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**The Calling of Practical Spirituality:
Transformations in Science and Religion
and New Dialogues on Self,
Transcendence and Society**

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The Calling of Practical Spirituality: Transformations in Science and Religion and New Dialogues on Self, Transcendence and Society

ABSTRACT

We are in the midst of unprecedented crises now and much of it revolves around non-sustainable and outmoded ways of thinking and organizing our life—self, society, state, science, religion and spirituality. The present paper explores pathways of going beyond the present predicament and offers practical spirituality as manifold ways of foundationally thinking and reconstituting self, society, religion and science. It discusses the seminal work of Daya Krishna and explores practical spirituality as a new purusartha of human development. The paper also discusses the work of Ramachandra Gandhi and explores how practical spirituality can help us find ways out of violence of anthropocentrism and the limitations of contemporary models of democracy.

[...] One conceives of truths not in terms of correspondence or satisfactions but as the pursuit of an ideal value which humanity tries to realize in and through time. The notion of transcendence enters just at this point to make the human seeking in and through time for an ideal or value which can never in principle be actualized or realized in time, however long we may conceive it to be. The idea of “transcendence” gives the seeking a “unity” which it would never have because of the very nature of “unendingness” of time on the one hand and of the “seeking” in it and through it, on the other.

— Daya Krishna (1999), *“Time, Truth and Transcendence,”* p. 324.

[...] Sita’s Kitchen is the entire field of her self-imaging Shakti, powerfully represented by the earth. It is on earth, in the embrace of the Divine Mother, that all are born, all creatures great and small; all forms manifest, noble or evil; and all are nourished. [...] The truth of Rama is the truth of advaita, non-duality, the truth of singular self-consciousness and its cinematic field of self-imaging Shakti which is Samsara. [...] Annihilationism (the readiness to destroy all life and civilization on earth) is the highest stage of development of dualism [...] Dualism is the conviction that self and not-self are everywhere pitted against one another.

— Ramachandra Gandhi (1993), *Sita’s Kitchen: A Testimony of Faith and Inquiry*, pp. 16, 18, 20.

Today we are so impressed with the progress of the physical sciences—originally derived from metaphysics— that we return the complement and derive our

metaphysics from natural sciences. But the scientific worldview has its own metaphysical presuppositions which originated in ancient Greece in way of looking at the world that came to fruition in Plato and especially Aristotle. This dualistic view stands almost in dramatic opposition to a worldview based on the non-duality of the seer and the seen.

— David Loy (1988), *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, p. 12.

Rta and *Satya* provide the cosmic foundation of the universe and may be apprehended by *tapasa* or disciplined “seeking” or *sadhana* and realized through them. The Sukta 10.191, the last *Sukta* of the *Rgveda*, suggests that this is not, and cannot be, something on the part of an individual alone, but is rather the “collective” enterprise of all “humankind” and names the “god” of this *Sukta* “Somjnanam” emphasizing the “Togetherness” of all “Being” and spelling it out as *Sam Gachhadhwam*, *Sam Vadadyam*, *Sambho Manasi Jayatam*, *Deva Bhagam Jathapurve Danjanatam Upasate*.

— Daya Krishna (2006), “Rgveda: The *Mantra*, the *Sukta* and the *Mandala* or the *Rsi*, the *Devta*, the *Chanda*,” p. 8.

EXPLORING PATHWAYS OF PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY AS A TRIBUTE TO THE STRIVINGS OF DAYA KRISHNA AND RAMACHANDRA GANDHI

Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi were inspiring seekers in the gardens of transformational knowledge and let us begin this dialogue with the following lines of Daya Krishna: “The development of new *purusarthas* in the history of a culture or civilization would perhaps be one of the more important ways of looking at man’s history as it will emphasize ways of making his life significant in the pursuit of new ends of a different kind. [...] The emergence of any new *purusartha* on the horizon of human consciousness should be seen as a breakthrough in human history, providing the possibility of a new kind of pursuit not available earlier” (1997: 25). In Daya Krishna there is not only a critique of earlier model of *purusartha* as providing “no place for the independent life of reason as a separate value, or for that matter any other life which is not concerned primarily with *artha*, *dharma*, *kama* and *moksha*”¹ but also seeking of a new *purusartha* which can help us realize life and society as a work of art, “meaningful and worthwhile in diverse ways” (Krishna 1991: 204). A seeking of a new *purusartha* beyond the violence of anthropocentrism and gender injustice and nurtured by the grace and compassion of non-duality and emptiness also animates the seeking of Ramachandra Gandhi. I wish to submit that it is practical spirituality which can contribute to the realization of a new *purusartha* of our times involving transformations in science and religion and embodying a simultaneous multi-dimensional engagement with beauty, dignity and dialogue. Practical spirituality whose contours I would soon elaborate only in an inviting, and not in a definitional way, is a way as well as an aspiration of self and social realization, of realizing *Svaraj* and *Samvad*

in the process fundamentally reconstituting these categories themselves such as *Svaraj* involving both realization of autonomy as well as embrace of the other and *Samvad* not only a discursive activity taking place in the comfortable rooms in Jaipur or Shimla but also at work with the lives of millions of laboring men and women who are cooking their food by the road side.² In Ramachandra Gandhi's *Sita's Kitchen samvad* takes place in the forest but there is no cooking in *Sita's Kitchen*. This *samvad* is also fictional³ not entirely compassionate to all the participants in the dialogue such as Ajita Kesakambalin and Makhali Gosala. But practical spirituality seeks to transform these practices of dialogue as both normatively inspired aspirations and practical activities of laboring and cooking together and by exploring further its aspirational horizons and practical manifestations in religion and science, societies and histories we can pay not only our tribute to Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi but also continue the inspiring works of these immortal companions of ours. This essay does not discuss in details the works of Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi rather presents practical spirituality as a possible frame for understanding the significance of their works in a suggestive and not in an exhaustive way.

Practical Spirituality: An Introduction and Invitation

Practical spirituality involves a transformation of both science and religion as well as reconstitution of self, society and transcendence transforming one-sidedness of what Day Krishna calls "socio-centric perspective" on the one hand and "Atman-centric perspective" on the other (Krishna 1993). In the field of religion practical spirituality emerges in varieties of transformative movements and seeking in self, culture and society which interrogate existing structures of domination and strive for a new mode of self-realization, God-realization and world-realization. Practical spirituality seeks to transform religion in the direction of creative practice, everyday life and struggle for justice and dignity. Practice here is not just practice in the conventional sense, for example in traditions of American pragmatism (cf. Aboulafia & Kemp 2002) or anthropological conception of practice as offered by Clifford Geertz (1973), Pierre Bourdieu (1971) and Jurgen Habermas (1971). These conceptions suffer from an entrenched dualism such as theory and practice, immanence and transcendence and work with a notion of subject which is predominantly "techno-practitioner" and cut off from its inescapable and integral links with transcendence. But practice in practical spirituality is simultaneously immanent and transcendent and the actor here is simultaneously a "technopractitioner" and "transcendentally real self." Practical spirituality embodies immanent

transcendence, as for example in music⁴ or in the experience of transcendence in our various moments of everyday life— love, meditations, scientific engagements and other activities of life and in society (cf. Bhaskar 2002). As Daya Krishna would say, “Practice itself though known to us intimately has an intrinsic inner mystery about it, and that is the transcendence in which we live even though we ‘know’ generally the ‘practice-dimension’ of it” (Krishna 1999: 336).

Practical spirituality emphasizes experience and realization—self, God and world—in and through practice but at the same time nurtures the humility not to reduce these only to practice. In its emphasis upon experience and realization practical spirituality has close kinship with the spirit of science which embodies, in the words of Albert Einstein, a holy spirit of inquiry. In its emphasis upon practice practical spirituality stresses that without taking part in practice we cannot realize truth—religious or otherwise. Practical spirituality involves manifold experiments with Truth as well as truths where truth is not a thing but a landscape of meaning, experience and co-realization.

Practical spirituality also emphasizes transformative practice which leads to self-transformation, cultural transformation and world transformation. For example, poverty, inequality and oppression have been challenges with humanity for long and here practical spirituality has generated varieties of transformative movements in its struggle against oppression and domination. There are movements of practical spirituality from different religions of the world as well as from traditions of emancipatory struggles such as revolt against slavery, workers movements, women’s movements, ecological movements and varieties of other transformative struggles in discourse, society and history. Liberation theology in Islam, Buddhism and Christianity is a recent example of practical spirituality.⁵ In Indian traditions practical spirituality has manifested itself in the Upanishads, the vision and practice of seekers such as Buddha, Bhakti movements, Swami Vivekananda’s vision of practical Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo’s strivings for *Life Divine* and Gandhi’s experiments with Truth and struggles for liberation.⁶ Movements such as Bhakti movements have involved struggles against caste and gender domination with new songs of self and social liberation. They have also embodied efforts to go beyond denominational concepts of truth and religion. They have involved not only struggles for justice but also embodied border-crossing dialogues. We see this, for example, in the Sant tradition of India, which like Sufism and Sikshism, is a product of transformative dialogue between Hinduism and Islam (Das 1982, Uberoi 1996). Thus practical spirituality involves both struggles for dignity as

well as new initiatives in transformative dialogues across borders. Dialogue is also a key concern in the strivings of Ramachandra Gandhi as he writes in *Sita's Kitchen*: “A non-dualist Church of Atman-Brahman Mary [...] would be a generous kitchen offering without exclusivist denial of the full range of truth’s cuisine to spiritually hungry humanity [...]” (Gandhi 1993: 10).

PATHWAYS OF PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

In fact, practical spirituality involves both practical struggles for a better world as well as practical discourses for spiritual realization going beyond denominational fixation—not only in terms of boundaries among religions but also in terms of boundaries between science and religion, material and spiritual.⁷ Practical spirituality urges us to realize that through undertaking concrete activities to ameliorate suffering we can realize God. From the Christian tradition theologian Johannes B. Metz (1981) urges us to realize that the Christian goal of unity of faith or what is called ecumenicism can not be solved at the level of doctrines alone. It can only be solved by undertaking concrete activities in addressing practical problems of life and society with the “Son of Man.”

Habitat for Humanity is a movement from within contemporary Christianity which tries to worship God by building houses with and for people. It is built on the foundations of “Economics of Jesus” and “Theology of the Hammer” (Giri 2002). We see a similar emphasis upon devotional labor and sharing in Swadhyaya, a socio-spiritual movement in contemporary India which can be looked at as an instance of practical spirituality from within contemporary Hinduism (Giri 2008a). Both Habitat and Swadhyaya despite their limitations to always hold up their own ideals urge us to be more dialogical compared to their fundamentalist counterparts in Christianity and Hinduism. But the dialogical dimension of practical spirituality is multi-dimensional: it embodies not only dialogue between religions but also between religion and science, and also between the material and the transcendental. Swami Vivekananda has captured a bit of this sensibility in his vision of *practical vedanta* which involves realization of oneself as Divine⁸ as well as struggle for justice and move towards dialogue.⁹

Practical spirituality emphasizes continued practice, not only on euphoric movement of realization, enthusiasm and miraculous experience. As Robert Wuthnow tells us drawing on his work with the spiritual quest of the artists: “Many artists speak of their work as a form of meditation. For some the sheer rhythm of the daily routine brings them closer to the essence of their being. Writing all morning or practicing for

the next musical performance requires mental and emotional toughness [...] For spiritual dabbers the insight that these artists provide is that persistence and hard work may still be the best way to attain spiritual growth” (Wuthnow 2001: 10).

Practical spirituality accepts the brokenness of the world and does not want to assert any totalizing unity or totalitarian absorption (cf. Bellah 1970). At the same time practical spirituality is a striving for wholeness in the midst of our inescapable brokenness and fragmentation of this world. This wholeness is emergent as it is manifested in the work of the artists. Artists strive to paint landscapes of emergent wholeness in the midst of fragmentation and brokenness. Artists incorporate “[their] experimental approach into one’s spiritual quest” (Wuthnow 2001: 276).

An artist is a *bricoleur*, creating beauty and images of emergent coherence out of many fragments. “The creative scientist is also a *bricoleur*” (Bhaskar 2002: 394). There is artistic dimension to scientific quest as there is to spiritual quest and in Ramachandra Gandhi it is an expression of the jewel of self-realization. Inspiration of art in creative spirituality makes transformative bridges between science and spirituality.

Practical spirituality involves a transformation in the conceptualization and realization of God. It submits that in order to be spiritual one need not believe in God nor be religious.¹⁰ But for the believers God in practical spirituality is not only in heaven but here on earth; she¹¹ is a presence in our heart and in every thing we see. In fact, Swami Vivekananda speaks about a practical God: “Where is there a more practical God than He whom I see before me—A God omnipresent in every being, more real than our senses?” (Vivekananda 1991: 305). In this context Bhaskar’s following proposals about God in his *From Science to Emancipation* deserves our careful consideration:

- (i) Ontological realism about God, that’s a belief in the reality or experience of God is quite consistent with epistemological relativism;
- (ii) Ontological immanence, that is the view that God is immanent within being, is consistent with epistemic transcendence either in the sense of being unknown, God could be real even if we do not know it, or in the sense of being knowable in a way which is susceptible to the normal canons of our discursive intellect;
- (iii) [Ontological ingredience] – if god is truly a kind of envelope which sustains and binds everything, then God in a certain

way must be ingredient within us;

- (iv) the proof of God's existence can only be experimental and practical. No one can prove to you that God exists. This can only come from your experience and practice;
- (v) [In this context man's role is to increase presence of the Divine in one's life, society and cosmos—I am here paraphrasing the subsequent thoughts of Bhaskar on this] (Bhaskar 2002: 35).

The above help us rethink God and realize her in a new way. God in practical spirituality is not only a moral God, omnipotent, God with capital G. God here is God with small g.¹² God in practical spirituality is also not anthropocentric.¹³

Practical spirituality involves a transformation of our conceptions of sin and evil. In practical spirituality evil is not absence or the abandoned house of the divine but lesser manifestation of it. We find such a foundational rethinking of sin and evil in many different religious, spiritual and philosophical movements of the world. For Swami Vivekananda: "Sins are very low degrees of Self-manifestation (Vivekananda 1991: 300). For him, "Vedanta recognizes no sin, it only recognizes error and the greatest error says the Vedanta is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner" (ibid). From a Christian perspective Giani Vattimo (1999) redefines sin as failure in love.¹⁴ For Vattimo, we have all sinned not because we have fallen in love but have failed in love. Love is not a conditional exchange but unconditional and from this point of view we all can always be more unconditional in our loves overcoming our integral original sin of not being quite up to mark in our practices of love. God is unconditional love. From the point of view of unconditional love we fail in on our lives of love as realization of unconditional love is always a journey. Given our human limitation no matter what we do our love is always in need of much more intimate non-dual realization and this becomes our condition of original sin. Thus our task is to overcome this through more love and Grace and continue our strivings with gratitude and not simply for fear of punishment from a God conceived as a moral law commanding us not to do evil (cf. Dalferth 2006). Similarly from the shores of contemporary critical philosophy, Giorgio Agamben (1993) redefines evil as deficit of human existence and anything that blocks the realization of fuller potential including the potential of fuller God-realization and world-realization.¹⁵ Here Bhaskar (2002) also speaks about structural sin and ill-being referring to such fields as contemporary capitalism which leads to exploitation and blocks universal self-realization. Both Swami Vivekananda and Roy Bhaskar

urge us to go beyond a facile dualism of good and evil which resonate with the non-dual strivings of Ramachandra Gandhi. He would consider sin as our lack of awareness of ourselves and realizing ourselves and **running after desire which blocks such a self-realization**. In *Sita's Kitchen*, “The missing slave girl is a powerful symbol both of the true extra dimension of existence, Atman, self, which we must seek and not the fulfillment of extra desires [...]” (1993: 29).

**NON-DUAL REALIZATIONS AND PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY:
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHALLENGES BEFORE SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

The interrogation and transformation of the dualism of good and evil in practical spirituality as it is accompanied by a transformational conception of God points to non-dual realization as an important challenge in human life – science, religion as well as spirituality. In fact, transformation in science and spirituality involves critique of available dualism such as sacred and profane, subject and object. The dualism between subject and object has been at the corner stone of modern science but recent developments in science such as quantum physics and system theory of pioneers such as Humberto Maturana challenge us to understand the limitation of a spectatorial perspective in science and the dualism of subject and object. “In the words of a biologist, if you want to really understand about a tumor you have got to be a tumor” (Knor-Cetina 2001: 520).

The dualism between subject and object in modern science finds a parallel in the dualism between ontology and epistemology. Modern science as part of the agenda of modernity has been primarily epistemic and procedural and has neglected ontological issues of nature of self and quality of self-involvement in practices of knowing. Moreover there is a profound revolution in varieties of scientific engagements now— from biology to anthropology to philosophy of science— where “to know is not only to know of” but “knowing with” (Sunder Rajan 1998). Knowing with involves both subject and object, epistemology and ontology, embodying what may be called an ontological epistemology of participation. This embodies transformations in epistemology such as virtue epistemology which points to the quality of the knowing subject and in ontology – practical ontology— which moves from a preoccupation with fixed subject to practical labor of love and learning. It also involves “weak ontology” characterized by humility (cf. Dallmayr 1991; Vattimo 1999).

Ontological epistemology of participation embodies a multi-valued logic in place of the dualistic logic of modern science. As J.N. Mohanty

(2000) argues: “In multi-valued logic every point of view is partly true, partly false and partly undecidable.” This helps one not to be trapped in closure and be engaged in science and spirituality as a continued journey. Multi-valued logic draws inspiration from multiple traditions of science, philosophy and spirituality such as the Jaina tradition of *Anekantavada* (many paths to truth), Gandhian experiment with truth and non-violence and Husserl’s phenomenology of overlapping contents. Multi-valued logic builds on non-injury in our modes of thinking and non-violence in our modes of relationships.¹⁶ Multi-valued logic as an integral part of an ontological epistemology of participation is also an aspect of the transformational dimensions of science and spirituality.

Non-duality is an important part of ontological epistemology of participation in science and spirituality. Yoga helps us in overcoming our dualism and realize non-duality. As David Loy writes: “We may see the three traditional *yogas* as types of spiritual practice that work to transform different dualistic modes of experience onto their respective non-dual mode. *Jnana yoga* transforms or ‘purifies’ the dualistic intellect, karma yoga the dualistic physical body and *bhakti yoga* dualistic emotions” (Loy 1988: 27).¹⁷

The multi-valued logic of practical spirituality transforms not only sciences but also religions: it helps sciences not to be dismissive about what it does not know and religions to be more exploratory, experimental, and less assertive. It urges religions to be more dialogical—to recognize and know more about each other, and also mutually interrogate each other with a smile.

THE CALLING OF PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY AND RECONSTITUTION OF SELF, TRANSCENDENCE AND SOCIETY

Practical spirituality seeks to go beyond a dualistic view of self and society. As suggested in the beginning of this chapter, practical spirituality goes beyond a dualistic view of self as either techno-practitioner or transcendental and urges us to realize that we are both as we are also more than this for example self is a field consisting simultaneously of autonomous and interpenetrating circles of techno-practice, transcendence and unconsciousness. In its conception and reconstitution of society practical spirituality seeks to go beyond the dualism of individual and society realizing that this is an evolutionary journey involving evolutionary transformation of both our conception and practice of society as well as individual.¹⁸ It seeks to realize that each society has a dimension of sociality and a dimension of *Atman* at

the levels of both individual and society going beyond what Daya Krishna (1993) would call the one-sided extremism of either an “Atman-centric perspective” or a “socio-centric perspective.” Practical spirituality also strives to go beyond one-sided valorization of self or other as it happens with many of us including Daya Krishna who is more on the side of the other and Ramachandra Gandhi on the side of self¹⁹ to the point of not letting the other to flourish or even to speak.²⁰ Practical spirituality can provide a compassionate critical framework to fellow seekers in understanding the limitation of these two companions of ours vis-à-vis their proclivity to a one-sided valorization of either other or self and the need to continuously strive to embody both self-realization and embrace of the other in non-domineering and transformative ways.

Practical spirituality also seeks to overcome the dualism between immanence and transcendence by cultivating paths and fields of immanent transcendence, a cultivation which resonates with the spirit of Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi. In Daya Krishna it also involves a reconstitution of our understanding of the relation between relative and non-relative: “Relativity is the inevitable condition of everything that man claims either in the realm of knowing, or of feeling, or of willing, but this relativism makes sense only if it is seen in the light of the pursuit of that which itself is non-relative [..]” (Krishna 1999: 336).

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY, PRACTICAL DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Practical spirituality has implications for various domains and discourse of our lives such as secularism and democracy. It offers a new realisation of secularism which embodies spiritual cultivation for mutual tolerance, learning and criticism going beyond the confrontation between science and religion which has characterized the first stage of modernistic secularism (Annaim 1995, Giri 2005b). The dialogical dimension of practical spirituality is a helpful companion in reliving secularism in our turbulent world.

Practical spirituality also involves a radical reformulation of the logic of power and transformation of democracy. In their struggles for justice and dignity movements of practical spirituality confront and interrogate power. But they are not just preoccupied with capturing power as an instrument of domination but to have power as a covenant to realize the common good, as Hannah Arendt would put it (cf. Cohen & Arato 1995). These movements do not embody the logic of sovereignty of self and state in modernity which has an inherent propensity to mastery; rather they embody the aspiration and struggle for what

Dallmayr (2005) reflecting on the struggle of Jesus calls ‘sacred non-sovereignty.’” While logic of sovereignty including the so-called democratic sovereignty in modernity has a propensity to make us bare (cf. Agamben 1995) and denude us of our dignity and mutuality practical spirituality as a struggle for ‘sacred non sovereignty’ embodies a new ethics, aesthetics and politics of servanthood in place of the politics of mastery.²¹ Sacred non-sovereignty embodies what Ramachandra Gandhi calls the grace of emptiness and nothingness (Gandhi 1993: 29).

Practical spirituality as a struggle for dignity embodies multi-dimensional partnership between God and man. This struggle challenges us to widen and deepen our vision and practice of democracy – democracy as not only a political mechanism but also as a spiritual struggle. Democracy as public participation and public reasoning in the public sphere needs to be supplemented with practices of self-cultivation and cultivation of generosity of being going beyond the dualism of private and public.

Democracy as public reasoning and deliberation embodying what Habermas (1990) calls practical discourse where actors are engaged in moral argumentation about the nature of self and society is crucial for transforming spiritual traditions of India which in their structural organizations have been mostly authoritarian. While there has to be a transformative dialogue between practical discourse and practical spirituality, it must be emphasized that practical discourse in Habermas does not bow down before authority in a slavish manner and discovers moral insights from deliberation among participants. Such a public deliberation and democratic decision-making seems to be missing in varieties of socio-spiritual mobilizations of India and here democratic participation for value formation can be helpful (cf. Dreze & Sen 2002).

Swadhyaya is a socio-spiritual movement in contemporary India but is now riddled with power struggle involving crucial issues of sole control of resources and doctrinal authority. After the passing away of its founder the control of the organization fell on his daughter, and this succession was not very different from the entrenched culture of dynastic succession in Indian religions and politics. The integral education movement in Orissa embodies aspirations of a practical spirituality as it works with children, parent and society for a more joyful and integral learning drawing inspiration from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But it also faces the challenge of generating spaces of public deliberation where people in management with power and money can sit together with teachers who join this movement out of devotion but are mostly without adequate resources (cf. Das 2001; Giri 2004).

Along with transforming secularism, democracy and authoritarianism which is in tune with the spirit of both Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi practical spirituality also draws our attention to the spiritual significance of food, and realize the link between food and freedom (cf. Sen 1999). It draws inspiration from texts such as *Taittiriya Upanishad* where it is written, *Annam Brahma*—Know food as *Brahma*. Practical spirituality challenge us to understand the link between food and freedom and realize the violation of the human and the divine when there is not adequate nourishment for us. It also invites us to cook together in *Sita's Kitchen* and sing new songs of self-discovery, mutual nourishment and intimacy.²² It also challenges us to realize the significance of body and realize that the aesthetics of spirituality is not confined to places of worship only but also touches our bathrooms overcoming the dualism between the temple and the toilet. In my field work with Swadhyaya I found that while in Swadhyaya orchards there is a separate special room for the leader which is rarely used the common bathrooms used by “devotee workers” is mostly dirty without even cleaning soaps. This is a problem not only in the rural projects such as *Brukhamandir* (tree temple) but also in Swadhyaya run schools as a senior Swadhyayee once told me in a conversation.

In his recent reflections on religion, Jacques Derrida (1998) tells us that one who claims authority in the name of religion speaks Latin today. Those of us who valorize spirituality also need to ask ourselves whether we are claiming authority in the name of spirituality. We need not close our eyes to the fact that there is a problem of entrenched authoritarianism in spirituality as well, and practical spirituality has to transform this authoritarianism by taking part simultaneously in political, moral and spiritual struggle in a new poetics and politics of transformation. *Bhakti* movements in medieval India were bound by a feudal order but practical spirituality now calls for a new *Bhakti* movement which embodies both democratic participation and a multi-dimensional generosity of being. In cultivating such a *Bhakti* movement not only for India but for the world practical spirituality can build upon the strivings of both Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi.

This multi-dimensional struggle for transformation – food and freedom, universal co-realization, transformation of existing institutions and creation of new institutions— calls for embodiment of values such as voluntary poverty and voluntary optimism (cf. Das 2005). Both Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi are deeply concerned with cultivation and nurturance of values. Practical spirituality strives to embody values of voluntary poverty, voluntary co-sharing in both suffering and joy,

and voluntary optimism. Humanity has flourished with the *sadhana* of selves and collectivities who have chosen to remain poor enjoying the creative beauty of simplicity, unencumbered by many outward temptations of money and power, and resisted the pressure for conformity by the priests, merchants and the kings. Similarly voluntary optimism is an integral aspect of journey of life, including its manifestation in practical spirituality, which is not a lack of acknowledgement of failures but a continued aspiration and striving that despite our failures to realize beauty, dignity and dialogue we nevertheless do not easily become a victim of nihilism in a debilitating way. As Ramachandra Gandhi tells us in the attributed voice of Buddha in *Sita's Kitchen*: “Do not declare war against reality [...] because reality doesn't declare war against anything. The nihilism you preach and the self-centredness you pardon are caricatures of the pacifying compassion of nothingness and the joyous explosiveness of self-realization” (1993: 45).

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NOTES

- 1 For Daya Krishna, “The oft-repeated traditional theory of the *purusarthas* [...] is of little help in understanding the diversity and complexity of human seeking which makes human life so meaningful and worthwhile in diverse ways. The *kama*-centric and *artha*-centric theories of Freud and Marx are as mistaken as the *dharma*-centric thought of sociologists and anthropologists who try to understand man in terms of the roles that he plays, and society in terms of the norms of those roles and their interactive relationships. For all these theories, the independent seeking of any value which is different from these is an illusion, except in an instrumental sense. [...] Fortunately for the Indian theory of *purusarthas*, it has postulated the ideal of *moksa* which is tangential to all the other *purusarthas*. But it too has no place for the independent life of reason as a separate value, or for that matter for any other life which is not concerned primarily with *artha*, *dharma*, *kama* and *moksa*” (Krisna 1991: 204-205). It is worth probing if Daya Krishna had in mind independent pursuit of knowledge or science as having no place in traditional theory of *purusartha*.
- 2 This also raises the question of relationship between philosophy and fieldwork in

our practice of dialogue. I do not know if Daya Krishna or Ramachandra Gandhi ever did fieldwork. Daya Krishna characterizes “Anthropology as a bonded science” and he could not liberate himself from this view of him emerging in the 60s in the context of views of anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss. See Daya Krishna, “Anthropology: The Bonded Science” in his *The Art of the Conceptual* (Krishna 1989).

- 3 Gandhi himself calls this “speculative narrative” (1993: 24) and it is worth exploring how this is different from the fictional dialogue taking place in John Rawls’ (1971) *A Theory of Justice*.
- 4 Consider here the following lines of Luc Ferry: “[...] When I hear a musical passage, it does not reduce to a series of related notes with no connection between them (actual immanence). On the contrary, it contributes—in an immanent way, apart from any rational operation—a certain structure that transcends this actual immanence, without being imposed on me from the outside like an argument from authority. This ‘immanent transcendence’ contains within itself, par excellence, the ultimate significance of lived experiences” (Ferry 2002: 26).
- 5 Liberation theology from Latin America is more widely known but less known are movements of liberation theology in Islam and social engagement in Buddhism. Helpful here are the works of Farid Esack (1997), Abdullahi An-Naim (1995), Fred Dallmayr (2001) and Sulak Sivaraksha (2006).
- 6 This is not an exhaustive list but only a pointer.
- 7 As E.H. Cousins (1985: 7) tells us in his *Global Spirituality*: “people of faith now rediscover the material dimensions of existence and their spiritual significance.”
- 8 Ramachandra Gandhi would urge us to realize that such quest for self-knowledge and self-realization involves realizing oneself as empty as well as a Self, a realization which brings compassion to our lives (cf. Gandhi 1993: 29).
- 9 Though the dialogical dimension in Vivekananda’s practical vedanta seems to be imprisoned in fundamentalist interpretations of his work who would like to see his work only from a Hindu point of view.
- 10 Let us not forget here Buddhism which is silent about God and many atheists who do not believe in God. The Buddha also did not use the word Self and Gandhi’s (1993: 22) reflections on it deserves our careful consideration:

The Buddha could have identified emptiness or nirvana or dhamma with atman or self, but did not do so because the atrophying self-consciousness of that age could have taken self to mean ego or body or mind, with disastrous consequences for his mission of compassion.
- 11 In their work on critical realism and transcendence Archer et al (2004) prefer to use He in talking about God. The use of she here is an invitation and it draws inspiration from traditions such as India’s where God is thought of as *Brahma* which is gender neuter.
- 12 Sulak Sivaraksha speaks about Buddhism with a small b: “There is a need to practice Buddhism with a small “b” (Engaged Buddhism). This means concentrating on the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching (*nibbana* or freedom) and being less concerned with myth, culture and ceremony” (Sivaraksha 2006: 1). Dallmayr (2005) urges us to understand the political and spiritual significance of moving from the big God and inviting “small” to our lives.

- 13 For Swami Vivekananda, “A God who is partial to his children called men, and cruel to his children called brute beasts, is worse than a demon” (Vivekananda 1991: 297). Realization of a non-anthropocentric god in practical spirituality can also draw inspiration from non-anthropocentric cultivation of human identity, divinity and spirituality in Ramachandra Gandhi.
- 14 For Eckhart Tolle (2005): “[...] to sin means to miss the mark, an an archer who misses the target, to sin means to miss the point of human existence. It means to live live unskillfully, blindly, and thus to suffer and cause suffering.”
- 15 In the words of Agamben (1993: 44):
 The recognition of evil is older and more original than any blameworthy act, it rests solely on the fact that, being and having to be only its possibility or potentiality, humankind fails itself in a certain sense and has to appropriate this failing—it has to *exist* as *potentiality*. [The only ethical experience is] the experience of being (one’s own potentiality). The only evil consists instead in the decision to remain in a deficit of existence, to appropriate the power to not-be as a substance and a foundation beyond existence; or rather (and this is the destiny of morality), to regard potentiality itself, which is the most proper mode of human existence as a fault that must always be repressed.
- 16 Non-duality and non-violence are also enduring concerns in Ramachandra Gandhi and here practice of multi-valued logic can learn from him.
- 17 Bocchi and Ceruti also help us understand the significance of non-duality in our spiritual quest:
 The dialogical and dynergetic cosmology symbolized by the union of Shiva and Shakti and manifested in yoga has given rise to many philosophical systems of the two great spiritual traditions of classical India: Hinduism and Buddhism. Beyond all their differences and disagreements, they express a principle of ‘duality within the non-duality.’The ultimate reality of the universe, the ‘noumenon,’ is defined precisely as ‘non-dual’: *a-dvaita* (a Hindu term) or *a-dvaya* (a Buddhist term) (Bocchi & Ceruti 2002: 47).
- 18 For Sri Aurobindo:
 “In the relations between the individual and the group, this constant tendency of Nature appears as the strife between two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the State, on the other the distinctive freedom, perfection and development of individual man. The State idea, the small or the vast living machine, and the human idea, the more and more distinct and luminous Person, the increasing God, stand in perpetual opposition. The size of the State makes no difference to the essence of the struggle and need make none to its characteristic circumstances. It was the family, the tribe or the city, the *polis*; it became the clan, the caste and the class, the *kula*, the *gens*. It is now the nation. Tomorrow or day after it may be all mankind. But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between self-liberating Person and the engrossing collectivity” (1962: 272-273).
- 19 The name of the protagonist in both *Sita’s Kitchen* and *Muniya’s Light* is *Ananya* and Gandhi translates this as “no other.” But *Ananya* also means unique including being uniquely different.
- 20 In his review of Gandhi’s novel *Muniya’s Light* Makarand Paranjape writes: “[In the novel] the narrator’s consciousness [...] dominates totally, not even allowing

his beloved Muniya to come into her own or flower forth fully” (Paranjape 2008: 16). Gandhi considers other as apparent other and though he himself writes: “Apparent otherness is undoubtedly a disguise of Self but what a powerful disguise it is! Let us make no mistake about this, let us not sentimentally deny the terrifying face of world-appearance” (1993: 4). His relationship with the other needs a foundational transformation in terms of realizing the other as also uniquely different and not just apparently different as she is also related to the self.

21 In our edited book, *The Modern Prince and Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom* I and several of our co-collaborators are exploring this (Giri 2009).

22 Daya Krishna and Ramachandra Gandhi can both cook together in *Sita's Kitchen* and possibly listen to this poem of co-creativity emerging from spaces of cooking together:

Oh what a disaster!
 No onions
 I gave your list
 How could he forget
 I would kill my husband
 Now sending an SMS
 But my dear soul
 There are coloured onions in this corner.

II

Onions and tomatoes
 Got dressed
 You said
 Oh Director
 Give me order
 No Soul, no order
 This is our meditation together
 Together we blossom
 But if you do not sing
 Onions would be still in sleep
 Tomatoes would be sad
 You sang:
 I may be worn
 But my love
 makes my body blossom
 and my soul a fragrance

III

Do you write poems?
 You became silent
 How did you know?
 Did Patrick tell you?
 No just thought like this
 After dinner
 We sat beside the fire
 I read a poem of embrace of fire and water
 Of wave and flame
 You laughed and laughed
 Smiled with your heart
 Tears flowed down
 Tears from eternity
 You read your poems

In French, Bulgarian and English
 You, the sadhika of poems and life
 Said
 Oh Indian Orange
 Let your journey be a bliss
 Touch hearts and million hearts
 Write new poems
 In souls, society and cosmos
 (a poem originally written in Oriya by the author and translated by him).

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