

Editorial

Engaging the Spiritual

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Educational reforms and processes have consistently explored the terrain of transformation at the individual as well as institutional levels. A historical analysis of changes and policies that have brought about the desired as well as unintended changes in society do acknowledge the difference between what is 'wholesome' or 'good' and 'unwholesome' or 'bad'. The desire for 'wholeness' directs one's attention to a realm that is termed as spiritual; that which is over and above the common - whether seen from economic, political, social or even religious factors that circumscribe individuals and communities.

Wholeness is intrinsically related to truth, *satya*, verity. Access to the truth of life is in a way, to use a cyber cliché, password protected. The decoding of the mystery unveils the beauty of reality ordinarily accessible only in a veiled shadowy sense. The password to the truth of things, the truth of reality as it appears has varied permutations depending on the field of knowledge from which one attempts to have access to truth - geography and history, mathematics and physics are all concealed or password protected when it comes to the 'real' truth it seeks to proclaim. It is as if once the code is cracked one has the access to truth. In order to crack the code, it takes some proficiency in the subject. It is in search of this proficiency in the subject - most of all of life - accessible from varying vantage points that education offers itself as a means.

Reality comes across as veiled. The veil is whatever it is that hides the transcendence and prevents the immanence from being grasped fully. Or, one could also see the veil itself as the transcendence/ immanence over and above the 'hard' reality that constantly manifests itself. The veil is that which shows or offers the possibility of a better mode of being, the possibility of a deeper truth to things as they are. Psychology and philosophy, education and sociology of knowledge, statistics and probability studies, all in one or the other way attempt to tear open the veil or deflect the opaqueness inbuilt into reality.

Discovering the immeasurable in the measurable, the unfathomable in the shallow, the far distant in the nearby, the eternal in the temporal and the perennial in the transient

are all insights that tumble from the existential exercise of engaging the spiritual. The fleeting sense of the lasting glimpsed in the impermanent and the abiding sense of the ephemeral locked in the permanent are both two sides of the same coin of life that engages with the spiritual. In the words of Gao Xinjian, the first Chinese Nobel laureate in literature:

You should know that there is little you can seek in this world, that there is no need for you to be so greedy, in the end all you can achieve are memories, hazy, intangible, dreamlike memories which are impossible to articulate. When you try to relate them, there are only sentences, the dregs left from the filter of linguistic structures.¹

Happiness is associated negatively with a situation and a frame of mind of 'no problem'; a state of being wherein one is contented positively or without any distraction or distress from anxiety, fear or anger inside oneself. Happiness is a frame of mind and state of being in the body-mind. This state of being is often in different words alluded to in different religious traditions as the spiritual state or state of grace. Whatever route one may take whether traditional or modern, classical or contemporary if and when one is able to arrive at a state of equanimity and contentment one is fully accomplished, psychologically free and spiritually liberated or graced.

The discipline of science besides invoking upon the knowledge provided by the external world explored through the subjective scientific methodological rigour also challenges the explorer to deal with the self. This self-engagement is wherein often the scientist comes face to face with the holistic dimension as the spiritual. Centring onto self is regarded as the source of peace and contentment. Constant steady grounding in the self comes easier to some and is an arduous path for others. This facility is sometimes regarded as subject to the dispositions one is genetically wired with. However, the transcendence of the impact the natural dispositions, or the given, provide is itself the beginning of the 'wisdom-frame'. One is not aligned or blindly subject to any belief structure or ideology or thought frame, having the tenacity to confront and question the very premises of any structured conditioned approach to life. Reality is to be constantly approached in full freedom.

Religious traditions are ordinarily associated with nurturing the realm of the spiritual. The new age movement emerged as an alternative to the religious paths in redefining the significance and necessity of the spiritual in human life. Holistic health, alternative medicines, challenges to traditional religions in the form of sects and groups all attempted redefining the role of the religions, and even the role of religiosity and spirituality in life.

¹ Gao Xinjian, *Soul Mountain*, Tr. by Mabie Lee, London, Harper Perennial, 2001, p. 329.

Nurturing the spiritual gets associated with wholesome education, healthy civil society, transparent economics, caring politics and accountable/responsible governance. All of these tend to look at the basics of the organization of life so as to bring about wholeness to life. Psychology, philosophy and education get a predominant position in this regard. Therefore the journal at hand explores the traditional, the modern and the postmodern ways of retaining the fullness, perfection, freedom, liberation, salvation from the diverse paths available.

The present issue looks at the complimentary and fulfilling role of the spiritual dimension of life from a very religious perspective to purely psychological and psycho-social perspective. It takes into deeper account the religious perspectives offered by Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. The Scriptural revelation as a guide to determine the spiritual on the one side, and, the traditions that rebuild constantly the guidelines for the delineation of the spiritual taking cues from the sciences and social sciences, both find a lead.

Scaria Thuruthiyil looks at the notion of *Sunyata*/emptiness in religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, as captured in the soul's journey to fullness. This is a recurring theme. The notion of self realization for which an ardent seeker of truth yearns is looked into its depths from two parallel traditions of *Advaita Vedanta* and *Madhyamika* Buddhism. The journey of the soul in its actual experience of *Sunyata*/ *Nirvana*, and, attainment of *Atman*/*Moksha* are shown to coincide both experientially as well as in its respective intellectual delineations if interpreted along the lines proposed by Scaria drawing on erudite scholarship on the thematic.

Shinu Varkey venturing into the field of Indian Philosophy engages one of the key texts of the tradition, *Gita*, in order to lay bare for a lay audience the significance of the sacred text. Wholesome living is understood as an integrated approach to the world of action, thought and devotion as exemplified in the transformation of the key character of the sacred poem experiencing true freedom in the process of being guided and directed by the teacher. A life of action with all the composure and sanguinity derived from equanimity and constant watchfulness is presented as the path to happiness and fulfilment.

The reflection on the plenitude of the teaching contained in *Gita* and its practical application in day to day life for the benefit of an upcoming generation as exercised in the context of a '*Gurukul*' /School is what Swami Mick carries forward in his essay. He draws on the textual heritage of more than one tradition and more especially brings home what he has himself imbibed from the direct lineage of a Guru tradition going back to the famed Sree Narayana Guru of Kerala. A journey of personal quest begun in American woodlands and carried along by the law of Tao to the Indian mountains speaks more than it actually says.

Merlyn George's essay on the 'Dream of Gerontius' takes the reader not only to the Christian world of salvation and liberation from and through death but also to the lyrical, poetic excellence of nineteenth century represented by Cardinal John Henry Newman. The theme of death and immortality though not oft-discussed in a consumerist globalized context, yet underlies the concerns of the serious minded, literally, and in the day to day encounters with it repeated in the news world, virtually. One is therefore constantly confronting the fragile status of life and yet expecting a state of transcendence beyond its momentariness. It is this truth that provides a motivating factor for taking seriously the journey to wholeness. It is an invitation to engage the spiritual in view of the inevitable death that awaits each individual sooner or later.

If death can be motivator and insight provider to the meaningfulness of life Nirmol Gomes tells the story of one who exemplified it in early 20th century - an Unknown Soldier explorer turned priest mendicant of the deserts of African Sahara, Charles de Foucauld. A part of his doctoral research summarised in the essay explores the fact that heroic life can be sourced from even the least expected humus of wealth and frivolousness and how his life and journey to perfection-seeking can be a model for contemporary takers of a similar path. Though the text was originally intended for those on the journey of catholic piety, it could be for anyone worth a consideration for its authenticity.²

The overall concern of the issue 'engaging the spiritual' takes a turn to the psychological and psycho-social in the last three essays. Jose Mathew's revised version of an earlier paper attempts to pinpoint the road to happiness and its texture as the goal of much of human life and its varied manifestations in and through different life paths. Being happy - with or without travails and tribulations - seems to be a constant factor of sanctity and rectitude across traditions and ages. Therefore taking time to consider what is the nature and dynamics of happiness and its meaning are not futile but rather central. The distinction between the external and internal factors and the enumeration of the theories that specifically attend to the intra individual dimension of happiness-seeking are pointers to the 'wholeness as self-attained' theoretical positioning.

Molekunnel summarizes the process and findings of a path breaking study among the crime related traumatized young adolescents of a Philippines' correctional home. He administered hypnosis to a select group and conducted the study using the 'Solomon Four-Group-Design', a standardised procedure in order to gauge the impact it had on the recipients. It shows that significant improvement in the behaviour as well as self perception of traumatised adolescents can be conclusively ascertained from having submitted them to treatment by hypnosis. This is indeed a measure that could be replicated accompanied by therapeutic and medical assistance across correctional homes in other countries as well.

2 Cfr. Nirmol Gomes, *Tracing the Steps: A psycho-pedagogical Study*, Sonada, Salesian College Publication, 2008.

The last essay by George Chempakathinal and others makes an application oriented incisive claim based on a field study of students in different educational setting - academic and vocational - and explores the impact affection, care and control does to them. The emotional wellbeing and behavioural pattern of school students have been closely observed in the field study using the parameters of affection, control and inclusion to derive the kind of set up that maximises wellbeing and wholesome growth. Restrictions and rules become less in socio-culturally advanced countries. The study finds in contrast, the lack of freedom ordinarily found in the natural rural set up, due to addition of rules and regulations arising as part of an attempt to create an ideal urbanised educational set up as a possible cause of stress and strain in the vernacular medium students. Therefore, education while intended to bring about an ordered wholesome perception of life, probably, at times, attains it by breaking down the traditional inherited sense of wellbeing and order. This, in turn, would reopen the Nature Vs nurture debate.

Finally, the articles in this issue can be said to engage with the spiritual from across the wide spectrum of the scripture backed revelatory certainties to the probabilities of fact-finding based on case studies in order to ascertain the nature and dynamics of well being and wholeness, happiness and contentment, detachment and surrender; all on the road to the final destination of life in its fullness.