

SPIRITUALITY WITH NO AFFILIATION TO RELIGION

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ABSTRACT : A common tendency with most people is to feel secure by declaring their affiliation to a particular Caste, Language and above all Religion. This may be giving rise to a sort of superiority complex over others so that it becomes habitual for the herd to diligently follow the dictates of the so called Connoisseur. There is absolutely nothing wrong in adopting the principles of any religion, provided one has honestly gone through the original texts, not just interpretations and understood all possible shades. Everything ages and that is a natural phenomenon. The age old rules, regulations and principles too, lose their efficacy in course of time. This is a fact to be accepted without dispute. It is surprising that out of reverence, religious claims are never taken for a thorough revision in the interest of humanity. All of them are granted eternity and the followers are forced to accept them as pronounced centuries back. This eventually has brought in rigidity in thinking and furthermore smothered the progress altogether. No religion has stood exception to this. In fact the fault does not lie with the textual matter of any religion as such. It is the mishandling and misinterpretations vociferously carried by the preachers and religiously practised by the devout followers. In the race to claim superiority over others, the enthusiastic mediocres have earned hatredness towards other groups. More than having a clarity of own religious scriptures they have been energetically involved in pinpointing and later harshly criticizing others faith, practices, belief system, traditions etc. The ultimate aim of any religion tends towards spirituality that involves regard for others practices and basic assumptions or outlooks. It is sad to see immature fellows equating old traditions, which have remained absolutely unchecked, to spirituality and claiming own presumptions as the ultimate. The present day need is to aim at spirituality having no affiliation to any religion as such. Religion can always be a guide or a pathway to the spiritual zone and therefore one who aims high should not get bracketted into a clumsy arena that provides no liberal attitude. This paper aims to check the genuine details related to spirituality than getting sentimentally carried away by the popular but false claims.

KEYWORDS : *Religiosity, Spirituality, Practices, Misconceptions etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion usually relates to a set of organized beliefs supposed to be profitable to a particular group of followers. There seems to be a typical spirit accompanying, with not only a hope but confidence that these beliefs would make them as a race endowed with superiority. There is nothing wrong in enriching knowledge but the same should reflect in behaviour which naturally stands as a practical application. Unfortunately knowledge on the negative scale promotes arrogance and enmity, for no proper reason. An ardent follower, instead of rejoicing the comfort provided by his religious convictions, feels more insecure looking at other religion's practices and the belief system. Quoting aphorisms from a language that is Latin to many, somehow brings in haughty nature and a sense of being one up compared to the fellow beings. Instead of bridging the gap, this psychological weakness makes even the well informed self-centred and totally responsible for the schism created in the society. Welfare of the society has no place in the agenda in a true sense rather creating division and animosity seem to be on the priority list. The so called learned people, though not all, who are supporting such activities are themselves misdirected and the unfortunate part is that they are ever engaged in guiding others. Virtues in action have no designated place. They are only referred to in speech and writings to impress the mass. The true evolved beings from any religious affiliation never involved themselves as such in nonsensical activities. They were far away from the vices and never ever reacted to the onslaught of injustice or cruelty levelled against them by the society. Any religion which can put its salient features in brief is the most wanted in present day context. This is because when virtues are picked up for strengthening a moral platform and gain happiness thereof, our judgements must be with regard to the behaviour exhibited than the words spoken. Therefore, an impulsive thinking with illogical expressions is most dangerous and subsequently deplorable. The main aim of all religions had been to actively participate in defense of their convictions but never have any comparison. They were also supposed to engage themselves in effortfully proving the existence of God in their own way. As an extension

they were to go a step further in consolidating the faith in God so that humanity as a whole would try to lead a virtuous life. When such a thinking pattern is sincerely adopted, then a pathway to God realization could be created leading to a region called 'Spirituality'. But then it is sad that most of the followers of all religions have misconstrued and therefore, have mixed up their own personal views with religion. As a result they have hardly progressed but definitely caused damage to the society. At the same time their poor level of comprehension has defamed the religion to which they have association.

Philosophy of religion is definitely connected to religion but it cannot be considered as any significant part of religion. It does help in analyzing certain concepts chiefly the metaphysical ones and also clarifying the terms which are closely knitted to human life of all phases. That is why there may not be any precise definition of the term 'Religion' but the meaning may be conveyed slightly in a descriptive manner. According to Concise Oxford Dictionary, Religion has to be, "human recognition of a superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God or Gods entitled to obedience and worship." Although there are many definitions/descriptions, ultimately all of them lay a lot of emphasis on a Governor or Controller of nature phenomena and all human affairs. This shows a subordinated position granted to human Free Will. Enthusiastically the status of God is elevated to such an extent that most people would submit themselves to Fatalism or such an attitude towards life. One might feel that so many ideas have been deliberately imposed by robbing freedom or weakening the very faculty of analytical thinking. This has been on from centuries and so the misleading procedure continues without interruption. Bertrand Russell writes, 'To say that we live in an age of science is a commonplace, but like most commonplaces it is only partially true. From the point of view of our predecessors, if they could view our society, we should, no doubt, appear to be very scientific but from the point of view of our successors it is probable that the exact opposite would seem to be the case.'¹ For an onlooker with no prejudice it seems Religion conveys many meanings. There are indeed various facets and therefore each feature has its own identity. It is generally believed that even though there are numerous features yet the fact that remains intact is that basic axis of morality is unchanged. The tragedy however, is much due to the improper utilization and claiming lofty metaphysical ideas which have not surfaced, religions have been systematically defamed. The excitement with which uncouth followers raise only their own platform condemning other religions is a clear sign of uncultured upbringing. That is why those who applaud their own religion also put up all efforts to promise a better life in a limitless manner. They speak of the existing world as totally filled with unsatisfactoriness and further rigorously proclaim only their belief system when adopted can bring upon a release. That is how the trap is laid down wantonly and the naive followers think the particular religion as the only possible solace. They even offer Divine grace or spiritual realm, as exclusively being an available quality with their religion. Their temptation to disgrace others beliefs is so strong that even morally depraved language is often used deliberately. Therefore, the conventional views and language have become absolutely despicable for sensitive minds.

II. PATHWAYS TO SPIRITUALITY

At the outset it would be wise to understand what is NOT spirituality so that the huge area which it encompasses could be studied sectionally for our convenience. It is quite irritating to find that everyone with meagre knowledge and clear deficiencies thinks he or she is well qualified to be rated as spiritual. In fact there is no hard and fast definition of spirituality covering all its aspects. Someone concerned merely with sacred things and is sensitive to others feelings may be considered as genuinely spiritual. However, the one much in vogue is the exhibition of intolerance, being temperamental, having capacity to quote a couple of historical facts or certain man-made tales and at times remaining silent, as if not communicable due to the owner of high intellect, are considered to be the qualifications. Similarly mastering certain black magic tricks is also taken for a far fetched progress in the pathways of spirituality. One has to remember that any religion may be used as a launching pad to tread over the path of spirituality. Although most of the enthusiastic followers of their choice religion are, instead of studying and understanding the underlying principles of own religion, seem to be energetically engrossed in criticizing other religions. This habit had been in practice since ages and a typical sadistic joy is derived by them. Sensitive people distance themselves from such fundamentalists but the result is even more nauseating. The religious minded but not spiritual in temperament have in their custody limitless intolerance towards others feelings or convictions. This has been a continual process even in the present century. It seems like an obsession never to diminish. The secular ideas are only accommodated in speech to impress upon the mass but not in thinking or practically practicing. Spirituality, needless to say, is same for all. The followers of different religions may differ with each other on many counts but spirituality has no room to do so. Sages from all religions always respected each other particularly with regard to feelings and beliefs. They never involved themselves in pointless arguments which could grossly waste time, directing no one with a vision. That is why spirituality has very few shades but those who practise shy away from publicity. They voluntarily preferred to remain aloof. They had been the seekers with wisdom not just owners of theoretical knowledge. Evolved beings irrespective of their religious background never criticised each other or fellow beings because they had marched in the right direction from the beginning which culminated into a non-ceremonially true spirituality. The present

scenario is quite appalling. It has already given a wider scope for the display of consternation. That is why those who are totally misled, brainwashed and easily taken for a ride must know the truth and real shades of spirituality than getting carried away. Therefore, the area of spirituality covers or allows only virtues or positive values, human relationships based on mutual reverence and purpose of life earned on the righteous path. This is the reason as to why the serene personalities from all corners of the world lay emphasis on the welfare of the society having animosity towards none. There had been and even today it continues, the germ of spirituality through devotion which is expressed by the chanting of the name of the deity, offering prayers and to some extent following ritualistic practices. Those who are in the field of spiritual discipline are quite patient and interactive too. According to the Existential viewpoint, "Not simply we are responsible for what we do", Sartre says, "we are responsible for our world. Each of us is living out a certain "project" with our life, so whatever happens to us must be accepted as part of that. Sartre goes so far as to say that "there are no accidents in life."²

a) SPIRITUALITY WITH OCCULTISM OR MYSTICISM

The strong belief in the supernatural powers with an innate desire to govern them at own "Will" falls under this. As we find numerous references to this, it is also seen a deep rooted desire residing to gain a control over even the physical phenomena. Of course we have the examples of those who made use of such powers for the benefit of the society and downtrodden, but to our dismay, there are many proofs showing senseless acts or even crimes committed. That is why the modern mind brings all such practitioners under one roof which is quite unjust. Without giving reference to any particular religion it can easily be understood that the staunch faith considers all our souls are just fragments of the supreme soul, i.e. God. Therefore, aspiring to get close to the Ultimate has to be through a rigorous set of ascetic practices which would eventually give capacity to handle supernatural powers. Well, at any rate, this is easily said and explained than done. Only a special class of devotees of the higher force having the aim to ward off misfortunes of the masses and individuals too, qualify but after leading a strenuous regulated life. Those who misuse the powers cannot be reckoned in the list of genuine practitioners of Occult or Mystical Spirituality.

b) SPIRITUALITY WITH DOMINEERING ATTITUDE

Affiliation to a particular religion, no doubt, encourages or rather inspires the followers to have a deep rooted urge to become one with the higher force or deity. Rigorous practice is a basic requisition for all pathways to spirituality. One has to really appreciate the level of concentration and subsequently attachment the practitioners hold on to. However, with due regards, it is observed that with age and experience a typical hierarchy is created which is least appreciable. Always striving to indicate a sort of Authoritative position of self, these practitioners have been owners of ill temperament. Their scholarship cannot be denied but their wantonly adopted disposition expressing always seniority or hatred towards other religions or belief systems is absolutely scornful.

c) INTELLECTUAL SPIRITUALITY

A scholarly outlook while learning and analyzing any subject shows intellectual characteristic attitude. When the subject under study is spirituality, the followers go in for all details right from the historical facts and in addition the stages of development. Obviously this would mean a sincere effort directed towards the theories of the past and presently those in vogue. Interpretation of the theories applying practical wisdom so as to make it convenient and cognizable to those interested in it is ever on a priority basis. This would also mean it is mostly studying the characteristics of God. However, there is always a rational analysis. Therefore, this may be concluded as partly Theological study. It could be described as a systematic study with a clear intention to know the existence as well as the essential nature of God. This is also further extended to know the relationship between the Divine force and other beings. Therefore, there is much emphasis laid upon getting acquainted with the Divine Truths and the intimate connection between God and the mortal beings.

4) SPIRITUALITY WITH A SENSE OF SERVICE

This is probably the most accepted and appreciated type of spirituality drawing attention of all and commanding reverence in the society. Those who trust in the efficacy of the virtues and carry acts with no expectations in return, develop this mental frame. There are indeed a few who voluntarily take on responsibilities of others and stand by them in difficult situations. Such persons with no show off follow this type of spirituality. Well, this may be considered as an offshoot of Karma Yoga only with philanthropic outlook. Their intent and the actions performed for the welfare of the society and genuinely needy, without discriminating on the basis of caste, creed or religious background, speak of their piouness. Therefore, there is a strong belief that 'Karma' performed with pure intention would never go waste and would surely generate happiness. This has been considered scientific in approach because the basis is 'Cause and Effect' theory. Ultimately this type believes more in actual work performed than merely exhibiting one's scholarship to impress others. The modern outlook has a feeling of profound respect towards such personalities because there is a clear connection between the spoken words and the deeds carried out. Sri Aurobindo writes, 'The spiritual sense is capable of knowing in its own

characteristic way, which is other than that of supramental thought or of the intelligence or spiritual comprehension, vijnana (scientific) or knowledge by identity, all things whatsoever, things material and what is to us immaterial, all forms and that which is formless.³

5) SPIRITUALITY IN GROUP

Prayers offered or rituals performed in a group of members aspiring for enlightenment or awareness generates, though at times on a temporary basis, this kind of spirituality. Mostly the practices are carried out periodically owing to which a rhythm or discipline is set in. It so happens that one draws inspiration or spirit with a sense of belonging with the higher force individually. Although the fact remains that togetherness also causes a systematic approach yet capacity and temperament do differ from person to person. Of course, there is a lofty ideal combined with a true spiritual purpose of life. Usually when this is practised a group spirit sets in with a particular religious affiliation. There is a drawback in this type of spirituality because sometimes it may lead to a spirited approach, discarding other affiliations and openly disdaining. There is absolutely nothing wrong in having an attachment to own views, outlooks and affiliation but that should not become a hindrance to own progress in the path chosen.

III SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

When it comes to the recognised spiritual practices fortunately there is no controversy as such. This is because only universally acknowledged values are considered and put into practice. On the other hand there is a wide range of controversy fuming in religious practices, wherein, the virtues remain or get stranded only in speech. The worst part is an ugly competition being encouraged by the leaders and the so called religious heads which results into a permanent damage creating divisions in society. That is why spirituality has wisdom while religions may be having accumulated information. Such knowledge brings in nothing else than arrogance but wisdom takes its owners to look at every relationship evenly covering not only humanity but also animal and plant kingdoms. Both knowledge and wisdom indicate a purpose but the latter considers or values relationship most on priority basis. There is a philanthropic outlook and so altruism has been given widest scope and importance. Sages from any nook of the world always practised spiritualism condemning none or exerted to elevate self through any sort of publicity. That is why they had their faith ever resting on sacred values, relationships and a well defined purpose completely in the interest of human welfare only. The faith was characteristically universal because it was never restricted to a particular community. If we analyze or grossly take into consideration the principles adopted by such venerated beings then we realize that the practices include a chosen path of knowledge leading to wisdom, an ardent and strong feeling of attachment with the divine force which is continuously pursued with devotion. This always resulted into calming down of the restless mind but not totally silencing through yogic discipline. Many times this is termed as Meditation, busying self in yeoman services for the less endowed, downtrodden and finally storing energy with an intention to utilize it for a right purpose on right time. Obviously this would be indicated through behaviour totally based on a moral platform and never getting flinched up by the societal consumerism. This would also give an insight so clear that there would be no scope for discrimination and other worldly vices that are seen liberally. It is a sign of genuine maturity as well as steadfastness on the accepted righteous path. However, the sad part is that the percentage of such extraordinary beings is extremely small and the worst part above all is that with a systematic planning, cunningness, publicity, developing connections with political parties, managing relations with wealthy people etc. worthless fellows are striving. There is a similarity in approach towards life expressed in Buddhism and Stoicism. This has been a guiding force as well as inspiration for the seekers of Truth in life. Both insist on not harping after worldly pleasures because there is definitely something more deserving to pursue. That of course is gaining perfection of mind and spirit. Our very attachment to the comforts and pleasures of life becomes the root cause of suffering. In fact this has been said by other religions too. However, the good things are not circulated instead efforts are taken to create, almost on a permanent basis, animosity towards each other. We need a radical revolutionary change in all religions to make the followers understand the right spirit than gaining superfluous knowledge without understanding. In short we need APATHEIA (peace of mind) or NIRVANA, than energy which is wrongly directed, to gain supremacy over others. We would definitely need everything based on cultural values.

IV CONCLUSION

With the astounding progress of science we have realized the fact that in order to have comfort, innovative ideas are necessary. By the turn of every century and sometimes even certain decades we have to confess that the upcoming generation is better informed and equipped too. The main reason for the progress of science that too at such a pace is only because it is analytical, application oriented and ever sportively willing to have alterations or corrections whenever and wherever necessary. Old methods do have their own historical importance but there is no hard feeling when a new approach with better practical results is presented. As a consequence every new generation is getting immensely benefitted and there is so much of time-saving. It is unfortunate that such an attitude finds no place in case of religions. While renewing any idea or concept pruning is a must. Discarding

anything for its failure to generate expected goods or its incapacity to exhibit efficacy is indeed a method based on common sense. However, no religion is ready for such an overhauling as its adherents are more emotionally tied down. It is in the interest of the humanity that necessary replacement, periodically, must be provided when results are desirable. Granting eternity to the precepts of every religion has become a habit, sometimes out of compulsion, due to the prevalent social order. That is why science has been growing and earning accolades from all while religions have become rigid with no scope for reformation. Great pride is taken in applying age-old principles although the fact remains that most of them have been maintained merely as ornamental.

Spirituality on the other hand has no such pretense or claims. In fact, it has no intention of gaining anything from others nor is ever involved on any scale to dominate the society. It is the mark of salvation for self and also to be remembered that it also strives for the same for others. That is why spiritual attitude cum principles would never ever dream to conquer anything. In spirituality there is a strong belief that whether religiosity or spirituality has to be maintained absolutely as a private affair. There need not be any attempt to gain worldly powers or pleasures. The individual 'I' should merge in the Universal 'I'. Later there would be no partition at all and nothing can or should tempt or attract. Therefore in the modern world there is no place for the nonsensical religious or spirited temperament which has nothing to do with spirituality. If this tendency is not curbed on time it would surely prove detrimental to the society and this world will not be a fit place to live peacefully. It would definitely mean a chaos created by us only in all directions unless spirituality is thoroughly understood and religious sentiments are sidetracked or if possible dislodged at least partially but sizeably. With all said and done, we also need to remember that, "Altruism, is basically a good thing, can become bad. When you carry a virtue to an excess, it becomes a vice. Balance is the order of life. By carrying a virtue to its extreme, it will reach its opposite. This is the law of dialectics and it is important."⁴

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