

# **The Calling of Practical Spirituality: Learning, Participation and Transformation<sup>1</sup>**

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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<sup>3</sup> 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.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the artists have increasingly become the spiritual leaders of our time. Artists are sometimes among the few who take time to reflect on the deeper meaning of life and to search for ways to express both the turmoil of their search and the tentative insights they have gained. They usually have more questions than answers, yet their work celebrates wholeness and coherence as well as bewilderment and mystery.

-Robert Wuthnow (2001), *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist*, p. 266.

God calls on us to be his partners to work for a new kind of society where people count; where people matter more than things, more than possessions; where human life is not just respected but positively revered; where people will be secure and not suffer from the fear of hunger, from ignorance, from disease where there will be more gentleness, more caring, more sharing, more compassion, more laughter, where there is peace and not war.

-Deshmond Tutu (2004), *God Has a Dream*, p.62.

## **Introduction and Invitation:**

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<sup>3</sup>Considering that our dialogue here is simultaneously with science and religion it is helpful to note that modern science has not only its metaphysical presuppositions it has also its superstitions. As Swami Vivekananda (1991: 28) tells us: "For practical purposes let us talk in the language of modern science. But I must ask you to bear in mind that as there is religious superstition so also there is a superstition in the matter of science." Tolstoy also writes in another context: "These new justifications are termed 'scientific.' But by the term 'scientific' is understood just what was formerly understood by the term 'religious': just as formerly everything called 'religious' was held to be unquestionable simply because it was called religious, so now all that is called 'scientific' is held to be unquestionable" (1997: 23).

Practical spirituality involves a transformation of both science and religion. 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-realisation. 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”<sup>4</sup> and cut off from its inescapable and integral links with transcendence. But practice in practical spirituality is simultaneously immanent and transcendent<sup>5</sup> and the actor here is simultaneously a “technopractitioner” and “transcendentally real self.” Practical spirituality embodies immanent transcendence, as for example in music<sup>6</sup> 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).

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<sup>4</sup>This is how James Faubion (1995) characterizes the notion of subject in contemporary European social theory. For a critical discussion of this see Giri 2005a.

<sup>5</sup>For an outline of such a notion of practice in the field of development please see Quarlese von Ufford & Giri 2003 and Giri & Quarles von Ufford 2004.

<sup>6</sup>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).

Practical spirituality emphasizes experience and realisation--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-realisation.

Practical spirituality also emphasises 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Movements such as Bhakti movements have involved struggles against caste and gender domination

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<sup>7</sup>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).

<sup>8</sup>This is not an exhaustive list but only a pointer.

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 Sikhism, 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.

### **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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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<sup>9</sup> 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."

spiritually from within contemporary Hinduism (Giri 2006a). 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 has both a dimension of struggle for justice as well as hints towards dialouge.<sup>10</sup> Practical spirituality, for Swami Vivekananda (1991: 354), urges us to realize that "the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest idea of metaphysical conception." 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" (Vivekananda 1991: 332). The task of practical spirituality begins with this realization but does not end there: its objective is to transform the world. The same Swami Vivekananda thus challenges: "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" (Vivekananda 1991: 353). What practical spirituality stresses is that the knowledge that one is Divine, one is part of a Universal Being, facilitates this mode of relationship with the world. This knowledge is however not for the acquisition of power over the other; rather it is to worship her as God. In the words of Vivekananda: "Human knowledge is not

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<sup>10</sup>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.

antagonistic to human well-being. On the contrary, it is knowledge alone that will save us in every department of life, in knowledge as worship" (Vivekananda 1991: 353).

Practical spirituality emphasizes upon 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.<sup>11</sup> 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).

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<sup>11</sup>Even Swami Vivekananda (1991: 382) writes in his *Practical Vedanta*: "Perfect balance would be our destruction. Suppose the amount of heat in this room, the tendency of which is towards equal and perfect diffusion, gets that kind of diffusion, then for all practical purposes that heat will cease to be. What makes motion possible in this universe? Lost balance [...] It is this difference, this differentiation, this losing of the balance between us, which is the very soul of our progress, the soul of all our thought." This has profound implication for many domains of our lives including thinking about relationship between God and Man. This helps us to acknowledge the significance of disjunction and antinomies in our life in general and spiritual quest in particular. From a different point of view sociologist of religion Robert Bellah also helps us understand this in his *Beyond Belief*: "For me the search for wholeness from then on had to be made without totalism. A critical stance towards every society, ideology and religion was henceforth essential" (Bellah 1970: xx).

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. 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.<sup>12</sup> But for the believers God in practical spirituality is not only in heaven but here on earth; she<sup>13</sup> 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 episteme 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).

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<sup>12</sup> Let us not forget here Buddhism which is silent about God and many atheists who do not believe in God.

<sup>13</sup>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.

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.<sup>14</sup> God in practical spirituality is also not anthropocentric.<sup>15</sup>

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. 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.<sup>16</sup> 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup>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).

<sup>16</sup> Swami Vivekananda writes about it poetically: “[...] where the husband kisses the wife, he is there in the kiss; when the mother kisses the child, he is there in the kiss; where friends clasp hands, he the Lord is present as the God of Love. When a great man loves and wishes to help mankind He is there giving freely His bounty out of his love to mankind” (Vivekananda 1991: 394). For Tolstoy: “[...] but one thing only is needful; the knowledge of the simple and clear truth which finds place in every soul that is not stupefied by religious and scientific superstitions—the truth that for our life one law is valid—the law of love, which brings the highest happiness to every individual as well as to all mankind” (1997: 29). And Bhaskar (2002: 134) writes: “The ultimate is not freedom. The desideratum is freedom, the ultimate is unconditional love.”



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.<sup>17</sup> 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 is evil.<sup>18</sup> 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. According to Swami Vivekananda: “The real genesis of evil is unselfishness [...] A man who murders another is, perhaps, moved to do so by the love of

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<sup>17</sup>Creative theologian IU Dalferth (2006: 18-19)also helps us with a new hermeneutics of evil:

The problem is rather to construe God’s will as law, and God’s law in moral terms as a set of divine commandments as to what humans ought or ought not to do. The result is a misleading *moral sense* of evil: If evil is that which is contrary to God’s will, God’s will identified with God’s law, God’s law reduced to moral instructions of what humans ought or ought not to do, then doing evil is equated with trespassing God’s commandments and evil is *everything that God prohibits us to do*. But this is a misleading way of stating the point of the Torah, the gospel, and arguably also the Koran. They are not a set of divine prescriptions, commandments and prohibitions which humans must obey in order not to do evil. At least in the case of the Torah and the gospel they are better understood in terms of God’s gift of a blueprint of a good and just human life in community with God and one another, the presentation of what God has done for his people and all humankind, and the unfolding or unpacking of its implications for human life at its best—as it could and should and ought to be. They outline a way of life that responds in gratitude to the goods received from God rather than to a set of arbitrary divine commandments and prohibitions that are to be obeyed on pain of punishment.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

his own child. His love has become limited to that one little baby to the exclusion of millions of other human beings in the universe. Yet limited or unlimited it is the same love” (Vivekananda 1991: 354). Roy Bhaskar also writes: “Once we begin to access our higher selves, we can begin to see that really the problem is not so much of evil. [...] For there is also, at least, philosophically a problem of good [...] love, goodness, nobility, courage those are displayed everywhere in the perpetuation of social ills” (Bhaskar 2002: 46).

### **Non-Dual Realisations 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, transcendence 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 (cf. Giri 2005). 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. 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).<sup>19</sup>

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.

### **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).

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<sup>19</sup>Bocchi and Ceruti also help us understand the significance of non-duality in our spiritual quest: “The dialogical and dynergic 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).

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, ethics and politics of servanthood in place of the politics of mastery.<sup>20</sup>

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. As Ramashroy Roy challenge us in his *Beyond Ego’s Domain*:

[Public order is threatened by the split between] man’s concern for his own good and that for the good of others. But can this threat to the public order be mitigated, if not completely eliminated, by the installation of the Polis? [...] For Aristotle, transcendence of self-interest is consequent upon participation in public affairs [but] the shortcomings associated with personal character cannot be expected to be rectified by the public realm, if it lacks necessary support from individuals reborn as citizens. To be reborn as a person who, rising above his self-interest, becomes attentive to and actively seeks to pursue collective good, is, then, to willingly accept a life dedicated to the cultivation of *dharma*” (Roy 1999: 5).

Democracy as public reasoning and deliberation embodying what Habermas (1990) calls practical discourse where actors are engaged in moral argumentation about

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<sup>20</sup>In our forthcoming edited book, *The Modern Prince and Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom I* and several of our co-collaborators are exploring this (Giri 2006b).

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 face 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 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 *Taittereya Upanishad* where it is written, *Annam Brahmeti Vijnanama*--Know food as *Bhrahma*. But what is the quality of food available in varieties of so-called spiritual

places in our world? Outside the dining hall of Sri Arobindo Ashram, Pondicherry once I read a pamphlet. “Oh children of the Divine, wake up! See the quality of food that is given to you.” 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 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.

This multi-dimensional struggle for transformation – food and freedom, universal self-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). Voluntary poverty is an important calling of both science and spirituality. Developments in science and spirituality have been facilitated by those 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 important aspect of both science and spirituality which points to the aspiration and the fact that despite all obstacles we are not giving to give up on our persistent efforts and struggles to learn, to be, to grow and create a more beautiful and dignified world for us all.<sup>21</sup> But this hope does not fall from the sky; it emerges from varieties of our experiments in and struggles for love and learning we engage ourselves in science and spirituality.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>As Sri Aurobindo (1950) urges us to sing in his *Savitri*:

A lonely freedom can not satisfy  
 A heart that has grown one with every other heart  
 I am a deputy of the aspiring world  
 My spirit's liberty I ask for all

<sup>22</sup>It is helpful here to remember lines from a novelist and a theologian here. Writes Imre Kertestz (2002: 12) in his *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*: "Yes, my existence in the context of your potentiality [...] Now I no longer have doubts—it is in the clouds where I make my bed. And this question—my life in the context of the potentiality of your existence—proved to be a good guide." And for the theologian IU Dalferth: "In religious and in particular Christian contexts "hope" has a strong meaning. It is not merely a wish but a way of "seeing" the future, and one's role in it, in a particular light" (2006: 15).



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