Spiritual Cultivation For a Secular Society

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Abstract

[The project of building a rationalistic self and secular society was an important part of the project of modernity and this project is now confronted with an epochal crisis. The modernist conception of secular self, society and public sphere is now under siege, locally as well as globally, which in turn calls for a broadened conception of self, civil society and secularism. Taking the debates about the crisis of secularism in contemporary India as its main point of discussion, the present paper is an engagement in a reshaping of secularism as not an apriori denigration of religion but as an ethos of pluralism, non-violence, *kenosis* and self-emptying which involves a simultaneous critique of religious tradition and secular state. Such a reshaping of secularism, the paper argues, calls for an appropriate spiritual cultivation of self and society.]

..the world today speaks Latin (most often via Anglo- American) when it authorizes itself in the name of religion

Jacques Derrida (1998), "Faith and Knowledge:
Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," p. 27

..being able to laugh at oneself would entail not less but more transcendence. It is a piece of folk wisdom that Kierkegaard knew well.

Walter Lowe (2002), "Second Thoughts About
Transcendence," p. 246.

The ethic of non-injury applied to philosophical thinking requires that one does not reject outright the other point of view without first recognizing the element of truth in it; it is based on the belief that every point of view is partly true, partly false, and partly undecidable. A simple two-valued logic requiring that a proposition must either be true or false is thereby rejected, and what the Jaina philosopher proposes is a multi-valued logic. To this multi- valued logic, I add the Husserlian idea of overlapping contents. The different perspectives on a thing are not mutually exclusive, but share some contents with each other. The different "worlds" have shared contents, contrary to the total relativism. If you represent them by circles, they are intersecting circles, not incommensurable, [and it is this model of] intersecting circles which can get us out of relativism on the one hand and absolutism on the other (emphases added).

J.N. Mohanty (2000), *Self and Other: Philosophical Essays*, p. 24

I am neither a secularist in my conception of public life nor the defender of a specific church. xx The idea is to rework the secular problematic by exploring layered conceptions of thinking, ethos, and public life appropriate to a timely vision of multidimensional pluralism.

William Connolly (1999), *Why I am not a Secularist*, p. 4.

The Problem

Much water has flown down Jordan, Jhelum, Ganges, Cauvery, Mahanadi, Thames, Rhines and Mississippi since the dawn of humanity and the Independence of India and in recent years much discussion has taken place on the nature of secularism in India, its uses and abuses. Broadly speaking, we can classify various contending positions on secularism in India into three approaches: a) those who defend the secular character of Indian Republic as enshrined in the Constitution of India; b) those who oppose it on the ground that the practice of Indian state-led secularism has been a pseudo-secularism; and c) those who critique that secularism is Western in origin and we must have something in its place which is appropriate to centuries-long tradition of India of spontaneous religious harmony and inter-religious co-existence. While I do not want to spend much time on the second argument of pseudo-secularism which has been offered by Hindu fundamentalist forces with an eye on religious minorities, I wish to come directly to the first and the third argument and draw our attention to a dead-end in which both the approaches are locked at present and how both need to rethink secularism and reshape it with a spiritual cultivation in self and society. The defense of secularism in the face of the rising fundamentalism in Indian body polity, especially on the wake of the 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which was a watershed in the history of secularism in post-independent India, by many left-wing scholars and constitutional experts has been mechanical and it does not wish to make a dialogue with the transcendental dimension of religion. Religion is a false consciousness to these secularists but even if it is a false consciousness, it is a reality in the lives of millions of people in Indian sub-continent as it is in many parts of the world, including the so-called secularized universe of North America and Western Europe. How do we come to terms with religion if from the beginning we label it as a form of false consciousness? It is probably for this reason that Andre Beteille, himself an ardent defender of secularism in contemporary India, tells us: "If civil society is pluralistic and tolerant in its very nature, then it would be absurd for it to wish to expel religious institutions from its fold or to denigrate its beliefs as a form of false consciousness" (Beteille 1996: 23). Beteille warns us against what he calls the "adoption of a militantly secular ideology": "Our constitution is based, I believe wisely, on the separation between religion and politics, and on their mutual toleration. Civil society must find ways of creating and nurturing secular institutions, but that objective is likely to be hindered by the adoption of a militantly secular ideology" (ibid). And here as William Connolly argues from the other side of the

Atlantic who is more self-critical about secularism than Beteille: "The historical modus vivendi of secularism, while seeking to chastise religious dogmatism, embodies unacknowledged elements of immodesty in itself. The very intensity of the struggle it wages against religious tolerance may widen blind spots with respect to itself" (Connolly 1999: 4).

It is a fact of living that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, tribals and people of other religious faiths live in India and the key question for an agenda of secularism is to ensure, facilitate and enhance toleration among people of different religious faiths. But defenders of secularism have not told us much how to have, ensure and facilitate toleration not only as a static equilibrium but as a dynamic movement of life which creates "fusions of horizons" in the people who are part of this process of inter-subjective and inter-religious (also multi-religious) interaction. Similarly those who oppose secularism on the ground that it has originated in the socio-historical context of Western Europe which has a monoculture of Christianity and is not applicable to our ethos of religious pluralism and present "Anti-Secular Manifestoes" (cf. Nandy 1985) do not say that they want our society and politics to be guided by religious authorities. In other words, their agenda is not one of a return to a theocracy or "establishment of a Hindu state" (Madan 1992: 408). But they do not spell out clearly their positive agenda and whether their desire to relate to religion authentically and sympathetically supports violence and authoritarianism perpetrated in the name of religion.

A clear example of this ambivalence is the work of Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan, two of our main proponents of the third approach to secularism mentioned above. Both of them make a cultural critique of the agenda of secularism and in the process rope in Gandhi. For example, in his now-famous address, "Secularism in its Place," fist presented as the Anniversary Distinguished Lecture on the occasion of the 1987 Annual Meetings of the American Association of Asian Studies, Madan (1992: 408) writes: "Perhaps men of religion such as Mahatma Gandhi would be our best teachers on the proper relation between religion and politics—values and interests—underlining not only the possibilities of inter-religious understanding, which is not the same thing as an emaciated version of mutual tolerance or respect, but also opening out avenues of a spiritually justified limitation of the role of religious institutions in certain areas of contemporary life." But Madan does not take further the issue of spiritual critique of religion which he just hints at with his phrase "spiritually justified limitation of the role of religion" (ibid). If secularism now has to be redefined as "religious pluralism," as Madan argues (Madan 1997: 262) then how does it relate to non-religious participation in our public life and what is its ethos of engagement—ethics of self-cultivation, terms of public dialogue and politics of becoming?

(cf. Connolly 1999). Furthermore, Madan does not realize that the proposed intermixture of secularism and faith is not simply a given one—as Madan seems to be suggesting—but has to be an object of a spiritual *sadhana*. Madan does not explore the preparation in self and society that is required to make this possible. Gandhian agenda of secularism is a transformative agenda of alternative practice and movement at the level of self, culture and society. In Gandhi, in order to be secular i.e., to be able to accept each other coming from different backgrounds of religious faith, one has to be spiritual but this spirituality is a matter of conscious striving, *sadhana* and struggle. It is an aspect of continuous self-cultivation in the life of both individuals and societies. Therefore, Gandhi used to have inter-faith prayer meetings everyday. But this aspect of the Gandhian agenda of spiritual cultivation of self and society does not find much place in Madan's critique even in his latest work, *Modern Myth and Locked Minds* (cf. Madan 1997).

In this context of the dead-end in the discourse and practice of secularism, Indian society specifically and the present-day world more generally, the paper explores the pathways of a spiritual reshaping of secularism from an emergent transdisciplinary perspective involving dialogues with sociology, anthropology, political theory, theology, philosophy and literature. From the perspective of spiritual cultivation, the paper redefines secularism as genuine toleration (facilitated by appropriate ontological cultivation and intersubjective dialogue), non-violence and self-emptying or *kenosis* via-a-vis one's will to power, domination and annihilation. The paper argues that both the critics and defenders of secularism need a radical spiritual supplement for a fuller realization of their potential, and preparing them against one-sided self-closure and for simultaneous critique of religious tradition and secular state from the perspective of human dignity and non-violence. Cultivation in spirituality would enable us to reconstitute secularism as genuine pluralism, both ontological and social, and characterized by a striving for realization of non-duality between self and other, self and society, among religious groups, and between the religious spheres and the State. A spiritual cultivation would enable us to realize the plurivocal dimensions of our beings as well as broaden and deepen civil society and public sphere as a space of "multidimensional pluralism" (cf. Connolly 1999, Giri 2002b; Uberoi 2002). Our contemporary conceptions of civil society and public sphere suffer from a rationalist and secularist blindness where sources from religions and spirituality are automatically excluded and a spiritual cultivation for a secular society contributes to a contemporary renewal of public sphere beyond the rationalist gaze of Kant, Rawls and Habermas. Thus starting with the specific debate about secularism in contemporary Indian society, the paper touches some of the broad themes of modernity, discusses the emergent evolutionary calling of practical spirituality, and points to the need for realization of non-duality and transcendence in self, society and polity as a way

of spiritualizing secularism and modernity, self and the public sphere. Spiritualization here is not bound to religion, belief in a personal God, theistic beliefs and other familiar orthodoxies but embodies a permanent critique of violation of life and incessant striving for establishment of relationships of dignity.

Critiques of Secularism and the Calling of Spiritual Transformations

In the Indian context, Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan have been at the forefront of presenting a cultural critique of secularism as a statist, hegemonic and culturally alien ideology. For Nandy (1985), much violence has been perpetrated by the secularist state and it is the ideology of secularism that not only makes us look at religion with suspicion but also does not enable us to build on traditionally existent people's capacity for co-existence. Madan's critique of secularism also begins with such a view. For Madan, "secularism is the dream of a minority which wants to shape the majority in its own image," it stigmatizes "the majority as primordially oriented" and "preaches secularism to the later as the law of human existence" (Madan 1992: 395). The problem of secularism in India for Madan is the problem of "modernist minority" which is "beset with deep anxieties about the future of secularism in the country and South Asia generally" who in their attempt to rescue secularism, want to "foster modern scientific temper" as a foundation for secularism (ibid: 396).

But in Madan's critique of secularism the issue is not only between modernity and tradition but also between different religious traditions in the way they classify the world. For Madan, the modernist ideology of secularism has its most comfortable home in Christian religious tradition, namely in its supposed neat distinction between the sacred and the secular. In other religious traditions such as Hinduism and Islam, for Madan, though there is a distinction between the two the secular is always hierarchically encompassed by the religious. Madan's argument is that since a majority of people of South Asia are vibrant followers of other religions, they have a problem feeling at home in the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. In the words of Madan, "..the Hindu tradition does not provide us with a dualistic view of the kind that Christianity does. I find that a Hindu or a Sikh or a Muslim for that matter would find it more difficult to make sense of the notion of 'privatization of religion' than perhaps a Christian does" (Madan in Bhargava 1998: 319).

Madan's reflections on comparative religious approaches to secularity call for a deeper anthropology of religions, particularly of Christianity which in the Indian context is a neglected domain of inquiry. It remains to be ethnographically validated if Protestant Christians are more secular or feel more at home with the ideology of secularism in a

multi-religious society such as India or even in Western Europe and North America. Furthermore, in the last quarter century we have witnessed intense mobilization against privatization of religion globally in which many Christian movements including Protestant ones such as liberation theology and Habitat for Humanity have been key actors (Beyer 1994; Giri 2002a). For Madan, secularism is a gift of Christianity but Madan himself says that it is Protestantism which has made a fuller delivery of this gift possible. But even in understanding post-Reformation ideal of secularism there is a problem here as it neglects the trajectory of what Charles Taylor calls Catholic modernity. It is the Catholic encounter with modernity, as Alexis de Tocqueville suggests from his encounter with the dialectic of individualism and equality in American democracy, which has struggled more on the side of equality rather than just feel satisfied with possessive individualism.[1]

What should be taken note of here is that Gianni Vattimo, a critical philosopher of our times who comes to his Christian faith taking both Nietzsche and Heidegger seriously, also makes a similar argument about secularism and Christianity. For Vattimo (1999), there is an intimate connection between the secular project and the Christian vocation in the world as Jesus Christ makes a break with violence. In making the connection between secularization and Christianity, Vattimo urges us to realize that secularization here is characterized by the striving for non-violence, kenosis or self-emptying which also means "self-abasing" oneself in love, and charity—namely interpretive charity with regard to supposedly sanctioned divine commands and laws. "Vattimo construes incarnation in terms of *kenosis*, the self-emptying and self-abasing of God in Jesus Christ. Yet the appeal to *kenosis* has to do less with a clearly recognizable christological doctrine than with an understanding of secularization, as elimination of the violence of the transcendent principle, the ground that silences all questioning" (D'Isanto 1999: 10). For Vattimo, secularization means working with a "non-violent and non-absolute God," a God who is "post-metaphysical." In the words of Vattimo: "..we derive an ethics of non-violence from weak ontology, yet we are led to weak thought, from its origin in Heidegger's concern with the metaphysics of objectivity, by the Christian legacy of the rejection of violence at work within us" (ibid: 44). What Vattimo writes below deserves careful and critical consideration from us:

> If the natural sacred is the violent mechanism that Jesus came to unveil and undermine, it is possible that secularization—which also constitutes the Church's loss of temporal authority and human reason's increasing autonomy from its dependence upon an absolute God, a fearful Judge who so transcends

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1. Tocqueville writes: "If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality: but the contrary may be said of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent, more than to render them equal" (Tocqueville 1961: 356).

our ideas about good and evil as to appear as a capricious or bizarre sovereign—is precisely a positive effect of Jesus' teaching, and not a way of moving away from it. It may be that Voltaire himself is a positive effect of the Christianization of mankind, and not a blasphemous enemy of Christ (ibid: 41; also see, Taylor 1996).

For Vattimo, non-violence inaugurated by Jesus's break with the supposed violence of the natural sacred, is an important part of the secular vocation. As Madan's formulations suffer from a weak anthropology and theology of Christianity, Vattimo's suffer from a messianic zeal of it and lacks a cross-cultural and cross-religious realization that all sacred is not violent. The God of Taitteriya Upansihad where God meditates upon himself to bring forth a world is not violent. But this apart, Vattimo's reflections urge us to realize the many other dimensions in the connection between Christian vocation and secularization. Secularization here is not confined to the neat distinction between the sacred and the secular but points to normative ideals of non-violence, *kenosis* or self-emptying, and charity—ideals which call for appropriate self-realization and institutional transformation. These ideals, arguing with Vattimo against Vattimo, are not only the legacy of Christianity, and they can work as a critique of both religion and secularism conventionally understood. If we understand secularism as *kenosis* or self-emptying then one challenge of being secular is to empty oneself from one's will to power. Secularism as self-emptying of power poses enormous challenge to the prevalent conceptions of secularism and models of emancipation as empowerment and urges us to realize that emancipation as politics of empowerment must have within itself an ethics and spirituality of self-cultivation so that one does not become a slave to one's will to power in one's private life and the public sphere. Secularism as *kenosis* or self-emptying vis-à-vis one's will to power challenges us not to be obsessed with, as Foucault urges in his *Care of the Self*, "excercising power over others" and to be concerned with discovering and realizing "what one is purely in relation to oneself" (Foucault 1986: 85). Secularism as *kenosis* can thus be linked to Foucauldian care of the self: "It is then a matter of forming and recognizing oneself as the subject of one's own actions, not through a system of signs denoting power over others, but through a relation that depends as little possible on status, and its external forms" (ibid).

Madan concludes his address, "Secularism in its Place," with a passionate urging to take both religion and secularism seriously. But the task of taking both religion and secularism also entails a mutual critique, and a foundational interrogation and broadening of categories. In his critique, Madan presents us a cross-cultural interrogation of what may be called the ideology of secularism. Secular ideology for Madan leads to "the marginalizatin of religious faith." The more foundational problem for Madan which he

expresses in the words of Falzur Rahman is: "Secularism destroys the sanctity and universality (transcendence) of all moral values" (Madan 1992: 402). But does secularism do this or has to necessarily to do this? Does religion always promote moral values? Does invocation of transcendence necessarily lead to human emancipation? What kind of ultimate values lead to human annihilation and what kind of ultimate values lead to human flourishing including a mutual sharing of each others ultimate values? If, as Vattimo (1999: 90) suggests, love is the ultimate value and all of us have sinned because we have failed in love, then should we be prepared to reject religion if they fail us in love?

Madan himself says that religious traditions of South Asia are "totalizing in character, claiming all of a follower's life" but in our engagement with religion should we support its totalitarianism. I am sure for Madan, respect for religion does not mean support for a totalitarian determination of life in the name of religion. Taking religion seriously means engaging ourselves with a critique of it, certainly a connected critique to begin with. What we need here is a critique of religion, and not only secularism, and in this realize the significance of secularism as it has loosened the totalitarian hold of religion and has contributed to the quest and realization of human freedom. As Thomas Pantham argues, "The problematic relationship between religion and politics in the West had its analogues in India too. Despite important philosophical or metaphysical differences between them, both European Christianity and Indian religions rationalized in their own ways, a feudal order of social inequalities prevailing during the medieval period" (Pantham 1999: 182). And in the medieval world a radical interrogation of religion as a partner in social exploitation was articulated by varieties of socio-spiritual movements such as the Anabaptists in Europe (cf. Mauss 1979) and Bhakti (devotional) movements in India. Bhakti movements were spiritually inspired socio-spiritual movements which fought against caste and gender hierarchy in medieval India. The work of spirituality in Bhakti movements involved a critique of religion as a partner in systemic oppression of society and quest for establishment of relationships of dignity. As critic and essayist Chitta Ranjan Das argues: "To go inside in the life of the spirit is also to expand oneself in terms of consciousness, to break down the separating wall between oneself and the all. Self-realization with the medieval saints of India was not a running away from the world to what is called to save one's soul; it is being reborn ego less, so that you are able to look at the whole world in a different eye. You become a rebel because you want the relationships and arrangements of society to be determined anew" (Das 1982b: 80). Thus secularism as a fight for human emancipation and striving for realization of human freedom has also an origin in spiritual protests in both India as well as Europe and this helps us to deconstruct religion as we take it seriously. In medieval India Bhakti movements characterized by a quest for love and non-violence have been the forbearers of secularism and modernity, what JPS

Uberoi (1996) calls Indian modernity which started with Kabir and has found an ally in Gandhi, among others, in the midway. But what is interesting is that this spiritual origin of secularism buttresses the non-violent character of it as pointed to us by Vattimo and is characterized by a religion, spirituality and praxis of love. Spirituality as a movement of transformation in self and society and embodied in the life and work of Antigone, Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Meister Eckhart, Bhakti movements, Ali Shariati, and innumerable movements of what can be called "practical spirituality" all over the world--provides not only a critique of secularism but also a radical interrogation of religion (cf. Uberoi 1996, 2002). It is my submission that both the critiques as well as defense of secularism would be enriched by bringing the vision and practice of spirituality not only to our discourse but also to our practice.

But opening ourselves to such sources of secularism calls for crossing the borders of conventional academic boundaries. When we look at the discursive field of secularism this seems to be a crucial challenge as it is bounded by a dualistic logic and is one-dimensional and mono-disciplinary. In contemporary Indian society and scholarship, it is a field which suffers from the blindness of disciplinary exclusivity which affects both the critics and defenders. The political scientists writing here talk mostly of State, to some extent of civil society, and of course always of Constitution. And anthropologists such as Madan or cultural critics such as Nandy enter the field with an apriori privileging of the religious and understandable faith in the capacity for tolerance in the pre-modern life-world. But if one of the tasks before us is an interpretative task of providing more clarity to the agenda of secularism, as Madan challenges us in the Indian context and Connolly in the Euro-American world, then what is called for is a creative embodiment of transdisciplinarity. This calls for political scientists to go beyond the secured logic of Constitution and state and anthropologists to acknowledge, as Andre Beteille (1992, 2002) would urge, that contemporary Indian society is governed not only by *Dharmasastras* but also by Constitution. But again the called for transdisciplinary participation here must have within it the perspective of spiritual movements and seekers and cross the boundaries between sociology and spiritual seeking. In a recent paper, "The Calling of Creative Transdisciplinarity," I have argued that a spiritual process of abandonment and creative exploration is central to the practice of transdiscplinarity and the discursive field of secularism calls for a spiritual interrogation of our disciplinary homes in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, theology and even spirituality (Giri 2001).[2]

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2. Of course, admirable exceptions in this field are J.P.S. Uberoi's *Religion, Civil Society and State: A Study of Sikhism* and Felix Wilfred's *Asian Dreams and Christian Hopes* which embody a simultaneous and sometimes transgressive engagement with politics, religion, theology and spirituality.

Such a transdisciplinary participation has not only semantic function or scholastic utility: it has important implications for our art of learning and living in a secular society understood as a plural society. Consider here Ashis Nandy's statement: "As far as public morality goes, statecraft in India may have something to learn from Hinduism, Islam or Sikhism; but Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have very little to learn from the contribution from state secular practices" (quoted in Pantham 1999: 177). But do not Muslim males who do not give alimony to their divorced wives and caste Hindus who burn Dalits have something to learn from Indian Constitution? Even do not the well-meaning Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have something to learn from the secular principle of Indian Constitution?

Thus in rethinking secularism the challenge is a multidimensional learning--lateral as well as vertical, and a simultaneous critique of both religious tradition and modern state. A transdisciplinary participation in secularism with a radical spiritual supplement can prepare us against one-sided confident self-closure and for simultaneous critique of both religious traditions and the secular state. And here Gandhi can help us in not only discovering the religious resources for living in a secular society but also in initiating a spiritual transformation of the telos and the machinery of modern state. For Gandhi, "the modern state itself needs to be 'civilized' by integrating it with spirituality or morality" (Pantham 1999: 183). As Thomas Pantham argues: "..Gandhi seems to have inaugurated a postliberal, ethical-secular trajectory of relationship between politics and religion in which their relative autonomy from each other is used in moral-political experiments or campaigns for the reconstruction of both the religious traditions and the modern State.." (ibid: 181). Unfortunately this aspect of Gandhian critique of a moral transformation of state has not received much attention from either the critics or the defenders of secularism.

Gandhi is dear to many of us but the question is how far, deep and up we wish to walk with him. One important implication of holding the hands of Gandhi is that we strive to learn about each other's religions. Madan finds it difficult and here gives the analogy of difficulty of multilingual learning in India (Madan 1997: 277). But if secularism as a dignified mode of inter-religious and plural existence has to succeed then learning about each other's religion is a must. As Gandhi tells us:

> 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. We need not dread, upon our grown up children, the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. xxx For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the Bible, the Quran, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu. He is no

Sanatani Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book (quoted in Sharma 1995: 89-90).

However the invocation of Gandhi in the reshaping of secularism does not go unchallenged. Political scientist Paul Brass finds the invocation of Gandhi in the critique of secularism offered by Nandy and Madan problematic. For Paul Brass, "Madan and Nandy are making a plea for the preservation, protection, and propagation of religion in Indian public life, for its integration in the public life and business of the state... But their goal is nothing but a pipe dream in a country where politicians make a living out of instigating ethnic and religious conflicts" (Brass 1998: 493). For Brass, "The peaceful pursuit of interreligious dialogue through the 'recovery of religious tolerance' has no meaning for those groups who have seen themselves as oppressed and discriminated against in Hindu society: Muslims, backward castes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. For all these groups, secularism means tolerance, acceptance, equality, non-discrimination, not Brahiminical or Gandhian searches for transcendent interreligious truths" (ibid). But Brass has to help us understand how even for these groups tolerance is possible without cultivation of the capacity of tolerance at the levels of individuals and groups? And here Gandhi is important because Gandhi urges us through the example of his life and death to be ever prepared for the knockings of the other in our house and open our doors. As JPS Uberoi argues: "..Gandhi would always look the other in the eye as his second self and offer truthful dialogue and non-violent conversation without the fear of the possible consequences" (Uberoi 2002: 121). To put it in the words of philosopher Levinas, Gandhi urges us to be ever prepared to look up to the face of the other, and in this case, the religious other, and not to let her die alone in religious riots "as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death" (Levinas 1995: 189). Gandhian agenda is not confined only to the search for "transcendent intereligius truths" as Brass makes it to be. Learning to hold the hands of the other from other religions here on Earth—in Noakhali, in Delhi, in Sevagram, in Lahore and in Amritsar—is an important part of the Gandhian way of life.

Defense of Secularism: Towards a Spiritual Transformation of Justification and Application

Co-existence and toleration are important aspects of the way of life which Gandhi inspires us to lead. Even defenders of secularism in the Indian context are coming to realize that toleration is the single most important task facing us now insofar as the issue of secularism is concerned. For example in his recent insightful reflection on the predicament of secularism, "Secularism and Its Discontents," Amartya Sen (1996) argues

that the key question for an agenda of secularism is the question of symmetric treatment of religions, groups, individual and other autonomies. For Sen, a secular state has a moral duty to ensure such a symmetric treatment among religions and does not agree with critics of secularism such as Nandy that such a practice is inevitably accompanied by the increase in the power of the State to perpetrate violence on people in the name of defending secularism.[3] What is helpful is that Amartya Sen just hints at an agenda of positive tolerance in the following lines of him: "There is, furthermore, a real difference between getting symmetry through the sum-total of the collective intolerances of the different communities, rather than through the union of their respective tolerances. Anything that causes the wrath of any of the major communities in India is presently taken to be a potential candidate for proscription. We have to ask whether that is the form that symmetric treatment should take" (1996: 43).

But how do we cultivate and facilitate the capacity for symmetric and fair treatment to each other on the part of individuals and groups? Here, Sen does not go much farther and deeper. He does not address the ontological preparation that is required for such a mode of life to exist in our society and politics. Similar is the problem with another thinker such as Partha Chatterjee (1994) who titles his contribution on the subject as "Secularism and Toleration." But Chatterjee does not tell us how we can cultivate toleration among members of different religious faiths. And like Sen, Chatterjee finds a panacea only in secular politics. For Chatterjee, by the initiation of a politics of representative democracy among the minorities to run their religious affairs such as the Muslim Wakf Board or the Akal Takht, we can help initiate reform within these and create a more favorable condition for inter-group toleration. But is this enough to ensure toleration? Practice of toleration requires a preparation in the life of individuals for another religion, another world, and this is not a matter of politics alone.

The same challenge of self-cultivation and transformation we find in the defense of secularism offered by other political scientists of India. They defend secularism as part of democratic equality. Manoranjan Mohanty makes a distinction between secularism—hegemonic and democratic. Mohanty would agree with critics of secularism such as Madan and Nandy that there is a danger in making it only an ideology of the state or an

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3. For Nandy, "to accept the ideology of secularism is to accept the ideologies of progress and modernity as the new justifications of domination, and the use of violence to achieve and sustain ideologies as the new opiates of the masses" (quoted on Sen 1996: 37). But for Sen, "The principle of secularism demands ..symmetric treatment of different religious communities in politics and in the affairs of the state. It is not obvious why such symmetric treatment must somehow involve 'the use of violence to achieve and sustain ideologies as the new opiates of the masses" (Sen 1996: 37).

elite and would want secularism to be part of ongoing democratic mobilization and transformation of Indian society. Continuing the same engagement with democracy, though a bit more constitutional rather mobilizational as in case of Mohanty, Neera Chandhoke (1999) defends secularism as defense of minority rights which is part of a broader agenda of democratic equality. For Chandhoke, "..the principle of secularism is not self-validating, for we can justify it only when we derive it from, and validate it by, reference to the antecedent moral principle of democratic equality. Consider this—secularism as equal treatment of all religions makes sense only when we refer it to the (prior) principle of equality. Correspondingly, a polity will be logically committed to treating all religious groups equally only when it is antecedently committed to the generic principle of equality" (Chandhoke 1999: 4). For her, "..societies that are deeply polarized on the matter of religion, such as India or Northern Ireland, will need to institute protections for minorities against majoritarianism" (Chandhoke 1999: 7). But Chandhoke also argues, implicitly suggesting the argument of Uberoi that the problem of humanity cannot be solved "within a framework of majority and minority" (cf. Uberoi 2002: 120): "..the right of a minority community to its own identity and practices has to be balanced with respect for the rights of other communities to their own identity and practices. xx *the struggle for recognition that is simultaneously a search for dignity, directs our attention to the intersubjective conditions of human realization*" (Chandhoke 1999: 19; emphases added).

To this defense of secularism Rajeev Bhargava contributes important clarifications by redefining secularism contextually. He develops a notion of contextual secularism partly out of the recognition of the problem posed by Nandy and Madan that there is very little sensitivity to religious pluralism in the state-centric discourse of secularism. Contextual secularism recognizes that "many forms of separation lie between total exclusion and complete fusion" (Bhargava 1998: 516). Contextual secularism for Bhargava is political secularism, not ideological secularism, and "political secularism demands only that every one—believer, non-believer—gives up a bit of what is of exclusive importance in order to sustain that which is generally valuable.." (ibid: 496). In the context of Madan's and Vattimo's theses about the Christian origins of secularism, Bhargava provides us with an alternative genealogy:

> At no point in the history of humankind has any society existed with one and only set of ultimate ideals. Moreover, many of these ultimate ideals or particular formulations of these have conflicted with one another. In such times, humanity has either got caught in an escalating spiral of violence and cruelty or come to the realization that even ultimate ideals need to be delimited. In short, it has recurrently stumbled upon something resembling political secularism. It is neither purely Christian nor peculiarly Western. It grows wherever there is a persistent clash of ultimate ideals perceived to be incompatible (ibid: 498).

But is politics enough in realizing political secularism or does it need an appropriate ethics and spirituality? Is realization of democratic equality possible only by institution of group rights in the Constitution or does it require appropriate self-cultivation and ontological preparation in self and society for inviting the other into the hard core of the "political" self. And this requires not only a Rawlsian political liberalism and Habermasian inclusion of the other but also a spiritual praxis of self-opening and self-transformation which is conspicuous by its absence in Rawls and Habermas (cf. Cohen 2001; Giri 2002b). Bhargava's conception of political secularism uncritically reflects a Rawlsian project of liberalism but the challenge now to realize the limits of Rawls. As Connolly urges us to realize: "*But secularism is the last historical moment in the politics of becoming Rawlsian categories authorize us to acknowledge.* Rawls wants us to freeze the liberal conception of the person and the secular conception of public space today while everything else in and around the culture undergoes change" (Connolly 1999: 66; emphases in the original).

Chandhoke herself writes that "we need not value pluralism although we are faced with a plural society" (Chandhoke 1999: 297). This urges to realize that even if institute pluralism constitutionally we may not embody a plural mode of being or what William Connolly calls "the ethos of pluralization" (Connolly 2001). As Connolly would suggest, for embodying an ethos of pluralization we need to be self-reflective about the modernist privileging of epistemology and open ourselves to ontological journeys. However, this calls for not only a multi-dimensional conception of the pluralism and public sphere as Connolly suggests but also a multi-layered conception of being which is suggested in Connolly's conception of "plurivocity of being." But Connolly's "plurivocity of being" only stops at the foot hills of Nietzsche and thus it is no wonder that the only other dimension of plurivocality of being that we are opened to in Connolly is the dimension of the infrarational. But here a cross-cultural and trans-civilizational philosophical and spiritual engagement can help us realize that it is not only Nietzschean and Deleuzean infrarational which constitute the other dimension of plurivocality of being but also Sri Aurobindo's supra rational and Roy Bhaskar's "transcenentlly real self" (Bhaskar 2002: 139) which is characterized by the striving for realization of non-duality in a world of duality and strife. For Sri Aurobindo, the "supra-rational dimension" of our being enables us to overcome the limitations of our mind, especially our "desire-mind," and enable us to "have the joy of contact in diverse oneness" (Sri Aurobindo 1950: 484).

A multidimensionally rich conception of self facilitates the realization of secularism as multidimensional pluralism by facilitating not only public contestations of one's fundamentals but also a sharing of selves, a creative interpenetration between the self and other, or as Uberoi would say, an exchange of self, not only of gifts (Uberoi 2002).

And this sharing in self and society is preeminently a spiritual activity. Thus in the political reshaping of secularism as democratic equality a spiritual foundation is helpful.   But spiritual processes of transformation are not foundational only in a genealogical sense but in a critically constitutive sense of permanent critique and refiguration. Spirituality as a permanent critique of violation of life and the destructive logic of power provides us with a much needed perspective of "limits," i.e. the realization of "limits of politics" to both the confident and self-critical political scientists of our times (see Lalcau 1992).[4]   As Roberto M. Unger, himself a political and legal theorist, tells us: there are two kinds of sacred—a transcendental sacred and a social sacred and whenever a system of power loses touch with the transcendental sacred it can and very often present oppression as manifestation and justification for the social sacred and there may not be any critical ground to critique such an unjust arrangement (Unger 1987).   And here as Alberto Melucci, a sociologist, urges us to realize: "Instrumental rationality has restored the world to mankind's scope of operation, but it also denies humanity all chances to transcend reality, it devalues everything that resists subsumption under the instrumental action.   Society thus becomes a system of apparatuses identical with its own actions and intolerant of any diversity.   The sacred thus emerges as an appeal to a possible other, as the voice of what is not but could be.   Divested of the ritual trappings of the churches, the sacred thus becomes a purely cultural form of resistance which counters the presumption of power by affirming the right to desire--to hope that the world is more than what actually is" (Melucci 1996:171).

Melucci's critique of instrumental rationality in modernity is in tune with Gandhi's and even has a resonance in Weber. As Madan helps us understand this: "A Gandhian critique of secularism in terms of ultimate values and individual responsibility is in some respects similar to Max Weber's concern with the problem of value.   What Gandhi and Weber are saying is that secularized world is inherently unstable because it elevates to the realm of ultimate values the only value it knows and these are instrumental values" (Madan 1997: 237-238).   These critiques point to a spiritual horizon of secularism not as a way of providing a stable ground to the inherent instability of secularism but as a

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4. This is as much a challenge for Neera Chanhoke and Rajeev Bhargava as for William Connolly. It is striking that Connolly's inspiring conception of "politics of being" has no engagement with the issue of self-cultivation in terms of, among others, developing kenosis or self-emptying vis-a-vis the will to power.   Note here the way Connolly defines "politics of being," and compare this, without judgment, with the vocation of being articulated by Roy Bhaskar described later in the essay: "By the politics of becoming I mean that paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of unexpected energies and institutionally congealed injuries.   The politics of becoming emerges out of the energies, suffering, and the lines of flight available to culturally defined differences in a particular institutional constellation" (Connolly 1999: 57).

permanently moving frame of criticism. But understanding this requires not only a transformation in our political reasoning but also sociological reasoning. Sociology has been part of the project of modernity which believes that it can "provide a privileged or authoritative interpretation of social events," making it a hegemonic discourse while "all others, including religious utopias, derivative" (Wuthnow 1991: 14). But opening ourselves to spiritual critique and transformations calls for us to "interpret the significance of contemporary movements in terms of hopes and aspirations of their participants, including their hopes for salvation and spiritual renewal.." (ibid).

The Calling of Mutual Learning and Cultivating a Non-Dual Pluralism

If toleration is the most important part of the agenda of secularism then we must lay its seed in our minds and hearts and for this it is important for us to learn about each other, know each other in an open-ended spirit of exploration, dialogue and creation of a new ground of life. Such a mode of learning is preeminently a spiritual activity. Spirituality is about the quality of relationship between the self and the other (cf. Kurien 1997); in fact spirituality lies in the heart of relationships or at the mid-point of relationships, to borrow a phrase from Martin Heidegger (cf. Dallmayr 1996). And for a more dignified relationship, we must prepare ourselves for it by being engaged in multifarious practices of education, self-cultivation or Bildung (cf. Dumont 1994) and to understand the spiritual foundations for a secular society.

But now there is a shocking ignorance about each other's religion. In a society like contemporary Indian society not only are we not taught about it in schools because of the secular injunctions against it nor do we have any opportunity for this in civil society. If we do not know anything about each other's religions then how can we accept each other's religions? It is true that knowing is not enough but this is an important part of a more inclusive process of feeling and realization. But how do we learn about each other's religions? If the Hindus learn about Islam only from the *Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha* and the *Viswa Hindu Parishad* (sectarian Hindu organizations) and Muslims learn about Hindus from sectarian Islamic organisations, then what is the nature of our knowledge of each other? Is this not a knowledge of hatred only? Is there any knowledge here where we have already formulated our objects of knowledge in an apriori mode?

In this context, it is helpful to listen to my discussion with a follower of a Hindu socio-spiritual movement. This movement is an exciting one and it believes that we should accept all religions. *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* (Goodwill towards all religions) is not enough; we must have *Sarva Dharma Swikara*—acceptance of all religions. This movement also believes that Hindus should accept Jesus as the eleventh incarnation of God and

Prophet Mohammed as the twelfth. But when I asked him does he know anything about Jesus or Mohammed, he told me: " I am sorry that I do not know anything." I told him: "But the city in which you live has so many Muslims. Could not you make a little effort?" Then he told me: "Yes, there is an eagerness within me. But it stays at a subterranean level of my consciousness. It is helpful if we have organizations to activate this dormant eagerness within me." Thus the challenge of education I am pleading for goes much deeper and here we must have appropriate institutional condition for learning both at the level of state and civil society.

In this context, what Arvind Sharma writes in his engaging *Hinduism for our Times*, deserves our careful attention: "We know that religious barriers exist but [our task is to convert] these barriers into bridges. This is to be achieved by promoting the realization that *all religions of the world are the heritage of each human being*. This goal can be achieved by promoting the study of all religions as one's own, so that we stop regarding our own religion as the only true one" (Sharma 1995: 89; emphases added). Despite constitutional injunctions against the teaching of religions in schools and colleges, Sharma urges us to realize that "even the Constitution does not stand in the way of introducing such a respectful study of the religions of the world into our curricula; it is our misinterpretation of it and the talismanic misuse of the word secularism which stands in the way" (ibid: 92). Like Amartya Sen, Sharma argues for a positive meaning of toleration and writes: "In the theory of secularism we notice the distinction between two interpretations of it—along the lines of the 'wall of separation' and along the lines of the 'no-preference' clause. The no-preference clause is negatively phrased but it need not possess a negative connotation. In fact, it can and should be imparted a positive connotation. And even if the Constitution comes in the way then it should be changed. xx Let us not confer on the Constitution the immutability we deny even to the *sanantana* dharma (perennial religion)" (Sharma 1995: 193).

If secularism has to be redefined as pluralism and multiculturalism then we must confront the epistemic task of living in such a plural and multi-religious society. Unfortunately, neither in India nor in the US, there is much creative interpenetration between the discourse of multiculturalism and the discourse of secularism. A multicultural society is, and has to be, a learning society where different cultures and individuals are open to learning from each other. But this requires, as Satya Mohanty tells us, "an adequate appreciation of the epistemic role of 'culture'" which provides us "deep bodies of knowledge of human kind and of human flourishing" (Mohanty 1998: 240). Each culture is an epistemic community and provides us a unique mode of knowing the world but this knowledge is not destined to be particular rather it finds its fulfillment in a creative

universalization (Sunder Rajan 1998). Genuine multiculturalism facilitates a creative universalization of particular knowledges of the world and requires the flourishing and practice of "epistemic co-operation" (Mohanty 1998: 240). This in turn requires opening and learning from the members which assertive identity politics in the name of culture, religion and secular State, makes it difficult to happen. But this epistemic learning is not simply a question of epistemology as it seems to be the case with Satya Mohanty but involves ontological preparation and work on self-development on the part of self, culture and society. An ontological opening for epistemic co-operation can facilitate the realization of "cultural communication" and "cultural liberation" and contributes to the much needed "recomposition of the world" in these days of fragmentation and deconstruction (Touraine 2000).

It hardly needs to be stressed that such a vision and practice of multiculturalism calls for a reformulation in our conceptions of culture and communities. As Baumann reminds us: "Multiculturalism is not the old concept of culture multiplied by the number of groups that exist, but a new, and internally plural praxis of culture applied to oneself and to other" (Baumann 1999: vii). Each culture has a dimension of beyond which resists its total subsumption under custom, convention and power (Pande 1989). As Veena Das, herself an anthropologist, tells us: "There are constantly moving, dynamic, challenging, encompassing relations between culture as a societally agreed set of values which structure voice--and voice as appearing in transgression, proclaiming the truth of culture and relationship--yet allowing culture to be born not only as external facade but as endowed with soul" (Das 1995: 160). But mobilizations in the name of cultural and religious identities have their limits in realizing such a vision and practice of culture, especially recognizing human voice. They also have a naturalized view of community. But community is not only the storehouse of a naturalized identity, it also has a moral dimension which calls for what Habermas calls a "post-conventional" identity formation on the part of the participants (Habermas 1990). In such an identity formation, identity needs cannot be easily satisfied by appeals to communitarian frameworks; rather it requires a morally just identity formation on the part of the actors and proceeds with a frame of "qualitative distinctions" (Joas 2000; also Matustik 1997). Such a process of identity formation calls for rethinking community as not merely a space of conformity but as a space of responsibility. In fact, in thinking about community there is a need now to make a move from community as a space of "descriptive responsivity" to it as a space of "normative responsibility" where as Calvin O. Schrag passionately tells us: "Responsibility, nurtured by the call of conscience, supplies the moral dimension in the narrative of the self in community" (Schrag 1997: 100).

Thus living in a secular society as a multicultural and plural society calls for appropriate epistemology and ontology. We need an epistemology which is not a slave to modernist privileging of epistemology as merely procedural and positivist and an ontology which is not imprisoned within the secured house of Being and God. We need a new epistemology of participation where to "know," as Sunder Rajan tells us in his passionate recent work *Beyond the Crisis of European Sciences: Towards New Beginnings*, is not only to "know of" but to "know with" (Sunder Rajan 1998: 78).

To live in a plural society we need a new ethics, politics and spirituality of self-cultivation. And it is this focus on self-cultivation which is missing in our discourse on both secularism and pluralism. In Indian sociology, T.K. Oommen is a passionate advocate of pluralism but his pluralism remains at the boundaries of groups and it does not have a project of what I would call ontological pluralism. Ontological pluralism calls for realization of non-dual plurivocality in our beings. Roy Bhaskar, the philosopher of critical realism, who has taken critical realism into new depths and horizons of spiritual strivings, provides us glimpses of non-dual self-realization as an important part of realization of ontological and sociological pluralism (see Bhaskar 2000; 2002). For Bhaskar, "the possibility of human emancipation depends upon expanding the zone of non-duality within our lives; and in the first instance upon shedding our own heteronomy so that we become in a way non-dual beings in a world of duality" (Bhaskar 2002: 11). And this "non-duality is not something 'mystical,' not something that depends on any kind of belief or faith, but the necessary condition for our most quotidian states and acts" (ibid: 261).

In order to live in a plural society, we need a new ontology and a new logic of working out our own relationships of reconciliation between variables considered previously as aprioristically dual. We need what J.N. Mohanty (2000) calls a "multi-valued logic" and Uberoi calls the "the four logic of truth and method" "in place of the restricted two-valued system of dualism that we have inherited from the European modernity" (Uberoi 2002). For Uberoi, "..the opposition between self and other is mediated by the emergence of the other self and the common human language of 'oneself.' This human language is the real and the true non-dualist locus of culture, labor and politics, whether the other should be God, non-human nature, the world or other human selves, masculine or feminine, native or foreign" (Uberoi 2002: 113). For Uberoi, in our striving towards the realization of non-dualism in self and society, we can learn not only from Gandhi but also from Goethe and the Hermetic tradition of Europe (Uberoi 1984). Considering the epochal need now to intertwine the striving for building a secular society with a genuinely plural and multicultural society not only in India but also in Western Europe and North America,

Uberoi's following lines point to the calling of non-dualism as it relates to pluralism and as it knocks at our doors: "..under a regime of pluralist non-dualism, all human differences and partitions are negotiable in civil society as a 'community of sovereignties because no one reality or truth falsifies another. Xx In effect our common humanity thereby returns to the perennial fashion of the Hermetic tradition of Europe, and produces neither simple homogeneity (equality) nor heterogeneity (inequality) but a new non-dualist axis of correlation and mediation, correspondence and complementarity" (Uberoi 2002: 130).

There are several implications of realization of non-duality for the project of reshaping secularism. One implication is that there is no point in thinking about the relationship between the religious and the secular in terms of an essential opposition. But the other implication for us in this path of engagement is to open ourselves to emergent evolutionary happening and possibility. As Uberoi suggests, which reminds us of Sri Aurobindo: "..the theory of evolution means to us, not chiefly or only development of what is complex out of simple, but also the development of many varieties of existence out of the original few, and without humanity in anyway losing the unity of its universe of discourse" (Uberoi 2002: 130).

The Calling of An Emergent Evolution: Transcendence and Practical Spirituality
(a) *The Calling of a New Transcendence:*
And I would like to submit that the emergence of transcendence as an existence sphere and value sphere of self and society along with "the standard three some of science, morality and religion" (cf. Schrag 1997: 148) is an important part of the contemporary processes of spiritual evolution. Fred Dallmayr's following comments make this clear: "There are plenty of signs in our time that a narrowly confined immanence cannot satisfy human longings and aspirations. What needs to be recognized is that longing for transcendence, even a transcendental holism, are vibrantly alive today in many societies on the level of the ordinary life-world--far removed from traditional holistic power structures" (Dallmayr 2001: 17). And as Jean-Luc Nancy argues: "It is precisely the immanence of man to man, or it is man, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community" (quoted in Dallmayr 1998: 281).[5]

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5. Charles Taylor also points us to similar difficulties in what he calls "modern exclusive secular humanism" which deserves our careful consideration: "This modern humanism prides itself on having released energy for philanthropy and reform; by getting rid of 'original sin,' of a lowly and demeaning picture of human nature, it encourages us to reach high. [..] This humanism leaves us with our own sense of self-worth to keep us from backsliding, a high notion of human worth to inspire us forward, and a flaming indignation against wrong and oppression to energize us. It cannot appreciate how problematic all of these are, how easily they can slide into something trivial, ugly or downright dangerous and destructive" (Taylor 1996: 34).

But the process of unification in the emergent sphere of transcendence as it relates to other domains of our lives is different from the familiar process of universalistic unification. It is not the simple formula of unity-in-diversity as Uberoi suggests. It is a process of unification where unity is always a deferred state. Calvin O. Scharg urges us to understand the distinction between universalist and transveral unification in his *Self After Postmodernity*:

> Radical transcendence operates transversally, and the salient point at issue is that the grammar of transversality replaces that of universality. The dynamics of unification in a transversal play of lying across and extending over surfaces, accelerating forces, fibers, vertebrae, and moments of consciousness is not grounded in a universal telic principle but proceeds rather as an open-textured gathering of expanding possibilities. As such it is a dynamics of unification that is always an "ing," a process of unifying, rather than an "ed," a finalized result. Xxxx the unity that functions as a coefficient of transversality is very much an open-textured process of unification, Moving beyond constraints of the metaphysical oppositions of universality versus particularity and identity versus difference. Transversal unity is an achievement of communication as it visits a multiplicity of viewpoints, perspectives, belief systems, and regions of concern (Schrag 1997: 129, 133).

Scharg builds upon Kierkegaard and urges us to overcome the facile dualism between transcendence and immanence. What is helpful is that in contemporary philosophy and theology we have passionate reformulation of not only the relationship between transcendence and immanence but the very categories themselves. Building on the philosophical and theological works of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, John D. Caputo writes: "The new idea of transcendence turns on a new and positive idea of the finite, not as confining limit, as in Kant's example of the dove that thinks it is confined by the air that sustains it..[Rather] transcendence [is] life in the elements, in the enveloping medium in which soul and body 'marry.' What then is God's transcendence? Who is the God who comes after metaphysics? Not a God of infinite distance from earth and flesh, but the infinite freedom to make Godself immanent in the finite, incarnate" (Caputo 2002: 14-15). Giving a new interpretation to Derrida's famous dictum "God is Wholly Other," Walter Lowe writes in his "Second Thoughts About Transcendence": "Surely we have the option of reading "God is other" as "God is different" and "God as Wholly Other" as "God differing-differently." There would then be the conceptual space to conceive that 'divine transcendence' might refer, perhaps, to God's freedom. Then transcendence would cease to be the opposite of immanence; for a God of freedom would not be isolated in some lofty place but would be capable of being immanent precisely because of being transcendent, i.e. free" (Lowe 2002: 250).

For Derrida, there is no problem and in fact it is a blessing if we do not take the

name of God. As Caputo (2002) interprets the Derridean pathway: "Save everything about God save the name of God, lest it become an idol that blocks our way." This Derridean refusal to name God and abandonment is noticed in the Bhakti movements of India. Here Chitta Ranjan Das's work on Bhakti movements and spiritual evolution deserves our careful attention. Das (1982a) tells us in his study of Bhakti literature of India that saint Pundarika Das of Karnataka in his poems has described Rama and Krishna as *Idli* and *Dosha* (items of food in South India). In Orissa, while the Panchasakhas-- Achyutananda Das, Balram Das, Ararkhita Das et al. have transcended many idols and arrived at Jagannatha as Brahma the blind tribal poet and spiritual prophet Bhima Bhoi in 19th century has transcended Jagannatha himself and made him a watchman in the house of Sunya—Emptiness (Das 2001). This refusal to name God and abandonment has affinity with the path of spiritual seeking enlightenment charted by Buddha.

Luce Irigaray has been another source of inspiration in contemporary rethinking of transcendence as the air we breathe. Irigaray has been an important source of inspiration in rethinking religion as a process of being divine reminding us of Sri Aurobindo's pathway of life divine (cf. Jantzen 2002; Sri Aurobindo 1951). Irigaray provides us a critique of religion, namely Christian religion from the point of view of feminine spirituality. A woman, a client in psychoanalysis, tells Irigaray, "At the point in the mass when they, the (spiritual) father and son, are reciting together the ritual words of the consecration, saying 'This is my body, this is my blood,' I bleed." Irigary points to the shifting trajectory of Christian theology and in the Indian context Felix Wilfred (1999) points to its mystical dimensions.   Wilfred presents us the agenda of a situated Christian theology taking into consideration the cultural and spiritual aspirations of Asia. For Wilfred Christianity in the new millennium, not only in India but around the world, should not only assert its prophetic truths but open itself to the mysterious dimension of religion, spirituality and the human condition. In the words of Wilfred: "The Christian attempts to cross over to the other, to the different, has been by and large from the pole of being or fullness. This naturally creates problems, which can be overcome by activating the ability also to cross over from the pole of nothingness or emptiness. The central Christian mystery of Jesus Christ offers the revelation of both fullness and emptiness—the total self-emptying. Many frontiers which are found difficult to negotiate and cross over could be crossed by making use of the other pole represented in the Christian mystery of emptiness as self-abnegation, so as to reach a deeper perception of the mystery of God, the world and the self" (Wilfred 1999; also see Wilfred 2000, 2002).

(b) The Calling of Practical Spirituality

At this point the work of German theologian Johannes B. Metz (1981) deserves

our careful attention. He says that the quest for unity can not be achieved on the level of faith but has to be a practical quest, the practical quest of addressing the concrete problems of men and women here on Earth. We can utilize this as a turning point for discussing practical spirituality as an emergent mode in many world religions now. Swami Vivekananda had spoken about it more than hundred years ago. Practical spirituality, as Swami Vivekenanda argues, urges us to realize that "the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest idea of metaphysical conception (Vivekananda 1991: 354). This highest conception pertains to the realization that man himself is God: "You are that Impersonal Being: that God for whom you have been searching all over the time is yourself—yourself not in the personal sense but in the impersonal" (ibid: 332). The task of practical spirituality begins with this self-realization but does not end there: its objective is to transform the world. The same Vivekananda thus challenges us: "The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not 'I' but 'thou.' Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt" (ibid).[6]

What is to be noted that practically spirituality as articulated by Swami Vivekananda and Johannes B. Metz can be looked at as an emergent global genre. Consider for instance the shifting contours of spirituality in contemporary American Society. For Robert Wuthnow in contemporary American society there is a shift from a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking" (Wuthnow 1998). "A spirituality of dwelling emphasizes habitation: God occupies a definite place in the universe" (Wuthnow 1998: 10). It "emphasizes an orderly, systematic understanding of life" (ibid: 8). But a spirituality of habitation and dwelling is inadequate to satisfy our multiple aspirations at present when the secured houses of our lives are in a flux. This creates the context for the emergence of a "spirituality of seeking" which is "closely connected to the fact that people increasingly create a sense of personal identity through an active sequence of searching and selecting" (ibid: 18). But Wuthnow makes it clear that a spirituality of seeking in itself is inadequate to come to terms with challenges of self-development and responsibility to the other and

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6   Scholars such as Peter vander Veer do not do justice when they equate Swami Vivekananda's practical spirituality with the supposed "spiritual Hinduism" of VHP. Consider here the following lines of vander Veer: "On the level of discourse there is very little difference between VHP propaganda and the sayings of the founder of Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Vivekananda" (vander Veer 1996: 136). But in Bengal many communists, as Girija Bhusan Patnaik, himself a participant in the communist movement during India's freedom struggle, tells us, many participants in the communist movement in Bengal had drawn inspiration from Swami Vivekanda See Patnaik's preface to an alternative biography of Vivekananda written by Chitta Ranjan Das (1996).

the world as it offers only "fleeting encounters with the sacred" (ibid: 8). Spirituality of seeking suffers from the danger of making seekers of spirituality satisfied with temporary spiritual sensations and needs to be supplemented by what Wuthnow calls "practice-oriented spirituality." Practice-oriented spirituality provides multiple grounds for combining spiritual practice and social service. In another context, Roy Bhaskar has argued that active love of God and men, women, and children is at the core of spiritual engagement of the present and the future as he writes: "The dialectics of de-alienation (of retotalisation) are all essential dialectics of love, love of self (Self), of each and all (Totality) and in both inner and outer movements, both as essentially love of God. The essence of liberated man is therefore love of God and God, we could say, is not only essentially love but essentially to be loved" (Bhaskar 2000: 44). Practice-oriented spirituality creates spaces and times which can hold Bhaskar's proposal of universal self-realisation as a dialectic of love. Practice-oriented spirituality is not confined to moments of spiritual sensations but touches all aspects of our life: "..the point of spiritual practice is not to elevate an isolated set of activities over the rest of life but to electrify the spiritual impulse that animates all of life" (Wuthnow 1998: 198).

The significance of practical spirituality as a global genre is attested by many observers of the contemporary scene such as Peter Beyer (1994) who argues in his *Religion and Globalization* that "pure religion" is at a disadvantage in the global society and the solution to its increasing and inevitable privatization lies in finding "effective religious applications." Thus in order to be of interest to both believers and non-believers, religions have to undertake activities which ameliorate the conditions of poverty and suffering, build the foundations for what Giddens calls a "generative well-being" (Giddens 1994) and through this act of building encourage the participants to develop themselves ethically, morally, and spiritually. But the practical activities of religion are not just "applied" where application is dissociated from what Kierkegaard (1962; also Giri & Quarles von Ufford 2000) calls a transcendental inspiration of love. The applied activities of practical spirituality manifest themselves through various projects--both the life-projects where the actors are committed to a cause and live in accordance with such a commitment and social projects where religious movements are engaged in a concrete activity as building houses as in the case of Habitat for Humanity or building water harvesting structures in case of Swadhyaya--but these projects are not merely instances of "application"; they are manifestations of an integral mode of engagement where applied activities are nourished by a spiritual relationship with the Transcendent. Thus the applied projects of such movements of practical spirituality are different from projects of mere application which is the case with many development projects of our times (cf.Quarles van Ufford & Giri forthcoming). Practice and practical work in such movements differ from the familiar

anthropological category of practice outlined by Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu 1971) and the notion of practical discourse presented by Habermas (1990) as both the categories refer only to rational strategies and rational deliberations of actors and are not linked to spiritual realization and transcendent self-awareness of actors. The applied activities of movements of practical spirituality transcend the familiar dichotomies between Transcendence and Immanence; in fact, their projects of social action for the other which are simultaneously initiatives in self-development transcend the familiar dichotomies between transcendence and immanence and exist at the "mid-point" of the relationship between transcendence and immanence.

In his reflections on religion and globalization, Beyer also writes: "A further consideration concerns the role morality plays in the relationship between religious function and performance" (1990: 360). But what is the shape and contour of moral engagement in the field of religion now? In the past, moral considerations meant "sin, ignorance, etc." but now there is a transformation in the ethico-moral horizons of religions where the condition of our life and society--the nature of poverty, social justice, etc.-- is the subject of ethico-moral engagement. This is evident in the following lines of Vattimo: "We all stand in need of forgiveness; not because we have broken sacred principles that were metaphysically sanctioned, but rather we have because we have 'failed' toward those whom we are supposed to love" (Vattimo 1999: 90). In fact, there is an ethical transformation at work in world religions where ethics is much more concerned with quality of our conduct in this world, with self-development and responsibility to the other. In such a mode of engagement, ethics is not just for the other; it is also for self-cultivation and spiritual realization.

The realization that ethical action is not just for the other but for the self is part of an aesthetic deepening of the agenda of ethics to which in recent times thinkers such as Michel Foucault (1986), F.R. Ankersmit (1996), Wolfgagang Welsch (1997) and Seyla Benhabib (1996) have contributed. In such a project, the art of self-cultivation, self-development and spiritual development is not looked at apologetically but plays an important role in ethics itself. As Foucault challenges us: "What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art is now only linked to objects, rather than to individuals or life itself. But couldn't we ourselves, each one of us, make of our lives a work of art? Why should a lamp or a house become object of art—and not our own lives" Despite lack of a fuller realization of possibilities of aesthetics ethics in Foucault, this does point to new relationships between aesthetics and ethics, self and other. Urlich Beck provides us with a sociological contour of this shifting trajectory: "For more and more people, 'social progress' is measured by the extent to which opportunities are created for self-fulfillment

in the value references and dimensions of one's own life. Xx it is this often-demonized individualism—and not the traditional duty orientation—which embodies a hitherto untapped source of engagement, a mighty 'social capital' lying dormant.." (Beck 2000: 152).

By the way of conclusion: Spirituality as a Permanent Critique and Creativity

In this essay we have explored different pathways of spiritual cultivation for realization of a plurivocal being and a multi-dimensionally rich public sphere. We began this essay with a caution from Jacques Derrida that we should be on our guard so that we do authorize in the name of religion. In exploring spiritual cultivation for a secular society am I authorizing in the name of spirituality? In this essay, I have not provided a definition of spirituality but spirituality for me lies in the in-between lines and embodies a permanent quest for realization of relationships of dignity. But it would be mistake to look at spirituality as a stable foundation, as the ultimate truth, and as solution to all our problems. It is also important not to forget that spiritual movements many a times are entrapped in a logic of individual salvation. For example, a spiritual care of the self is very much at the heart of many Indian spiritual traditions but such a concern has many a time forgotten the face of the other. As Daya Krishna helps us understand this: "[Once we begin to] see the 'other' as a subject in his or her own right and capable of being affected by one's actions...one will begin to see the self as 'responsible' to the 'other' and not just concerned with the state of one's own being. Yajnyvalkya's [an important sage in Indian tradition] *atman*-centric [Self-centric] analysis of the human situation and his contention that everything is dear for the sake of the self would, then, seem to result from a one-sided analysis" (Krishna 1996: 58).

In this context, as we work on spiritual cultivation for a secular society, the challenge before spirituality now is to continue to fight for radical universality--a universality which transgresses the boundaries of self and other, creates new intimacies and solidarities across boundaries and participates in the struggle for creation and nurturance of transformative institutions of justice, well-being and dignity. To dream, strive and to sing with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
A heart that has grown one with every heart
I am a deputy of the aspiring world
My spirit's liberty I ask for all (Sri Aurobindo 1954).

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