



Relevance of Spiritual Principles for Solving Global Social Challenges

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Abstract

Society unknowingly follows the course of spiritual evolution. Spirituality is the quest for self-existent order and harmonious perfection. The evolution of society is driven by an irrepressible aspiration for the values that are the translation and embodiment of that order. The history of civilization is a record of its progressive emergence. Spirituality is the quest for a unifying reality that transcends all limitations, distinctions and differences; an inner oneness that unites rather than divides us; a faith in and quest for perfection in all its myriad forms; and a power accessible to human beings to overcome impossible obstacles and achieve the inconceivable. It is founded on the principles of absolute freedom, equality and unity. In the modern era, faith in spirit is embodied in the realization of the intrinsic value, extraordinary endowments and unmanifest potentials of the human being. We find expressions of it in the idealism and power released by revolutionary social change. We revere its power in great individuals. The aspiration for perfection in any form or field of endeavor is spiritual. So also we recognize expressions of spirit in the movements of the masses. Spirituality is not confined to pursuit of the otherworldly or unattainable. It is a living power for the transformation of human consciousness and the solution to the compelling challenges confronting humanity.

Spirituality stands for a self-existent order and society shares the aspiration for such an order. The history of civilization is a history of a growing social order and in that sense society is heading in that direction. Ancient Greece expressed this aspiration in its quest for objective rational criteria for the determination of Truth. The high mental culture it developed expressed in its development of logic, philosophy, science, ethics, and drama etc. In ancient Rome, it expressed as the quest for a perfect organization of social life through development of law, governance, military, commercial and civic life. In France it manifested as intellectuality while in Germany it expressed itself as music, philosophy and a taste for physical perfection and punctuality. In England it appeared as honor and integrity. Spirit in India expressed itself as pursuit of knowledge and truth. Such social manifestations of spiritual aspiration appear in different forms in different nations. America experienced it as the quest for freedom, while Russia sought it as emotional fullness. In China, it expressed itself as a well-developed physical mentality while Japan developed it as a sense of beauty, cleanliness and orderliness.

The central importance of spirituality is universal and remains pervasive even in an age of extreme scientific materialism. Although the concept of spirituality means a great many different things to different people, it does possess some characteristics which may be considered universal. Spirituality is the quest for a reality that transcends all limitations, distinctions and differences; an inner oneness that unites rather than divides us; a power accessible to human beings to overcome impossible obstacles to achieve the inconceivable; a faith in and quest for perfection in all its myriad forms. Spirituality is founded on the principles of absolute freedom, equality and unity. It seeks freedom not only from the constraints of external political, social or economic deprivation and oppression, but also liberation from the limitation, subordination, domination and possession of the individual by ignorance, falsehood, desire, passion, egoism and all forms of psychological imprisonment. For spirituality is the quest to contact, experience and unite with an Infinite spirit, an Eternal reality, a transcendent Truth that is the origin, foundation and creative source of all that is finite. Rationalists conceive it as a utopian ideal to be sought after, even though attainment may be impossible. Some perceive it as a living presence active in the universe and in the lives of every individual.

In our modern era, our faith in spirituality is embodied in the realization of extraordinary endowments, capacities and unmanifest potentials of the human being. Today humanity has come to recognize and cherish the value and potential of each individual. We have discovered the wonders of human ingenuity and resourcefulness in the soaring aspiration and resourcefulness of penniless immigrants seeking a new life in a new world, the incomparable courage and self-confidence of Churchill and Gorbachev, the idealistic values of Washington and Lincoln, the humility and self-abnegation of Gandhi and Mandela, and the unlimited creativity of Leonardo and Beethoven.

1. Powers of Spirituality in Human Affairs

The march of civilization is a progressive unfolding of the powers of spirituality in human affairs.

1. Humanity has an irrepressible aspiration for freedom, truth and progress.
2. Spirituality is unbounded, unconditional freedom.
3. Freedom appears in the field of politics as Liberty.
4. True freedom is attained only when it is extended to the whole population.
5. When freedom shows itself as political equality, only then does it truly become effective.
6. Political equality is availed of by the citizenry through extension of franchise.
7. Economic equality can be assured only by giving employment opportunity to all.
8. Money is a very fit instrument to achieve that equality.
9. Political and economic equality become real only when society is mature enough to look at all its citizens with an equal eye.
10. When psychological equality becomes real, all other forms of equality also gain strength.

11. Spiritual equality which eliminates fundamentalism is the rock on which all other social edifices stand.
12. Society has been built up by Man and therefore it must serve his needs and not the other way around.

2. Applied Spirituality

Though many spiritual changes have taken place in society, they are only seen as political changes. The emergence of democracy is spiritual though it is not seen as such. When some impossible thing becomes possible it is recognized as spirituality in action. India's winning of independence through non-violence is seen as a political achievement. Only in 1943 did India lose some 3 million people to the severity of a famine in Bengal. In 1965 she received a warning from U.N that she would face an imminent famine threatening the lives of some 100 million people due to an impending food shortage. The nation woke up and successfully staved off the challenge by increasing food production by another 50%. Such accomplishments are spiritual though we don't recognize them.

"We insist on being blind as if it were our birthright."

Currently, global warming appears to be an intractable problem defying any solution. The nations that participated in the Arab Spring revolution in the Middle East present another insoluble problem. Millions of refugees are fleeing their home countries and looking for asylum in other countries. They have to be accommodated somehow. Robots are increasingly taking over our jobs and at this rate some experts fear total take over by robots of the job market with nothing left for people to do. After World War I expanding populations were seen as a great hazard. But the issue is seen in a different light now. Especially if the population is a skilled one, it is even seen as a valuable asset in itself. Robert McNamara, former American Secretary of Defense, who vigorously pursued the Vietnam War, later gave it up and started calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Currently, Ukraine seems to be on the brink of disaster. In such a situation, the question of the relevance of spiritual principles to solving such problems arises and further it is highly interesting to find out how such principles are relevant to the issues at hand. We also need to inquire into what man should do to solve such problems.

On a certain day, the heads of Germany and U.S.S.R wondered about the future of Berlin Wall not even knowing that it would be demolished in 2 days. If we study all the psychological, economic and cultural factors that went into the break-down of the Berlin Wall, we will know all the secrets about the relevance of spiritual principles to our social ills. As with six blind men who struggled to understand an elephant, we too are equally blind and what is worse, we insist on being blind. The reality today is that America dominates the world with a show of her military might and economic wealth. She derives that wealth from the productive capacities of the Individual. The European serf came to the U.S and instead of seeing all his production go to his Lord, was pleased to see all of it coming to himself. It signified a political freedom for the entire peasantry. So great was the impact of this freedom that it reversed the economic fortunes of America and Europe and made the former give economic aid to the latter. Freedom is spiritual and when it comes to a very large

section of the population it becomes very effective. We are unaware of this simply because we do not want to be aware of it. We insist on being blind as if it were our birthright. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ruled for 11 unpopular years and then suffered a humiliating defeat. But after 3 years in political wilderness, she came back to power in an astounding manner which was not understood by any political observer. It is here that all the secrets of spirituality lie waiting to be discovered. It is a wise approach to learn valuable lessons from the past. When Man truly wants to know, these truths reveal themselves and they also reveal the process by which they go into action.

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It may sound strange to hear that Man is in love with his suffering and does not want to be freed from it. This would mean that slaves don't want to be freed of their slavery and the poor don't want to be liberated from their poverty. Worse, they actually make an ideal out of their poverty. Spiritual relevance cannot exclude these two issues. If these two issues are left out, we may find the spiritual relevance still real. Malthus' prediction was real when he warned about the threat of the explosive growth of population. Such a warning prompted humanity to awaken to the reality. Reality included not only the threat of catastrophe but also the possibility of human resourcefulness. Unwillingness to make use of human resourcefulness is not to be appreciated.

3. Spirituality is Power

The only object that has evoked man's universal admiration and has retained it over the centuries is Money. It contains an enormous symbolic power that man is subconsciously aware of. Currency contains enormous social power and thus, money rules the world today as nothing else does.

When Greece joined the E.U it was doing fairly well and had a flourishing economy. Her joining the E.U was a sign of her political maturity and a good indicator of the political potentials of the E.U itself. Later developments show a parallel to what happened in U.S.S.R. The U.S.S.R realized the folly of having become a state economy and as a result moved towards market economy. It is to be regretted that she took the advice of IMF. The market economy of the West grew on its own strength and later succumbed to many artificial ways. Under the guise of the market economy Russia accepted many of these artificialities. A country is a whole by itself and draws its strength from its foundations. Each country sustained on the strength of its foundation can, by joining others, contribute to the union. This was apparently the understanding at the time of the formation of the E.U. The formation of the Euro came as an expression of the political advancement of the E.U. The real power of the Euro issues from the political authority of the E.U. The Euro as it has turned out, is dominating E.U., its creator, which is a very retrograde step.

In the 19th century, American President Andrew Jackson tried something along these lines but failed in his attempts. The emergence of the computer and economists winning Nobel Prizes by developing algorithms for stock market trading only shows that this tendency has returned. As a mark of protest for this tendency, the two Nobel Prizes that were given should be withdrawn. It should be noted that Monetarism is only a part of the Economy which is the whole. Economy is a part while Society is the whole. Further Man is the center of Society and not its subordinate. Speculation has put a check on money serving Man by reversing its spreading tendency and concentrating it in fewer and fewer hands.

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Money arrived on the scene by way of trade. Farmers related to their fields by directly making use of the produce of the field. Trade made farmers relate to other people. It made them get in touch with civilization and not be totally lost in the soil. This widened the range of their relationship with others. Trade generated wealth through a system of productive values. Coin is a symbol of that activity. While coins are limited by the scarcity of metal, paper currency removed that impediment. By enabling money to purchase anything available, Society immensely improved the power of money. As a result Money became all-pervasive and very nearly omnipotent.

Money became Man’s most powerful social instrument. This was followed by the arrival of banks. The institution of banks gave a solid physical form to the conceptual form of money. Agriculture ceased to be the fountainhead of productivity. The creative role shifted to trade and its instrument of money. Banks through which trade was conducted then gained enormous social power. This enormous power has been used to benefit society. Stock markets were originally created for collecting funds from the public for business use. That original purpose has been reversed now. Money kept on accumulating and later acquired a destructive character. It is in the midst of this situation that Greece got entangled in the debt trap of the E.U.

While Greece struggles with its financial problems, a parallel problem has appeared in the form of refugees. The world looks at refugees as a national problem while in reality it should be looked at as a global one. As a world government is in the making, the problem of refugees can be solved only if the nations of the world adopt a similar approach. Money that used to be a market instrument is no longer so. The market has become too small a place for the 21st century. Society has emerged all important and is demanding a global government for itself. Money has risen in its value to become a comprehensive power that includes educational, cultural and social power of society. However, truth demands that all these powers serve Man rather than vice versa. He must be able to dominate those institutions that are supposed to be his instruments. If such a perspective is gained, the present disorders in society will acquire the capacity to automatically set themselves right. Neither royalty, nor aristocracy nor the racial purists of Nazi Germany have any great future. It is democracy, liberty and

equality and such other values that have a bright future. Man is short-sighted and myopic in the extreme. It is pardonable to be a little myopic but it becomes unpardonable when myopia is venerated as something divine. Even the superstitious will protest the elevation of myopia to this divine level. Chamberlain was at his myopic best when he called Hitler a gentleman but suffered the rude shock of seeing Hitler break the agreement. Conservative philosophies belong to the past and have no future. The future belongs to human-centered values.

Spirituality is relevant to all of us in our daily lives. During 1940, patriotism was the spirit of the British people. For India, it was breathing freedom without taking recourse to war in 1947. Refusal to surrender was a spiritual moment for the European nations during World War II. Thus, we see that any social problem can be solved. As for E.U, the greatest step it took was when it formed itself very much like the American union in 1865 after victory in the civil war. When the depression hit the U.S in 1929, FDR displayed spiritual courage in taking the steps he did to conquer the depression. The winning of Freedom by India was a clear demonstration of the relevance of spiritual principles at work. Green Revolution was one more demonstration of this point. Present-day problems look formidable when we know that world leadership as such does not exist. Spiritual law says that attacking the problem straight may end up energizing it rather than destroying it. So it would be wise to focus our energies on strengthening counter measures to the evils that the world is facing today. The world has successfully fought and tried to eliminate such evils as epidemics, terrorism and violence, hot and cold war etc. Commensurate with these achievements, the stature of man has also risen. In spite of all adverse criticisms, it can safely be said that the world is a much better place to live in today than a century ago. Instead of energizing the evils that exist today, let us as a countermeasure enhance our human rights. We can issue a call to Muslim women to come out in the open and assert their human rights. Environmental groups such as Green Cross are worried about availability of water which is a legitimate worry. Its availability can be enhanced if we choose to pay more attention to water. In Tamil Nadu, a lot of water is wasted in agriculture. The state government chose to conduct an experiment to recharge the aquifer in all the towns. Building rain-water harvesting devices was made compulsory in all households. Tamil Nadu normally gets 40" of rain per year. But in the next year after the scheme was implemented, Tamil Nadu got 80" of rain which was simply double. This perfectly proves the power of the spiritual principle of attention.

In conclusion we can say that the present problems faced by the world are the result of shortcomings of our mentality such as narrow outlook, lack of adaptability, lack of wide-ranging vision and ignorance of our inherent potential. Spiritual principles have no such shortcomings and exhibit the very opposite of these qualities. They are comprehensive in outlook, highly adaptable, have a long-range and multifaceted vision and are abundantly productive. We have seen so far that rational approaches to solving the world's problems are not yielding any promising results. If so, it is advisable that humanity looks for solution in the direction of suprarational approaches and as such spiritual values and principles which are suprarational eminently deserve consideration.

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