliament of Religions address, in 1893, Vivekananda pronounced, “Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written: In spite of resistance, “Help and not fight”, “Assimilation and not Destruction”, “Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus we find that religious and spiritual wisdom can help in bringing peace and harmony if they help each other, cooperate with each other, not hate each other.

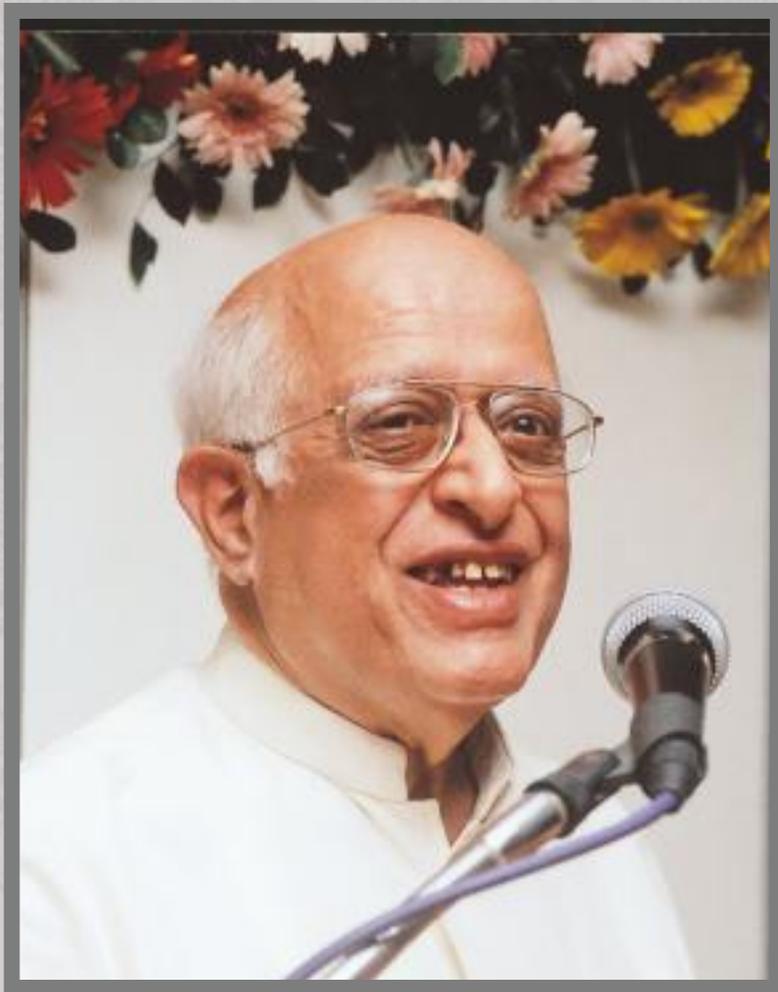
OM, Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!

(ॐ शान्ति : शान्ति : शान्ति :)

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Endnotes:

- 1 Rao Nagaraja P., Introduction to Vedanta, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1960, p. 13
- 2 The Sutta Nipata Mettasutta, P. V. Bapat (ed.), Sri Sadguru Publications, Delhi, 1990, cf., Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I, Ainslie T. Embree (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 118
- 3 **अभयं मित्रादभयममित्रादभयं ज्ञातादभयं पुरो वः ।  
अभयं नक्तमभयं दिवा नः सर्वा आशा मम मित्रं भवन्तु । ।**  
abhayam mitradabhayamamitradabhayam jnatadabhayam puro vah/  
abhayam naktamabhayam diva nah sarva asha mama mitram bhavantu//  
Atharvaveda XIX.15.6
- 4 Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, 1963-1965  
Francesco Gioia (ed.), The Magisterium of John Paul II, 765, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, 1997
- 5 The Sutta Nipata Mettasutta, P. V. Bapat (ed.), Sri Sadguru Publications, Delhi, 1990, cf., Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. I, Ainslie T. Embree (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 119
- 6 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1986, p. 24



## Photo Gallery



Dr S K Somaiya with father Padmabhushan Shri K J Somaiya



with mother Smt Sakarben K Somaiya



with wife Smt Maya S Somaiya



in celebrations of Janmashtami



with Pujya Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale-Dadaji, Swadhyay Parivar



with H H Swami Satyamitranand Giriji, Haridwar



with H H Guru Gangeshwaranandji Maharaj



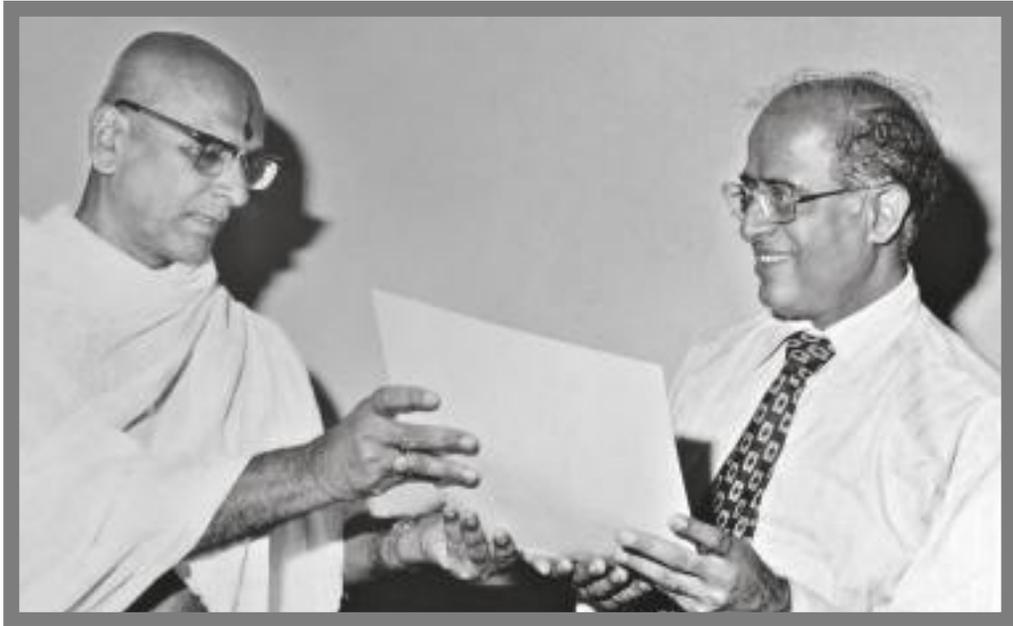
with H H Shri Ravishankar Dadaji



with H H Swami Chinmayanandaji, Chinmaya Mission



with H H A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder, ISKCON



with H H Panditaraj Gopalacharya Mahuliji, Satyadhyana Vidyapeeth

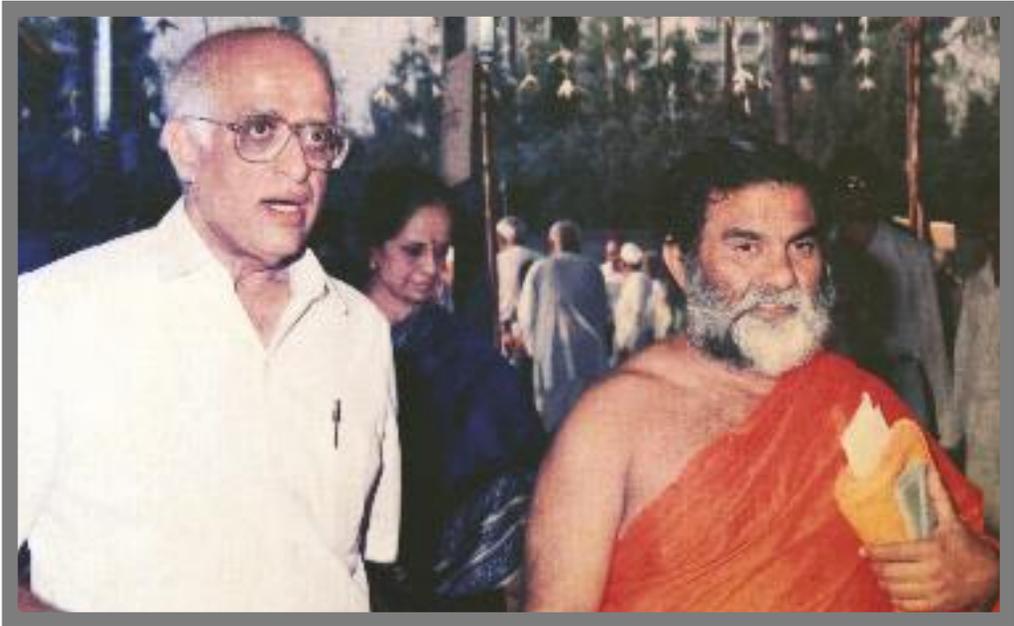


with H H Shri Dongreji Maharaj



with H H Morari Bapuji





with H H Swami Tadrupanand Saraswatiji, Manan Ashram, Bharuch



with H H Swami Jayendra Saraswatiji, Shri Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Kanchi-Kamkoti Peetham



with H H Morari Bapuji and H H Swamiji Sugunendra Theertha of Puttige Mutt, Udipi



with H H Shri Pramukh Swamiji, Shri Swaminarayan Sampradaya



with H H Swami Vidyashankar Bharatiji, Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Karveer Peeth



with H H Swami Vagishanandaji, Head, Ramkrishna Mission, Mumbai and H H Nikhileshwaranandaji, Head, Ramkrishna Mission, Vadodara



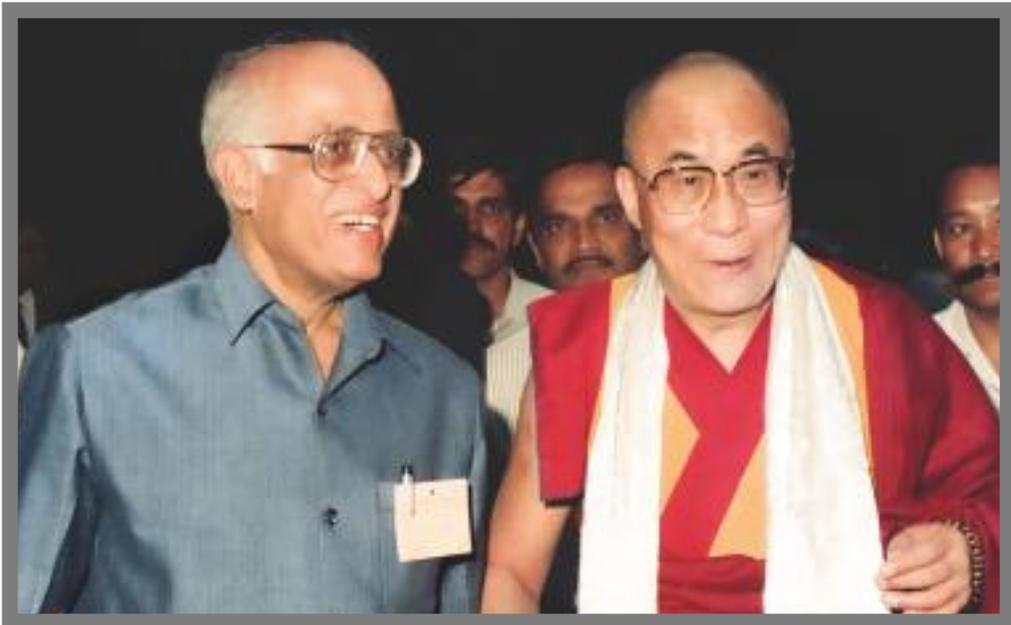
with H H Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, Art of Living Foundation



with H H Acharya Mahapragyaji, Head, Jain Shwetambar Terapanth



with Dadi Jankiji, Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya



with H H Dalai Lama



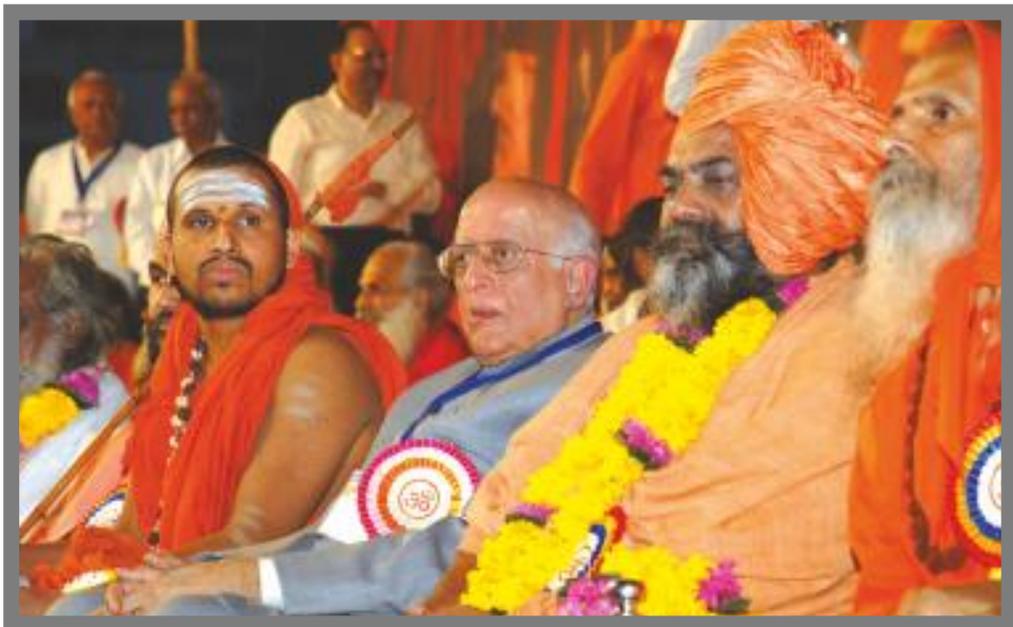
with H H Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vishweshwarananda Giriji, Sanyas Ashram, Mumbai



with Dr Karan Singh



with Justice P N Bhagwati



with Hindu Dharmacharya-s

# धर्म रक्षा मंच

सम विद्या

हम सबका है एक ही नारा  
जांचे भारत देश हमारा

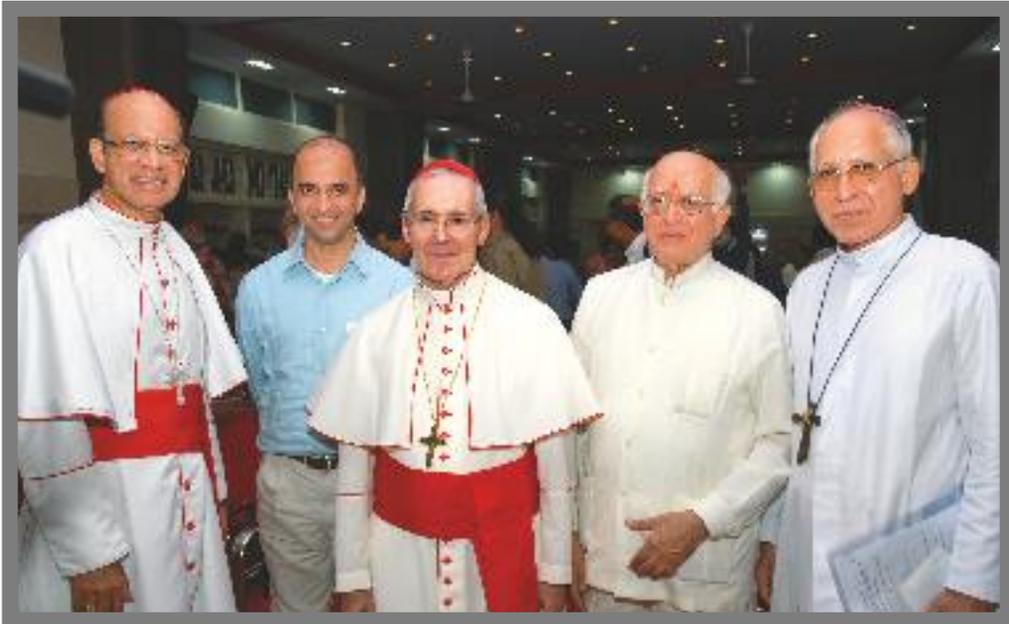
with Hindu Dharmacharya-s



with H H Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh, India  
and H E Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai



with H H Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh, India



with H E Cardinal Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican and H E Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai



with H E Cardinal Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican and H E Pedro Lopez Quintana, Apostolic Nuncio, New Delhi



with Late H H Pope John Paul II



with H H Pope Benedict XVI



with Chief Abbot Ven Jue Xing, The Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, China



with Revered Madam Chiara Lubich, Founder-President, Focolare Movement



with H E Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Republic of Kazakhstan



with H E Cardinal Paul Poupard, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican



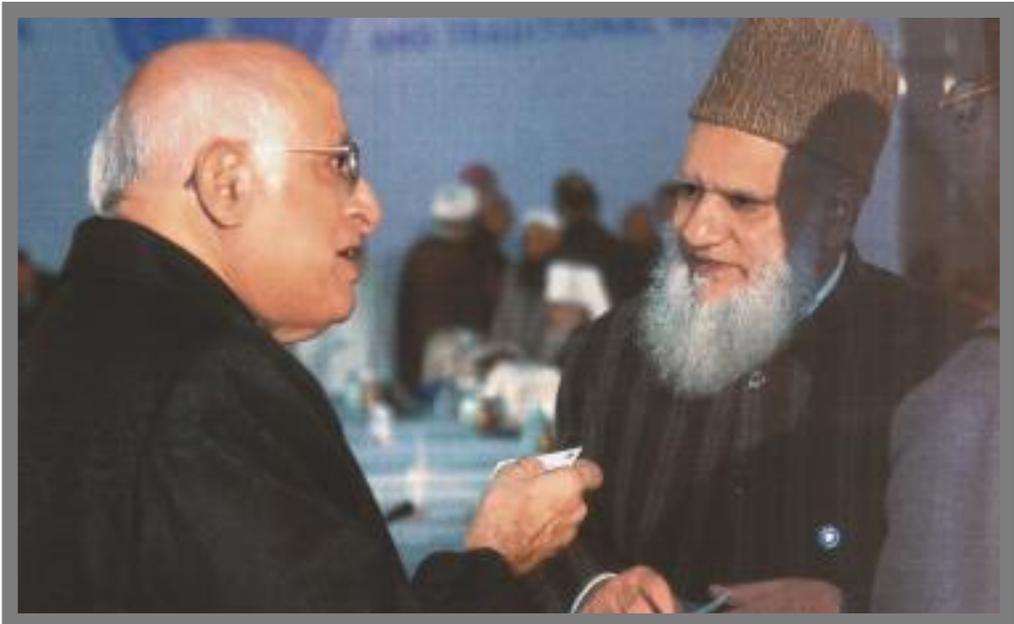
with H E Archbishop Felix Machado, Cardinal Simon Pimenta and H E Cardinal Ivan Dias, Archbishop of Mumbai



with H E Cardinal Paul Poupard, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican and Mr Sami Bubere



with H H Prof Derbis-Ali Abdsattar-Hajji, Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan



with Salman Al-Husaini Al-Nadvi, Jamiat-e-Shabab-e-Islam



at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions at Astana, Kazakhstan



at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions at Astana, Kazakhstan



Dr S K Somaiya and the participants of the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions at Astana, Kazakhstan



with Her Highness Siridaran Maha Chakradhari, The Princess of Thailand



with H H Shri Nagraj Baba