



SPIRITUALITY – THE GENIUS OF INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

“Every nation has a special genius; and India’s is spirituality, which embraces all aspects of life and relationships”, said Swami Vivekananda, India’s foremost exponent of Indian Heritage and Culture (IHC). Unfortunately, we have adopted a so-called secular policy, whereby spiritual attitude and approaches are not introduced in day-to-day life and work, transactions, relations, education and character building, governance and management, etc. In practice, secularism has even come to mean ‘anti-religion and anti-spirituality’. Even a prayer to God at the beginning of public or educational functions is considered improper! This is unfortunate since, as per IHC, everything in life ought to be done with a spiritual attitude. This article attempts to clarify the real meaning of secularism and spirituality so that teachings of

IHC, though appearing to be religious in origin or form, are genuinely secular. Therefore, the teachings of IHC can be suitably adapted and followed by the State, educational institutions and media as well as individuals in their day-to-day life and work as well as in all transactions and relationship.

India’s hospitality and tolerance towards alien cultures and adoption of spiritual approach began from Vedic times, which continues even now in spite of foreign invasions and conquests and also religious conversions. During the last 2500 years India was invaded about 70times and was subjected to tremendous amount of humiliation and harassment. Temples and treasures were plundered and pillaged. Artistic, architectural and sculptural works were mutilated. Hindus were forcibly converted under threat of death. These acts of sacrilege and wanton destruction have left behind many scars on the psychological and social plane. Though unfortunate, our country accepted this stoically as her destiny. It was disunity and discord

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among the ruling princes that enabled aliens to humble India militarily and socially. Alas, even now disunity and divisible forces are fragmenting Indian thought and destabilizing the State. .

NATURE OF THE SOUL

Man is the product of Nature constituted of the five elements or Pancha Bhootas – earth, water, air, fire and space. The soul does not transmigrate in a state of nudity but with a sheath or series of sheaths of subtle matter. The condition of the sheaths depends on the balance of previous good and evil Karma, and the new birth is determined by the nature of the sheaths which surround the soul. The subtle body of transmigration is deprived of sense organs, including mind and therefore, the soul cannot normally remember previous births. Very advanced souls can sometimes recapture memories of previous existence after deep meditation and practice.

MYSTERIES OF LIFE AND CREATION

There are many questions about the mysteries of creation and of life, for which there are no conclusive answers. What is the purpose of life? According to IHC, the real nature of Man is divine, i.e. the individual soul is part of the universal consciousness or energy, called Brahman. The principle of Brahman pervades every entity in the universe. Due to ignorance, or Avidya, Man does not realize divinity within him. Jesus said the same in a different way, stating that the Kingdom of God is within you. He added “father in heaven, me and you are the same”, which is near to the Non-dualistic principle propounded by Adi Sankaracharya. Man wrongly identifies himself with the body-

mind-intellect equipment. The pure soul has no suffering. It is considered to be always in bliss. For achieving the purpose of life, one has to take millions of births, improving oneself in each birth by right conduct and action. It is only through human birth, that one can attain a state of realization of God. This is not an abstract concept. Many saints and sages, such as Ramakrishna, Ramana, Aurobindo, Vivekananda and other evolved souls have attained it even in recent times. With such a transcendental and super-ordinate goal, life becomes worthwhile. The ultimate goal or right of Man is to realize his true nature and oneness with God. Going through the Prarabdha, which is of one’s own making, one gets psychological strength to endure suffering, which is inevitable in life. Bhakthi helps through grace from God for reducing Prarabdha. So all activities should be conducted with a spiritual and pious attitude, which would help calm the mind.

As regards the purpose of creation, IHC postulates that there has been no creation by God, as the popular impression goes. The Universe has always existed from eternity and would continue to exist indefinitely and infinitely. There will be only cycles, i.e., Kalpas and Manvantharas – each of millions of years. Incidentally, the concept of infinity and zero, relative time, decimals and many other concepts of mathematics are in the Vedas.

The Self or Soul or the Divine element in us is surrounded by the causal body, subtle body and the gross body, in successive layers. They are called the Annamaya Kosa, Pranamaya Kosa, Manomaya Kosa, Vijananamaya Kosa

and Anandamaya Kosa standing for the sheath physical, the sheath comprising vital energies, the mind with its capacity for cognition, the intellect with its capacity to weigh pros and cons, the ananda that is enjoyed during deep sleep. The last is the name given in fact to ignorance or *ajñana*!

It is due to ignorance, we identify ourselves with the body-mind-intellect equipment. Our real nature is the eternal Soul or Self, which has no beginning or end. At the time of death, the soul, along with the causal and subtle bodies, containing desires and tendencies, migrates to another body, where there is scope for enjoyment of the desires or for going through suffering. This self is part of the Universal Self or Energy or Consciousness. This concept is the great concept of *Adwaita*, succinctly elaborated by Adi Shankaracharya.

THE NON-DUAL CONCEPT

Adi Shankara is the exponent of Monism the *Adwaita* (non-dual concept), which postulates that the *Atman* within the individual, and *Paramatman*, which is universal consciousness, are the same. Madhwacharya propounded the *Dwaita* concept (dualistic), where the *Atman* and *Brahman* are different. Ramanujacharya propounded the *Vishista Adwaita* (qualified non-dualism). These Acharyas have also written commentaries on Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad Gita, which are considered as equally valid. Vivekananda and many sages and scholars considered these concepts as complementary. They do not see any contradiction among them. Hanuman clarified it succinctly by telling Rama “When I consider myself as the ‘body’, you and I are different, and I am your

servant (dual); when I identify myself as Jiva, I am part of You (*Vishista Adwaita*); when I consider myself as Atman or the Self, You and I are the same (*Adwaita*)”

HINDU - SPIRITUALITY – OPEN AND UNIVERSAL

Mind and Matter

From the beginning of the Age of Reason, questions have been asked as to which came first : Ideals/Ideas or matter? Marxists assert that man’s consciousness itself is influenced by the way he satisfies his needs of material goods. Hinduism postulates that Man’s nature is divine and he is essentially spiritual and also that ideas came first and matter thereafter. Universal spirit/consciousness/energy / intelligence / soul / divinity / Jiva / Atman is the essential nature and reality of Man. Man is ‘spirit’ and the body, mind intellect is only his equipment to experience the world phenomena. Recently there is evidence of increasing awareness of the supremacy of mind over matter. While some major religions often claim that salvation is possible only through their faith, Hinduism accepts other religions as equally true, as will be evident from the following statements in Hindu scriptures.

- Truth/God is one; saints and scholars call it/Him by different names.
- Like water from the sky, falling on earth as rain, take different routes through rivers and rivulets, and finally merge with the ocean, so too all prostrations and prayers – in whatever name and form – reach the same God.

This concept is not just mere theory or an ideal. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated the universality of religions in practice. He lived like a Christian, and later as a Muslim, observing their respective rituals, and realized God. He then boldly declared, “whatever be the name and form or method of prayer, one can realize God in all religions”. Such a broad minded and liberal view cannot be found in any other culture or civilization or religion.

WORLD AS ONE FAMILY

The inventions of Science and Technology (S&T), as seen in the spectacular achievements in space travel and Information Technology in communications, have brought the people of the world closer. TV, Internet and Multimedia have enabled people to understand other cultures better. But unification of people’s mind in mutual respect is still a distant dream, an ideal worth striving for. A noteworthy statement in Indian scriptures is: “For those with small mind, this is yours and that is mine. For the large-hearted, the whole world is one family”. The Indian civilization declared 5000 years ago, “*Sarve Jana Sukhino Bhavantu*”(let the whole world and people be happy). Thus, India and IHC can help to unify the minds of the whole of mankind, though adhering to different religions, races and languages.

UNIVERSAL APPROACH

Religion has been criticized for having divided people. Throughout history, people fought inter-religious battles in various parts of the world. In the name of Christ, who taught mankind to love even enemies, crusades were fought. Though India was attacked about 70 times (as per one historian), Indian soldiers did not cross her borders to conquer other

countries. Similarly, though Christianity and Islam converted Hindus (and still do), Hindus did not and still do not, practice proselytisation. This ideal of Hinduism can perhaps help inter-faith dialogue, understanding and harmony. Swami Vivekananda pointed out the universal approach of Hinduism in his historical address at the World Congress of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. Since then, many Indian spiritual teachers have been following this approach and ideal of Hinduism of promoting unity of mankind in India and abroad. In the Satya Sai Ashrams, thousands of devotees from all parts of the world congregate to have his *darshan*. Festivals of most religions are observed in Sai Ashrams. Jesus is worshipped as an incarnation. This phenomenon is unique. People of various races and religions pray and sing together the glory of one God, known by different names. The Sai emblem shows the logo of all religions. Other religions and their teachers do not show such benign universality.

But, for a variety of reasons including selfish interests of political parties to create and take advantage of vote banks based on special privileges and job quotas etc. based on religions, caste and communities, such an integrated, sacred-cum-secular approach has not been practised. There is apprehension that a spiritual approach can easily be turned communal by vested interests, creating inter-religious conflicts. But the secular teachings of Vedanta and its profound concepts and bold postulations can be effectively applied in secular life as well for unity, harmony and common good. Those elements in India’s spiritual literature, which are applicable to all areas of human endeavours, have universal relevance.

CATHOLICITY OF HINDUISM

The universal spirit of Hinduism is manifest in India through the coexistence of several other religions. Besides Hinduism, it has Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists-religions which originated in the country. Jews, who were driven out of their homeland, were given refuge in India, and also provided with facilities for worship. India contains the last remaining Parsis of the ancient Zoroastrian religion of Persia (Iran) who were given refuge in India. Christianity came to India before it went to Europe. They were given freedom to worship,

preach and practice. All sects of Christianity have established in India. Islam came to India in the early stage, through traders who were welcomed by the Hindus. Later some came as conquerors and converted millions by force. The Sufi mystics are also respected in India. The largest Bahai temple in the world is in Delhi. The Theosophists have perhaps their largest following in India. The acceptance of such diversity is explicable only through the open tradition and catholicity of Hinduism.



**I dont have time to hate
People who hate me
because I am too busy loving
People who love me.**