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## The Concept of the Spiritual in Indian Thought

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### **Abstract:**

*As per Department of Home Affairs. (2018) Indian society is an inter-religious multicultural pluralistic society, where almost all the world religions are lived and professed. According to the census of 1991, of the total 812.3 million of Indian population about 82.4 % are Hindus, 11.7 % Muslims, 2.3 % Christians, 2% Sikhs, .8% Buddhists, .4% Jains and .4% people of other religions and those who do not profess any religion.1 today, however, Indian population is about one billion. All these religions have their own Spiritual Theology, which differs from each other, in doctrine, tradition and practice even essentially. When we speak of Indian Spiritual Theology, we have to take into account the Indian reality and specially the diversity of these religions. In this given context however, with the limited time and space allotted to this paper, it is practically impossible to deal with the Spiritual Theologies of all religions and all the aspects of Indian reality. I will be concentrating mainly on Hindu Spiritual Theology as an existential context for our spirituality.*

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**Keywords:** *Indian Civilization, Bhagavad Gita, The Epics And The Puranas, Indian Approach To Spiritual Theology, Multicultural Pluralistic Society.*

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### **A Historical Overview:**

As per Culture Factor Group. (2023) Indian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, and Hindu Spiritual Theology is essentially based on Hindu scriptures, the Vedas and especially the Upanishads. Besides, there are also other scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita, the Epics and the Puranas, the Scriptures of Aivism and Vainavism. Though some of these scriptures, especially the Upanishads are accepted by all, there is a lot of difference in their interpretation. This has given origin to different schools of thought (darsanas). Thus the spiritual theology of Hindu

thought concerns itself with God-man relation and the ways and means of promoting this relation. Hindus generally believe that human liberation and transformation is attained in perfect relation with God. This perfect relationship, however, is interpreted in different ways, mainly in dualistic and non-dualistic stand points. In India, Indian Philosophy, Indian Theology and Indian Spiritual Theology are all same. They all depend on Hindu scriptures and concern themselves with the liberation of man (moksa) All these schools of thought darsanas may be also called by a more familiar name, yoga. The word yoga has

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

#### **Methodology:**

As per Sengupta, S. (2016, March 19) Methodology of Indian Spiritual Theology Indian approach to Spiritual Theology is existential and experiential. Existential because it addresses the most existential problem, namely the problem of evil, pain and suffering. This approach comes from the general outlook of reality in the Indian thought. Whereas Aristotelian logic begins with universal and concludes with the particular, Indian logic begins with the particular, and ends with particular through universal. This approach is more in keeping with reality itself, because universal is a mental abstraction while particular is existential, experiential and objective. In this sense Indian approach seems to be more realistic. The same principle is applied also to Indian Spiritual Theology. As per Storti, C. (2015) Content of Indian Spiritual

Theology Spiritual Theology in India concerns itself with the transformation of man. Seen from a spiritual point of view, today the humanity is influenced by illusion (maya) to a very great extent, and because of this, we get attached to creatures, forgetting our final goal in life. As per Transparency International. (2024) this attachment to creatures brings about in us moral guilt (karma) which in turn leads us to bondage and the cycle of birth- death and rebirth (punarjanma through karma samsara). If this problem is not solved by eradicating illusion and evil, human person will go from bad to worse, from generation to generation through the cycle of birth and rebirth. It is necessary therefore, that the flux of birth and rebirth be stopped and man be brought back to his pristine condition of freedom from all forms of illusion and bondage. Indian Spiritual Theology concerns itself with the understanding of the pristine condition of the human person, his condition in the state of bondage, in the flux of birth and rebirth (punarjanma) under the influence of illusion (maya) and guilt (karma). Indian Spiritual Theology concerns itself with the transformation and liberation of man from this state of bondage by showing him adequate ways and means to overcome bondage. But this liberation and transformation is to be brought about by reinstating him in his original state in relation to, and in conformity with, the ultimate Reality or God Man in Indian Spiritual Theology The understanding about the human person or the self (atman, purusha) differs from school to school in Indian Spiritual Theology. There are schools like Sankhya, Vaiseshika, Vedanta

and also the religion of Jainism which see the human being in terms of knowledge and consciousness. According to them in the original state, the human self is not only endowed with perfect consciousness but is essentially pure consciousness itself. But under the influence of maya, which implies negatively ignorance (avidya), positively misrepresentation of truth (avarana), we become unaware of our true nature and destiny, and get attached to creatures. As a result we incur moral guilt and impurity called (karma) and come under bondage losing our liberty in the flux of birth and rebirth (karma samsara). The way to liberation and transformation is the way of knowledge, not perceptual or conceptual knowledge but unqualified, mystical knowledge of pure contemplation. There are other schools of Indian Spirituality which see man as created by God and destined to be united with God. They also see him in a state of bondage due to ignorance (maya) and moral guilt (karma), which take away his liberty and confine him to the process of birth and rebirth (karma-samsara). God in Indian Spiritual Theology In understanding the nature of God also, there is no unanimity in Indian thought. God is seen as the ultimate metaphysical impersonal being called Brahman who is ineffable (anirvacaniya) and unqualified (nirguna). He is better known through a negative way (neti marga - via negativa) than through rational thought. Brahman means to evolve because from Brahman everything is evolved. Chandogya Upanishad calls it 'Tajjalan<sup>3</sup> meaning that (tat) from which the world arises (ja) into which it returns (la) and by which it is

supported and it lives (an). In Taittiriya Upanishad Brahman is seen as that from which all beings are born, by which they live, and into which they are reabsorbed.<sup>4</sup> The Brahman or the God of whom we speak is the Saguna Brahman or the qualified Brahman. The same Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of the manifestation of the Brahman in five planes or sheaths (kosas) namely, in the form of inorganic matter (annamaya kosa), form of biological life both vegetative and animal (pranamaya kosa), in the form of mind and perceptual consciousness (mandmaya kosa), in the form of reflexive self-consciousness (vijhanamaya kosa) and finally in the highest state, in the form of non-dual contemplative mystical bliss (anandamaya kosa). The Brahman pervades them all and is immanent inner controller of all (antaryamin) There is also a trinitarian concept of God in Hinduism as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva but this is not the same as the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. Hinduism has also personal concept of God (Iswara). He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Man owes him submission and surrender. This God, Iswara rewards the just and punishes the unjust. Further, when non-righteousness prevails over righteousness,

#### **Future Prospective:**

As per Partridge, C., & Kawanami, H. (Eds.). (2016) Man in the World of Today Indian Spiritual Theology takes into account the actual situation of the humanity today. Pain and suffering constitute the universal condition of man today. Liberation and transformation must take into account this actual situation of

man and must show him the way to overcome this problem. Though all the Indian religions take into account this problem of pain and suffering, Buddhism has scientifically elaborated this problem and has announced it in terms of the following four noble truths (xrya satya).<sup>6</sup>

6.1. Existence of Pain (duhkha) one of the most common experiences in human life today, is the experience of pain. Pain and sufferings have become a part of human life, yet they do not constitute an integral part of our life and therefore, they can be overcome and there must be a way to overcome this problem. This problem of suffering and pain call for an explanation and human life yearns for liberation from it. The Ways of Liberation The way to liberation would depend on the understanding of the relationship one has with the Ultimate Reality, God. As we have already pointed out, different schools of spirituality in India have different ways of understanding of God-man relationship. As a result there are different ways to perfect liberation and consequently different schools of spirituality. The most important among them are the Way of Knowledge (Gnana Marga), the Way of Devotion (Bhakti Marga) and the Way of Action (Karma Marga). These ways are called marga or yoga. In non-mystical states and practical knowledge (vyavaharica gfiana) everything is seen not only distinct but also separate from each other. But this dual consciousness is the result of an illusion (maya). Ultimately Brhaman or God alone is real and all other things are unreal (brhama satyam jagam emitya jivo brhamiva riapara) When a person acts

under the influence of illusion, one incurs guilt (karma). Under the influence of maya and karma one not only cannot see one's oneness with God but also sets in motion the cycle of birth and rebirth according to the nature of his karma. Hence if we want to be liberated we need to dispel the illusion of maya and undo our guilt karma. But all this can be done only through the pursuit of contemplative knowledge. The Vedantic school shows the way to this liberating knowledge which can be classified into three preliminary and three classical stages. Three Preliminary Steps to Contemplative the Vedantic school of Sankara teaches a transformative discipline which has three preliminary stages and three classical 8 stages. The preliminary stages are the following. Discernment of the Real from the Unreal (Nityanitya vastu viveka) Under the influence of illusion we fail to discern between what is real and unreal, eternal and temporal, necessary and contingent, being and becoming. Hence the very first step to contemplative knowledge consists in true discernment between what is real and unreal. Detachment (mumuksa) True knowledge does not consist in mere mental exercise. We must live according to this discernment, that is, we must be detached from what is unreal and love and be attached to, the real.

### **Conclusion:**

We the Carmelites in India, with our long and deep Carmelite tradition, are called to interpret, our rich tradition in the contemporary categories of Indian culture, philosophy and spirituality. This is a specific Carmelite mission in India-to dis

cover the convergence of Carmelite tradition especially that of St. Teresa and St. John of the cross and Indian search for truth through meditation and contemplation. At mystical level Indian spirituality is closer to Carmelite spirituality, than perhaps any other schools of spirituality in the Church. Indian Spiritual Theology, which is one of the most ancient systematic Spiritual Theologies in the world, has something special to offer. It is concerned with human person and his actual problem of pain and suffering, the problem of evil. Not content with the proximate means to overcome human suffering, it attempts to find out the radical cause of suffering, namely sin. Not being able to find an answer to the problem why an innocent man should suffer, it has recourse to a postulate namely, the theory of rebirth and karma-samsara. Indian Spiritual Theology recognizes that the radical cause of suffering is the illusion which is inherent in our life today. It is due to this illusion that man commits sin and comes under bondage. In order to reverse this condition of bondage and to arrive at perfect liberation, both the grace of God and our own efforts are necessary. We must strive to overcome illusion through knowledge. But all forms of human knowledge have their inherent limitations, and therefore they cannot be totally free from illusion. It is only the contemplative mystical consciousness, which surpasses all human capacities, and is the direct and immediate consciousness of the Being, without any

limitations, without even the subject-object contrast, can totally dispel the darkness of illusion and enable us to be fully united with God in perfect love and devotion.

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