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AN APPRAISAL OF THE ADVAITIC SPIRITUALITY OF SISTER VANDANA FROM A DALIT PERSPECTIVE

Submitted by

Student ID: AA2476

A Thesis submitted to the Senate of Serampore College
in the Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Theology

March 2014

To

The Downtrodden Dalits

Who are

Crying for

A

Holistic Spiritual Renewal

ABREVIATION

AJTR	=	*Arasaradi Journal of Theological Reflection*
BCE	=	Before Common Era
Brhd Upa.	=	Brihado Upanishad
BTESSC	=	The Board of the Theological Education Senate of Serampore College
CDS	=	Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies
CE	=	Common Era
cf. (confer)	=	Compare
Chand Upa.	=	Chando Upanishad
CIIS	=	Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies
CISRS	=	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society
CLS	=	Christian Literature Society
Co.	=	Company
CSS	=	Christava Sahithya Samithi
DP	=	Dharmaram Publication
ed.	=	Editor
eds.	=	Editors
Eph.	=	Letter to the Ephesians
et. al. *(et alii)*	=	And others
etc. *(et cetera)*	=	And others of the same class
Exo.	=	Book of Exodus
f., ff.	=	and the following pages
FTR	=	*Faith Theological Review*
i.e. *(id est)*	=	That is to say
Gal.	=	Letter to the Galatians
ICC	=	International Critical Commentary
ISPCK	=	Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
ITS	=	*Indian Theological Studies*
Jn.	=	Gospel of John
Ltd.	=	Limited
LXX	=	Septuagint
NBD	=	New Bible Dictionary
NT	=	New Testament
NY	=	New York
OT	=	Old Testament
Phil.	=	Letter to the Philippians
Pvt.	=	Private
Rom.	=	Letter to the Romans
SATHRI	=	South Asia Theological Research Institute
SC	=	Scheduled Caste
SPCK	=	Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge

Sr.	=	Sister
St.	=	Saint
ST	=	Scheduled Tribe
s.v.	=	See under the heading
TDOT	=	*Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*
trans.	=	Translator
TWT	=	Third World Theologians
UK	=	United Kingdom
USA	=	United States of America
UTC	=	United Theological College
VJTR	=	*Vidyajyothi Jounal of Theological Reflection*
Vol., vols.	=	Volume, volumes
WCC	=	World Council of Churches
Wm. B. Eermdmans	=	William B. Eerdmans

Abbreviations of the books of the Bible have not been included. They are the same as given in the Bible: Revised Standard Version, Second edition, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc. (1946), 1971, ix.

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ABSTRACT

Title: An Appraisal of the advaitic Spirituality of Sister Vandana from a Dalit Perspective

Statement of the Problem: Sr. Vandana's Advaitic Spirituality seems to be narrow and one sided that it does not address the issue of *Dalit* discrimination and oppression by the Brahminic tradition. This necessitates a *Dalit* reading of her spirituality. This is an attempt to make a critical response to her exclusive Advaitic spirituality from a *Dalit* perspective.

Elaboration of the Problem: The study here attempts to appraise the explorations of Sr. Vandana's advaitic spirituality in the light of Dalits understanding of spirituality. At the outset it may be stated that Sr. Vandana's spirituality lacks depth in understanding the plight of the Dalits in their life of deprivation and discrimination.

Sr. Vandana in her explorations focuses on the advaitic form of spirituality as that which can project the Gospel in the Indian context as it stresses the spiritual experiences encountered in the depths of mystical experience which is a historical. As mystical and spiritual experiences are universal and are experienced as such in all religions, Sr. Vandana attempts in her ashramic/ advaitic spirituality experiences the depth of Christian spirituality.

Sr. Vandana however, approaches spirituality from different angles in her explorations. While choosing the advaitic mysticism as the most compatible on in the Indian context, Sr. Vandana locates its flowering in an ashramic existence of meditation, contemplation and exclusive living for others welfare. As such, though her advaitic form of spirituality and the ashramic existence have been termed elitist and exclusive form of Christian living in the Indian context, Dalits have found it incongruent with their plight and living.

Dalits have been leading a marginal existence for ages on the fringes of society from the caste communities suffering discrimination, deprivation, exploitation and poverty among other forms of suffering. They have suffered as those who are discriminated on the terms of purity-pollution syndrome that characterizes the caste system in India and as such endorsed and given sanction by religion in a hierarchical socially stratified society. Dalits therefore need a way out of this morass of suffering towards a liberation and freedom that the caste configuration the Hindu religious system has denied. They need to exercise their right to opt out of 'outcaste' category and live as free citizens in India.

Conversion into Buddhism and Christianity provided a way out but with certain limitations. To their horror, Dalits found the caste distinctions continuing in their converted

state and thus they suffered continually there as well. Thus the question of advaitic spirituality whether it has a way out for the Dalits in their plight?

Sr. Vandana's spirituality has been termed as ashramic spirituality in all her works which is understood as a model of inculturation. The present research is therefore an attempt to see the relevance of this particular model of inculturation in the Indian context. From another perspective, it looks at the aspiration and dreams of the Dalits as to their understanding of a holistic spirituality.

Sr. Vandana's explorations in to spirituality more so of the ashramic/ advaitic spirituality harps on the Brahminic category of understanding mystical experience with an exclusive living of contemplation, seem to run astray from the materialist understanding of the Dalits as a community in distress. Dalits spirituality seems to rise out of the injustice done to them in terms of religion, society and politics through the ages. Sr. Vandana's advocacy of spirituality is one passive in bringing about social justice as well it is curative in its action than being preventive of the injustice done to Dalits. Her advocacy of social action is limited and selective and thus fails to appeal to the Dalits. Their's is a spirituality of combat - a fight against injustice and a fight for the rights as free citizens of India.

Previous research done in this area confines itself to explorations of Sr. Vandana's experiments with spirituality, ashramic existence, her attempts at inculturation and indigenization. No study as such has been made of her explorations in the light of Dalit plight and spirituality. Here is an attempt to appraisal of Sr. Vandana's ashramic/ advaitic spirituality in the light of Dalit suffering of injustice to find a way out for their liberation in adopting advaitic spirituality.

The study as such is limited to the explorations of Sr. Vandana's advocacy of ashramic/ advaitic spirituality in her works and writings. Dalit spirituality is explored to find parallels in ashramic spirituality in the advaitic mould as its efficacy in alleviating dalits suffering.

The study contains three chapters with a conclusion. The first chapter entitled *Understanding of Spirituality in General*, deals with the understanding of spirituality, in each of the religious systems in India such as in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity etc., concluding with a summary. The second chapter, *Advaitic Spirituality of Sr. Vandana* deals with her works and her explorations into spirituality, ashramic existence and advaitic experiences etc. The third chapter, *Appraisal of Sr. Vandana's Spirituality from a Dalit perspective*, attempts to appraise Sr. Vandana's spirituality from a Dalit perspective with a Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

0.1. Statement of the Problem

Sister Vandana's *Advaitic* Spirituality seems to be narrow and one sided that it does not address the issue of *Dalit* discrimination and oppression by the Brahminic tradition. This necessitates a *Dalit* reading of her spirituality. This is an attempt to make a critical response to her exclusive *Advaitic* spirituality from a *Dalit* perspective.

0.2. Elaboration of the Problem

Sister Vandana[1] adopts an ashramic pattern of *Indian Spirituality* (Mysticism) as the best medium for expressing the Christian Gospel. Sister Vandana focused[2] on spiritual realities encountered in the depths of mystical experience which are historical. She is convinced that the Spirit is to be experienced at least through the mystical traditions of all religions and that it is the mystical dimensions of Christianity that need to be stressed in the Indian context. As a woman theologian, Sister Vandana is also attracted to *Shakti* images of the Spirit. Sister Vandana's thought is remarkably eclectic, drawing on much different elements from Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Judaism tribal religions, and Zoroastrianism, the religion of her birth.

---

[1] Vandana was born as Gool Dhalla in Bombay on 13 September 1924 to a Parsi family. Her Zoroastrian up-bringing in a Hindu milieu facilitated her later inter-faith dialogue. She was immediately attracted to "the Spirit" of the first eight nuns who were highly educated in a western sense and yet- to her surprise- promoted Indian culture and supported Indian Independence. Vandana changed her name Gool Mary Dhalla to Vandana (meaning"Prayer"). Vandana traces the history of the Spirituality of the Sacred Heart from St Anselm and St Bernard through medieval mystics, to its incorporation in Jesuit spirituality, and to the emergence of orders, like her own, dedicated to the sacred Heart. Vandana's theology of the Spirit is revealed through her writings promoting Christian ashrams, her discourse on Spirituality, and her efforts in theology of religions, which we shall consider below. For more, Kirsteen Kim, "Mission in the Spirit," *The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003).

[2] Kirsteen Kim, "Mission in the Spirit," *The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003).

Sister Vandana approaches Spirituality from different perspectives. While choosing *Advaitic* mysticism as the most compatible one in the Indian context, her works could be cited as elitistic in nature. In the mid 1970s, her *Find Your Roots and Take Wing* shows how Sister Vandana quickly latched on to the new thinking about 'inculturation,' which she defines as 'allowing the Gospel to take root in the culture.'[3] Her spirituality is found to be inadequate and insufficient, not taking Indian social political reality seriously, especially the marginal issues. The researcher will critically look into her interpretation of *Advaitic* Spirituality and its relevance to *Dalit*s in India.

0.3. Significance of the Problem

Sister Vandana's Spirituality is acknowledged as Ashramic spirituality which is understood as a model for inculturation. The present research is, therefore, an attempt to see relevance of this particular model of inculturation in the Indian context. From another angle, it looks at the aspirations of *Dalit*s for an integral and Holistic Spirituality.

Dalit issues such as exploitation, caste, and colour and status discrimination are vibrant today. It seems that Sister Vandana's Brahminic colour of spirituality has over looked such issues. This research is, therefore, intended to critically look at Sister Vandana's spirituality through a *Dalit* perspective taking into account the emerging *Dalit* concerns.

0.4. Scope and Limitation

Sister Vandana's work falls in to several categories: arguments for inculturation in the form of ashrams, handbooks of spiritual exercises, devotional reflections on spiritual and biblical themes, and academic discourse on spirituality.

[3] Kirsteen Kim, *Mission in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Indian Christian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 111.

However, this study will primarily focus on Sister Vandana's *Advaitic* Spirituality and its different philosophical orientations and influence from all her works published in India and the West.

0.5. Previous Research

Even though there are a few books on this subject, the study in this field is a new venture. Kirsteen Kim in his book *Mission in the Spirit* gives importance for articulating Sister Vandana's concept of Mystical Spirituality within a Pneumatological framework. Her writing *Find Your Roots and Take Wing, gives also a notable picture on Spirituality.* As far as the knowledge of the researcher is concerned, no one has so far done a research exclusively on Sister Vandana's *Advaitic* Spirituality and its relevance for articulating a holistic spirituality from a *Dalit* perspective.

0.6. Method of study

This is a critical and analytical study based on library research using primary and secondary sources on Sister Vandana's Mystical spirituality.

0.7 Outline

This research is divided into three chapters. First chapter is discussing about ***Understanding Spirituality in General***, what is spirituality, the history of spirituality, different religious understandings of spirituality, especially Hindu understandings, Buddhist understandings, Islamic understandings, and Sikh's understandings. The end of this chapter is dealing with the Christian understandings of spirituality or the Biblical understandings of spirituality.

Second chapter, ***Advaitic Spirituality of Sr. Vandana***, is dealing with the methodology of the research. The *advaitic* spirituality of Sister Vandana is the main focus. Her life situations influenced her understandings of spirituality and this area

deals with the life and her influences. The ashramic life was the main formative factor of her theology. She always focuses on the spiritual perspectives of the life than the material. For that she found the *Advaita* as better than any other.

Third chapter, ***Appraisal of Sr. Vandana's Spirituality from a Dalit Perspective: Theological Reflection***, is dealing with the situation of Dalits in the Indian scenario. Dalit Understanding of Spirituality such as the Spirituality of Liberation, Spirituality of Human dignity and Involvement, Spirituality of Justice and Empowerment, Spirituality of Ecological sustainability is also dealt. Dalit understandings of *Advaitic* Spirituality, an alternate approach in Spirituality, i.e., the holistic approach, theological approach is also discussing here with final conclusion.

CHAPTER- ONE

UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUALITY IN GENERAL

Introduction

Spirituality is a religious term and it is understood differently in different religions. In this chapter an attempt is made to identify some of the features of Spirituality. The first section tries to define what spirituality is and how spirituality is generally understood by looking at its various dimensions. This will be followed by a discussion on Christian understanding of spirituality leading to a holistic understanding of spirituality in general.

1.1. Understanding Spirituality in general

Spirituality is a complex and a much misunderstood term. The term implies matters pertaining to the Spirit. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition), defines spirituality as "the quality or condition of being spiritual; attachment for things of the Spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests." With similar implication, but more comprehensively, Margaret Chatterjee defines spirituality as 'the relation between the inferiority of the person and the transcendence of the divine that can be changed in various ways.... in each case a particular style of religious life will ensue, or rather, be enjoined on man. It is this style that later generations called spirituality'.[4]

Spirituality is primarily concerned with the Spirit. It is the movement of the Spirit and its work. It is a movement in and towards total freedom (from where he comes, where he goes no one knows). It is a life of the Spirit in the people according

[4] S. Robertson, *Approaching Religion in a Pluralistic Context* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2009), 70.

to the Spirit. It is the life of those who are imbued and charged with the Spirit, possessed and permeated by it, led and guided by the Spirit and the Spirit alone. It is a life that is lived in the awareness of the indwelling Spirit and all- pervading Spirit (*Jivatman- Paramatman, Atman-Brahman*). It is coupled with the all-round detachment and continuous transcendence till the realization of the ultimate goal.[5]

"Spirituality," according to K. P. Aleaz, is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit in us and in the whole creation." Another significant dimension of spirituality is being available to God.[6] Aleaz writes about the comprehensive content of spirituality as "a wholesome spirituality that has three aspects, namely passion for Justice, compassion for people and communion with God.[7]

1.2. Religious understandings of Spirituality

1.2.1. Hindu Spirituality

The history of the religion of the Hindus does not closely follow the political history of India. The political history is generally divided into three periods—the Hindu, the Muslim, and the British. Following this principle and admitting that there is no hard and fast line between one period and another, one may say that there are three periods in the history of Hinduism, the ancient, the medieval, and the modern. The ancient period ends with the establishment of Sankara's system of Advaita philosophy and the final triumph of Hinduism over Buddhism and Jainism in the ninth century. The medieval period opens with the consolidation of the bhakti (devotional) systems in the teachings of Ramanuja and Madhva and comes to a close when the

[5] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: National Catechetical And Liturgical Centre, 1982), 37.
[6] Cited in V.J. John, Ed., *Many Ways of Pluralism- Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz* (Kolkata: ISPCK, 2010), 52.
[7] Cited in V.J. John, Ed., *Many Ways of Pluralism- Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz*, 52.

bhakti movement exhausts itself about the middle of the eighteenth century. The modern period begins with the new reform movements in Hinduism, such as the *Brahmo Samaj* founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1830.[8]

Thus, we say, Hindu Spirituality proposes a variety of means or paths for the spiritual pilgrimage of the spiritual aspirant (*sadhaka)* to the ultimate goal *(Sadhya)*. These means are technically known as paths *(margas)* or spiritual efforts for integration (*Yogas*), or as concentrated and concerted endeavour (*Sadhana).* Thus, the spiritual means of devotion may be designated as *bhakti-marga*, *bhakti-yoga or bhakti-Sadhana.* The word, "*Sadhana*," would evoke in the mind of an Indian the image of a detached and determined person who has totally and intensely dedicated his/her life to achieve a particular skill or expertise in a particular occupation.[9]

1.2.1.1. Spirituality in Three margas

1.2.1.1.1. Jnana Marga:- *Marga* means Path (*Karma, Jnana and Bhakti*, etc). *Jnana marga* aims at *Brahma Sakshatkara* (realization of Brahman). The antecedent to this is *Dhyana*- meditation and *Upasana*- continued meditation. (Upa= near+as =sit) to wait upon.

Jnana (Knowledge) consists of three aspects.

1. Knowledge of Brahman as the ultimate reality.
2. The world is Maya (unreal)
3. Individual self and the universal self are not two.

Aranyakas and Upanishads (1000-500 BCE) form the section of knowledge (*Jnana-Kanda)*. They, especially the Upanishads, revolted against the ritualism of the Vedas and Brahmanas. Upanishads proposed the knowledge of oneself

[8] Kenneth W. Morgan,*ed., The Religion of The Hindus* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna, Bangalore, Madras: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 27-28.
[9]Augustine Thottakara, cmi, *Indian Spirituality* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005), 96.

and of the ultimate Reality as the means for eternal bliss and freedom.[10]

Sankara's Advaita Vedanta gave a philosophical understanding of *Jnana Marga.*

1.2.1.1.2. Bhakti Marga:- Bhakti marga means way of living devotion.

Effects of Bhakti: 1. It destroys sin, 2. It gives true wisdom, 3. It confesses union and conformity with God, 4. It reaches its consummation in Mukti.[11]

Definitions of Bhakti: "That *(bhakti)* indeed, is of the nature of the supreme love of God. And the intrinsic nature of divine love is that it is in the form of immortal bliss" (Narada- bhakti- Sutra, 2-3). "It *(bhakti)* is the absolute love for God" *(Sandilya-bhakti-sura,* 1.1.2).[12]

The poet saints of the great Bhakti movements carried the message of the Gita into every Indian home. The redeeming power of the love of god was sung by the Chaitanya movement in Bengal, by the Swami Narayan movement in Gujarat, and especially by the great Bhakti saints in Maharashtra, like Dhyanadev, Namdev, and Tukaram.[13]

1.2.1.1.3. Karma Marga:- Karma marga is the way of action. That is to please God through actions and thus attain realization of God. It emphasises on doing one's own duty-duties in relation to family, society and world.

Karma Marga is the search for a solution to a problem both ancient and modern, Hindu and Christian, a universal problem. Karma Marga is the result of 3500 years' effort of finding a solution to a perennial problem that confronts people of all centuries and all cultures.[14] In the origin of Hindu tradition – from the Vedic times, roughly from the 15th to the 10th century B.C, this has 3 orders: cosmic, social and

[10]Augustine Thottakara, cmi, *Indian Spirituality*, 31-32.
[11]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality*, 169.
[12]Augustine Thottakara, cmi, Indian Spirituality144.
[13] Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community* (ANAND: Gujarat sahitya prakash, 1987), 150.
[14]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality*, 170.

human and all are integrated into a whole as a horizontal world-view. This world view has been the explanation for the meaning of liberation. In perfect harmony release is obtained. By conforming to cosmic and social orders, and by reflecting these in his life through the two fold Karmas, one gets release or liberation (moksha). In short one gets salvation through Karma.[15]

1.2.1.2. The sources of Spiritual strength in Hindu Tradition

The richness and spiritual depth from which the Christian religion can draw strength when it is rooted in Indian culture may be summed up in three terms: Sadhana, Advaita, and Satyagraha.

1.2.1.2.1. Sadhana: - Sadhana means striving after perfection. A distinct mark of Hindu Spirituality throughout the ages is the clear sightedness with which man's ultimate aim, his *paramartha,* has been discerned and the resolute consistency and the joyful enthusiasm with which it has been persuaded.[16]

1.2.1.2.2. Advaita: - Advaita means not two. Advaita philosophy holds that God and we are not two; that God and we are one. For nothing can be added to him who is the infinite Being. 'Infinite plus one' is a contradiction. God, as the *Advaita* philosophy holds, is 'the one without a second'.[17] The Advaita doctrine enables us to see God in everything, and everything in God and thus enables us to discern the true dignity of man since in every particular 'you' becomes transparent. *Advaita* philosophy discovers the wisdom and glory of the supreme spirit in the resplendent facts of nature.[18]

1.2.1.2.3. *Satyagraha: -* Spirituality remains sterile unless it takes recourse in action. The best-known movement inspired by the Hindu tradition, inspired by *Sadhana* and

[15]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality*, 171.
[16]Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community*, 223.
[17]Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community*, 224.
[18]Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community…*, 224.

advaita, is Satyagraha, the way in which India gained its independence. *Satyagraha* literally means clinging to the truth. It is a way of fighting injustice and oppression without using violence, without bearing hatred and ill-will.[19] Mahatma Gandhi got the inspiration for *Satyagraha* from his own Indian tradition which taught him that there was a divine spark in man. Relying on this divine element in man Gandhi was convinced that *Satyagraha,* if it is genuinely non-violent, will be infallibly successful.[20]

1.2.1.3. Yogas and Sadhanas for Spirituality

The Sadhanas by which the wholeness and harmony of man can be realised at the core (siddhi) is called Yoga. Its eight fold discipline (ashtanga yoga) are the universal and comprehensive sadhanas. The 8 elements of yoga are: *Pranayama* (regulation of breath), *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (fixation of mind), *dhyana* (meditation) and *Samadhi* (complete quiet).[21]

In Indian tradition Yoga is said to be a universal *Sadhana* embracing all aspects of life while sublimating it to a divine place of experience. The psychosomatic discipline of Yoga is attuning oneself to nature, Nature's ingredients in Man and Harmony as the Yogic Siddhi (Realization).[22]

1.2.1.4. Darsanas and Spirituality

The six-fold view-points of the Reality (*darsanas*), the one, total and integral reality (of God, man and the world) which we referred to above can be seen and perceived from different angles. There can be, therefore, as many perceptions and readings, interpretations and understanding as there are 'points of view' (*darsanas*).[23] These six *darsanas* teach the knowledge that leads to cognition and liberation. For

[19]Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community…,* 225.
[20]Hans Staffner, S.J. *Jesus Christ And The Hindu Community…*, 225.
[21]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…*, 158.
[22]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 182.
[23]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality*, 157.

knowledge of Indian culture and spirituality, a study of the *darsanas* is indispensable. They originate in the Vedas followed after in the Brahmanas and the Upanishads and developed in the *vedantic* period. These are: the *Vaisesika*, the *Nyaya*, the *Samkhya*, the Yoga, the *Mimamsa* and the Vedanta.[24]

1.2.1.5. Hindu View of Man

Probably the most basic beliefs of the Hindu religion are *karma-samsara* and *caste* (*varnasrama dharma)*. According to the principle of *karma-samsara* the soul (*atma*) is immortal, but the actual individual in whom for the moment the soul is incarnated is of no great account.[25] The soul is certainly of great significance, and a man will be greatly concerned about its future; but the actual human existence, the fate of *this* man, *this* family in *this* place is comparatively unimportant. This view is combined with a doctrine of fate or destiny (*prarabdha)* which means that there is little a man can do to improve his own or others' lot. And so the tendency of traditional Hinduism is towards a fatalism little concerned to change or reform the world. The fact that the supreme manifestation of God, the absolute Brahman, is impersonal, beyond good and evil and beyond all qualities, help to confirm the idea that the fate of the individual person is of little account.[26]

1.2.2. Buddhism

Buddhism should be considered as a development in the history of opposition to Brahmanism and Vedism. Referring to this earlier tradition, Cowell is right in saying that 'the arguments against sacrifice are the very arguments used by Buddhists.' Burnout remarked that 'it is an old Buddhist retort.[27] The popular appeal

[24]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…*, 157.
[25]R. H. S.Boyd, *Khristadvaita Theology for India* (Madras; The Christian Literature Society 1977), 69.
[26] R. H. S. Boyd, *Khristadvaita Theology for India…*, 69.
[27] T.S. Wilkinson and M. M. Thomas, eds., *Ambedkar and The Neo-Buddhist Movement* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for The Study of Religion and Society, 1972), 8.

of Buddhism was in its concentration of attention on the spiritual preoccupations of the common man. Ordinary people could not appreciate the esoteric ritualism of the Brahmins. Buddhist literature contains prolonged invectives against the malpractices of Brahmins for the sake of gaining money and prestige. In contrast, Buddhist teaching was simple and ethical.[28]

1.2.2.1. Teaching of Buddhism

Buddhism has three articles of its faith, namely, *anattavada* (soul-lessness), *ksamkavada* (momentariness) and *dukkha* (suffering). These norms of faith (dogmas) were quite revolutionary at the time they were preached. The heart of the Buddha's teaching lies in the four noble truths. Buddha was a realist and a great humanist. He always preached on welfare, peace and happiness of the human beings.[29]

1.2.2.2. Concept of God

In Buddhism there are two schools, i.e. Hinayana and Mahayana. Hinayana school is fundamentally non theistic and does not accept one personal God as the Ultimate Reality. According to this school, there is no God. If there are no supernatural agencies, then it is useless to depend on them. But Mahayana school believes in the reality. As regards the existence of God, Buddha maintained silence because he did not want that his faith should ever become a prey to controversy of any sort. Any concept of Supreme God, or worship of Him in any ritualistic form, is for him totally unnecessary for liberation. Although the concept of God was excluded from his path to liberation, Buddha never argued against it. Buddha's question is not about weather God exists or not, but whether belief in Him has any relevance to man's immediate problems.[30]

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[28] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition* (Bangalore: Dharmaram college, 1969), 46.
[29] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 88.
[30] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 88.

1.2.2.3. Concept of Man

Man's position, according to Buddhism, is Supreme. Human being is his/her own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny. Buddha thought that the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief, which has no corresponding reality. The theory of *Karma* taught that man is the maker of his own destiny and that he should not look to the supernatural agency for his betterment.[31]

Gautama Siddhartha started from the legitimate aspirations of man and showed that all of them could be fulfilled only by righteous conduct and by the quest of the ultimate meaning of life. If one should desire to become popular, to receive the necessaries of life, to do good to others, to conquer discontent and lust, to be victorious over danger and dismay, and "to realize the hopes of those spiritual men who live in the bliss which comes, even in this present world", then, "let him fulfil all righteousness, let him be devoted to that quietude of the heart which springs from within, let him not drive back the ecstasy of contemplation, let him look through things, let him be much alone". This shift of emphasis from conformity to caste rules and social propriety to personal righteousness and quietude of the heart was practically the liberation of the common people, the low castes and the outcastes from the hegemony of the Brahmins.[32]

1.2.2.4. Concept of Soul

Anattavada holds that there is no permanent soul. Hence there is no God or gods. The common belief is that there is a permanent substance in human beings. This substance is known as soul. All the beings of our world-including ourselves are impermanent and therefore cause sorrow when we cling to them. The foundation of

[31] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 88
[32] John B. Chethimattam,,*Dialogue in Indian Tradition…*, 46-47.

this delusion is the belief in a permanent, grasping self-underlying experiences. Buddha denies the existence of the soul. He encourages his disciples to give up the false idea of the self.[33]

Rebirth is, therefore, not the migration of the same soul into another body. It is rather causation of the next life by the present. That of an unbroken stream of consciousness, thus, replaces the conception of a soul here. As the present state of consciousness inherits its characters from previous ones, the past in a way continues in the present, through its effect. Memory thus becomes explicable even without a soul.[34]

1.2.2.5. The Theory of Karma

The present existence of an individual is, according to this doctrine, the effect of its past; and its future would be the effect of its present existence. This is clear from the origin of suffering in the light of the theory of dependent origination. The law of *karma* is only a special form of the more general law of causation as conceived by Buddha.[35]

The law of *karma* is seen as a natural law inherent in the nature of things, like a law of physics. God does not operate it since all the deities are under its sway. Good and bad rebirths are not, therefore, seen as 'rewards' and 'punishments', but as simply the natural results of certain kinds of action. A moral life is not necessarily immediately followed by a good rebirth, if a strong evil action of a past life has not yet brought its results, or a dying person regrets having done good, good actions produce good results and bad actions produce evil results.[36]

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[33] V. S. Lalrinawma, "*Major Faith Traditions of India*", (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 88-89.
[34] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 89.
[35] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 89.
[36] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 89-90.

1.2.2.6. World

The word *Sangha* is a common noun found in Sanskrit, *Pali*, and the various Prakrit languages, meaning 'assemblage'. For Buddhist, it has become the technical term for their religious community. *Sangha* literally means *samuha* or group. The *Sangha*, in the sense of the 'community' of monks and nuns with the Buddha as its teacher, originated as one of the groups of *Samanas*. The monastic discipline developed by the Buddha was designed to shape the *Sangha* as an ideal community, with the optimum conditions for spiritual growth. Its sustaining power is shown by the fact that no other human institution has had such a long-lasting continuous existence, along with such a wide diffusion, as the Buddhist *Sangha*.[37]

1.2.2.7. The Philosophy of Buddhism

Buddhism has a very simple philosophy, summarised in three words: *anatman, anitya,* and *duhkha:* there is no permanent individual soul; everything is feeling and non-eternal; life itself is beset with suffering. This existence itself is a composite of parts, all arising out of craving: owing to ignorance and conditioned by it, there originate the *Samskari,* the dynamic residue of actions.[38]

The spirit behind this missionary zeal was the universal love, which was the core of Buddha's message. *Karma* or compassion for the suffering humanity persuaded Gautama to leave his royalty in search of a way of liberation, and after his illumination prodded him on his long-preaching journeys to communicate his realization to all men. *Ahimsa*, or non-violence, was not a mere negative concept for him. It involved, *maitri*, loving kindness, for all men and friendship with the whole creation. As *Dhammapada* states, "Loving kindness puts an end to hatred. This is the eternal law." The Buddhist *Jataka* stories contain a good many tales that depict even

[37] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India…*, 97-98.
[38] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition…*, 49.

animals sacrificing themselves selflessly for the sake of others. These legends often exaggerate the heroism in order to accentuate the ideal of charity.

Similarly, the Buddhist idea of the *Samgha*, the monastic order, introduced a new sense of the community. In Hinduism, the Brahmin was too lonely a sage to be an integral part of the common people.[39]

1.2.2.8. The Buddhist Religious Tradition (Spirituality)

It is generally believed that Brahmanism and Buddhism have much in common. Some scholars are of opinion that Buddhism has been profoundly influenced by the beliefs and teachings of Brahmanism. Some of them go to the length of recognising Buddhism as an off-shoot of Brahmanism.[40]

The Buddha vehemently opposed the ceremonial and ritualistic observances of the times.[41] He opposed all forms of superstition and priest craft. In particular he rejected the idea of a cosmogenic principle and the caste system training and mental discipline leading to ultimate *Nirvana*.[42]

1.2.3. Islamic Spirituality

The Straight path of Islam requires submission to the will of God as revealed in the Qur'an, and recognition of Muhammad as the Messenger of God who in his daily life interpreted and exemplified that divine revelation which was given through him. The believer who follows that straight path is a Muslim.

The word, *Islam,* literally means "peaceful submission." It maintains a firm belief in the truth and justice of all that God has revealed in human history. In the Quran it is made clear that from most ancient times the word *Islam* has been used by all divine messengers and their followers as the name for their religion. Islam is thus,

[39] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition*…, 52.
[40] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, G. R. Singh (edt), "*Religious Traditions of India*" (Delhi: ISPCK,2006) 200.
[41] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, G. R. Singh (edt), "*Religious Traditions of India*", 200.
[42] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, G. R. Singh (edt), "*Religious Traditions of India*", 200.

the generic term applicable to every revealed religion so long as that religion is not altered by men. The Qur'an assures us of the intimate relation of its revelation to the previous revelations: "God has ordained for you religion which He has already commended to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus" (Surah XLII, 13)[43]

1.2.3.1. Fasting, a moral and spiritual exercise

It is one of the essentials of religion almost as universal as prayer. The Holy Quran says "You, who believe fasting, is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil)". In Islam, fasting is an institution which improves the moral and spiritual condition and it does not mean simply abstaining from food and drink of every description, but guarding oneself from every kind of evil. Fasting is a physical and moral exercise which brings passions under control, removes false sense of prestige, helps economy, greatly contributes to the preservation of health, teaches moral discipline, adds lustre to prayer and enhances faith in God, a living force.[44] Islam enjoins upon every adult Muslim, the duty of observing fast during the month of Ramzan every year.

1.2.3.2. Fasting Strengthens Spirituality

Fasting as a Spiritual exercise, as a period of penance or as a prelude to the receiving of Divine favour, has always been practised by all world communities. It is imperative for the well being of man as there is a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul. Ramadan provides him with the unique power to nourish both the material and spiritual aspects of man without detriment to one another.[45]

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[43] Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *Islam The Straight Path-Islam Interpreted by Muslims* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1998), 3-4.
[44] N Ravi, ed., *The Hindu Speaks on Religious values* (Chennai: Kasturi & Sons Ltd., 2005), 627-628.
[45] N Ravi, ed., T*he Hindu Speaks on Religious values*…, 630.

1.2.3.3. Foundations of Spirituality

1.2.3.3.1. The Quran:-Though Muhammad holds an important place in Islam yet his greatness is derived from the fact that he was chosen to be the messenger of God, through whom the Quran was delivered to mankind. For a Muslim the Quran literally is the word of God.

1.2.3.3.2. The Tradition of the prophet:-For the Muslim, the Quran is the complete book of law and guide given by God to man to direct every aspect of his life. However, as Islam expanded, new situations arose for which the simple legislation of the Quran was not adequate. So, shortly after the death of the prophet an oral law came to be recognized, called the *sunna* i.e. the 'custom' or 'usage' according to which the sayings and practices of the prophet were made to do the duty as a supplement to the Quran.[46]

*1.2.3.3.3. The Muslim Law:-*The revelation which God gave to men, through Muhammad according to the belief of the Muslims, contained adequate guidance and law to govern and direct every aspect of their lives. This law, contained in the Quran and the *hadith,* had to be further elaborated and specified to be applicable to every concrete situation of life. The complete law, thus, elaborated is the *Sharia,* the Quranic Law or the Muslim Law. The elaboration of the Law, from the sources of Quran and *hadith* is done either by means of consensus of the community (*ijma)* on a particular point or by analogy (*qiyas*) reasoning from a similar case which was specifically legislated for in the primary sources.[47]

Creation reflects the Unity of God's works for He is the real cause of all that is. He sustains the universe—even natural disasters such as earthquakes are part God's order. It all has a purpose. The Shari'ah includes the Five Pillars of Islam,

[46]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: National Biblical catechetical And Liturgical Centre, 1982), 187.
[47] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality*, 188-189.

which are obligatory for all Muslims: (1)The declaration of the faith, the Shahadah, (2)Prayer (*salat*) (3)Almsgiving (*zakat*) (4)Fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*) (5)Hajj: the pilgrimage to Mecca.[48]

1.2.3.4. Some Concepts about Human Spirit

i) There is no such thing spirit or *ruh* in human being. The physical body is made up of material elements and when the body dies, it is dissolved into the constituent elements, and that is the end of man.[49]

ii) According to another view the spirit is an additional element introduced into the physique of man that is made up of material elements. Without this spirit, the physical body of human being cannot be alive and active. The difference between life and death is caused by the presence or absence of this spiritual element. According to this concept, the spirit at the time of death leaves the body and enters another body, and takes the embodied existence again as a human being or as an animal, depending upon his/her good or bad actions during this life.[50]

iii) A third concept is that the spirit leaving the body at the time of death continues to exist in a spiritual world and waits for the Day of Judgment, when he (the spirit of the human being) will be called upon to give an account of his deeds, words and even intentions.[51]

1.2.3.5. Sufi Spirituality

Sufism, the name by which Islamic mysticism is usually known, gives maximum importance to activities of the inner self rather than to the observance of the external rituals of Islam. It is also sometimes called *tasawuf* (divine wisdom), which too indicates the inner and esoteric dimension of Islam. This is considered to be the

[48] Linda Edwards, *A Brief Guide To Beliefs-Ideas, Theologies, Mysteries, and Movements…*, 220.
[49] Augustine Thottakara, ed. *Islamic spirituality (Rome: Cdentre for Indian and Inter-religious studies[CIIS] and Bangalore: Dharmaram publications [DP], 1993),* 26-27.
[50] Augustine Thottakara, ed. *Islamic spirituality*…, 27.
[51] Augustine Thottakara, ed. *Islamic spirituality…*, 27.

noblest spiritual *tariqah* (path) for salvation by the Muslims. Sufism is certainly the most appealing and glorious aspect of Islam, though it is considered also as its most subtle element. Its greatness is to be appreciated in view of its contributions to the Islamic society, civilization and spirituality. However, for the vast majority of the orthodox Muslims a *sufi* is a devout Muslim who is respected for the depth of his religious life, even if all he does, believes and practises are not known, understood or approved of by the rest of community.[52]

1.2.3.5.1. <u>The Main Characteristics of Sufism: -</u> The entire system of Sufism centres around two questions: (i) How can man gain the experience of God's inward presence? The answer is: follow the *tariqah* (path). (ii) what is God's relation to the individuals and to the universe? The answer lies in the doctrine of *marifal* (Gnosticism), which describes God in terms of pantheistic and monistic philosophy and not in terms of monotheism of the Holy Qur'an.[53]

According to the Sufi understanding, every man has three main organs of spiritual communication: *qalb* (heart), *sir* (soul) and *ruh* (spirit). The heart, situated at the left side of the chest, of course, not the physical heart, is the seat of the intellect and is capable of knowing the essence of all things. The soul is located at the right side of the chest and its main function is to contemplate God. The spirit, which exists between the two, is the organ to love God.[54]

With regard to their speculations concerning God, the Sufis may be divided into two main groups: (i) The Pantheists to whom everything is God and has the same essence. To them the creed, "there is no god but God", means that besides Allah there is no existence. These are called *itlihadiya or wahdatu-'I-wu judiya* (Pantheists). (ii)

[52] Augustine Thottakara,ed., *Islamic spirituality*, ed., (Rome: centre for Indian and Inter- religious studies [CIIS] and Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications [DP], 1993), 73.
[53] Augustines Thottakara Edt,*"* Islamic spirituality*"*, 78.
[54] Augustine Thottakara Edt,*" Islamic spirituality"*, 78-79.

The *Ilhamiya*, for whom the existence of the universe and all that it contains is so far transcended by the reality of God that these things count for nothing. These conform to the monotheistic teaching of the Qur'an.[55]

From the philosophical point of view, God is pure being; but from the mystical and devotional point of view God is the absolute Beauty of which all earthly beauty is but a faint appearance. He is all beautiful and the whole universe is the mirror of His beauty.[56]

1.2.4. Sikhism

The religious movement of the Sikhs presents a unique phenomenon in the religious history of India. Started as a movement to reconcile the two major religions of India, Hinduism and Islam, it ended up in a new religious group, territorially, socially and politically circumscribed. Hence, it is a phenomenon not merely in the field of religious ideology and politics.[57]

Guru Nanak is acknowledged as the founder of the Sikh religion. But his nine successors in the office of *Guru*, especially Arjun (1563-1606) a contemporary of Akbar, and Govind Singh, the last of the *Gurus*, also played decisive roles in making Sikhism what it is. But to evaluate properly the nature of the interactions, pro-religious climate of the age has to be borne in mind.[58]

1.2.4.1. God

Sikhs affirm the ultimate supreme formless idea of God who is beyond human conception. Like Islam, Sikhism rejects the belief in *avatars* (divine manifestations), the caste system, and images to help worship. However, Sikhism accepts a belief in reincarnation, which is nearer to Hindu beliefs. Although Nanak became a guru, in

[55] Augustine Thottakara Edt,*" Islamic spirituality"*, 79.
[56] Augustine Thottakara Edt,*" Islamic spirituality"*, 79.
[57] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition*…, 122.
[58] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition*…, 122.

Sikhism the only true guru is God; other gurus are those through whom God speaks. At the beginning of the sacred book, the *Guru Granth Sahib,* there is a sacred chant called the *Mool Mantra*, which states Sikh belief in God. Every Sikh is expected to recite it daily.[59]

God "cannot be installed like an idol nor can man shape his likeness", said Nanak. Hearken to the Name of the Supreme, in unity and harmony with other men—such was the substance of Nanak's instructions. Simple openness to the grace of God is what is implied by "hearkening to the name". Through faith in the Divine Name, man can obtain the godliness of *Shiva*, *Brahma* and *Indra*, said Nanak; one can thereby learn the art of *Yoga*, and imbibe the whole Vedic wisdom, and reach the final enlightenment, in which the whole universe stands self-revealed.[60]

1.2.4.2. Mysticism

Guru Nanak practised a mysticism of love. He often described his relationship with God to be like that of a bride longing for her husband. Guru Nanak believed God to be present everywhere—that is, "as much in a worm as in an *elephant*". By means of God's grace, believer can enter into a deep inner awareness of his or her own nature, becoming one with God, the *Satguru*.[61]

1.2.4.3. The Nature of the World in Guru Granth Sahib

The concept of the world in the Granth is no different from what is commonly found in Hinduism. The world is created and destroyed at will by God, who watches over it from a trance-like state, through his creating of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh with three functions-to create, sustain and destroy the cosmos continually. It is illusion (*maya*) and a plaything of God. God lives the world away from Himself

[59] Linda Edwards, *A Brief Guide To Beliefs-Ideas, Theologies, Mysteries, and Movements…*, 165.
[60] John B. Chethimattam, *Dialogue in Indian Tradition*…, 124-125.
[61] Linda Edwards, *A Brief Guide To Beliefs-Ideas, Theologies, Mysteries, and Movements* (London: John Knox Press, 2001) 172.

through *Maya*, and humankind is attached to this world by three qualities (*gunas*) of matter; *rajas* (passion), *tamas* (darkness) and *Sattva* (goodness), which increase the love for earthly values.[62]

As the primal being God is the supporter and upholder of the earth. God's *dharma* sustains creation through its moral law. The Supreme Being is not the creator of this world but of many more worlds beyond. He cannot be installed like an idol. They who worship strange gods are considered accursed.[63]

1.2.4.4. Karma and Transmigration in Guru Granth Sahib

The doctrine of *Karma* in Sikhism is similar to doctrine of *Karma* in Hinduism. A person's present status (good or bad) is determined by his/her past deeds. A person fails to obtain salvation through good deeds and recourse to the name by the Guru's grace; he/she will fall back in to the cycle of births and re-birth 84 lakh times. This cycle of births and re-births can only be broken through the utterance of the True name by the help of the true guru.[64]

1.2.4.5. Soul or Atman

The soul or *Atman* is eternal. It is immortal and exists at one with God. Whether God abides in the soul, and God is monotheistic or monistic, is not absolutely clear. The egocentric self in human being is the temporal self-working within the limitations of intellect and the senses the real self, the *Atman*, is the spiritual self of human being, in which blazes the hidden light of God. God is the sole giver of the gift of *Gur Prasad*. No human endeavour can flex, influence or question God's will. Good works in the life are the result of God's grace. By Guru's grace, you do the good works. Alms and charity are not at par with contemplation of the Lord's name. Only with God's grace is obtained the name. It is better to submit to

[62] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 334.
[63] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 334.
[64] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 335.

God's will than indulging in good deeds to earn merit. Submitting to God's will, *hukam* is better than seeking merit by doing good deeds.[65]

1.2.4.6. Sikh Spirituality

The goal of spiritual progress according to Sikhism is absolute merger, blending or union of human soul with God. Therefore salvation is looked upon as deliverance (*mokhu*) or emancipation. This understanding implies the idea of deliverance from the cycle of transmigration and from *karma*.[66] The doctrine of grace occupies a crucial position in relation to salvation. The door to salvation is opened by God's grace. In His gracious glance is found the door of salvation (*nadir mokhu duar*). *Karma* only determines birth, but it is divine grace which leads the faithful towards salvation.[67] Good *karma* in itself cannot procure salvation nor do bad ones obstruct salvation. Divine grace is the ultimate deciding factor. However, Sikhism insists upon the superiority of inward devotion (*bhagati*) and inner cleansing. Superficial and external religion, consisting of pilgrimages, fasting, ceremonial bathing, alms-giving, vigorous ascetic discipline, social and caste status, ritual purity, mechanical observance of ritual, has no value as far as pursuit of spiritual progress is concerned.[68]

Guru Nanak elaborated the path of spiritual progress in terms of stages of *khands* in the *japuji*. These stages are *Dharam Khand* or the realm of performing moral duty; Gian Khand or the realm of knowledge; *Saram Khand* or the realm of effort; *karam khand* or the realm of fulfilment in which the joy of spiritual union begins to be experienced and finally the *Sach Khand* or the realm of Truth which is an

[65] V. S. Lalrinawma, *Major Faith Traditions of India*…, 321.
[66] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 324.
[67] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 324.
[68] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 324.

experience of permanent union with God. The ultimate stage is beyond description and can-only be experienced. It is the ultimate destiny of human existence.[69]

1.2.4.7. The Sikh Practices

Regarding a Sikh's personal discipline for spiritual progress, he or she should rise early in the morning, bathe and remember God. A Sikh should repeat the Lord's Name and read the *japuji* and *jap Sahib* in the morning. At sunset he should read the *Sodar Rahiras*. At night he should read the *Sohila* and recite the Sikh prayer called *Ardas*. These may be called a Sikh's personal observances of worship and devotion to God.[70]

A Sikh should also join the corporate singing of hymns to musical accompaniment of various instruments.[71] This singing may be punctuated with brief expositions of the scriptures and exhortation of spiritual advice.[72]

1.2.5. Christianity

1.2.5.1. What is Christian Spirituality?

Christian Spirituality is the "indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers empowering them to do the will of God". It should be life-sustaining as that of Jesus' own Spirituality, but should also be one that receiver's insights one drawn from other faith experiences. For instance, spiritual traditions and practices of Hinduism can contribute towards Christian Spirituality. The margas of knowledge, devotion and action, and the prayer of the name (Namajapa) are possible meeting points for Hindus and Christians. Hence, Christian Spirituality should be open to receive inspiration from other spiritual traditions. One may sincerely and fully accept

[69] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 325.
[70] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 325.
[71] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 325.
[72] P.S. Daniel, David C. Scott, and G. R. Singh, Eds., *Religious Traditions of India…*, 325.

another spiritual tradition without giving up one's own, and may even transcend the externals of religions there by touching upon the experience of other traditions.[73]

Spirituality is just as available as is salvation. The Word of God is very specific as to what it is, how to obtain it, and what it produces. In order to clear up the many misconceptions concerning this subject, it will be necessary to understand what spirituality is not, as well as what it is. In the broadest sense of the words, Spirituality is a relationship with God, the Holy Spirit just as Christianity is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A person is a Christian not because he is religious or because of something he has done but because he has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour through faith.[74]

a) Christian Spirituality or Christian life consists in the life of Committed Response in Faith as persons, community and people to God, revealing himself and inviting us to the ultimate goal of Liberation, Salvation and Communion in the reality and dynamism of our world and history in and through Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, centred on and culminating in the Christ-event.

b) It is a response under the guidance of the Spirit patterned on the normative human existence as lived by Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and expressed and realised before (OT) and after (NT) (the Bible) and in the unbroken traditions of the Church over the centuries in the concrete reality of today in varying measures, in persons, communities and peoples, witnessing to and embodying his normative lived human existence, and inserted in and constituting the history of salvation in which God's plan is unfolded and fulfilled and moving towards the kingdom while experiencing it, witnessing to it and proclaiming it.

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[73]Cited in V.J. John, ed., *Many Ways of Pluralism- Essays in Honour of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz* (Kolkata: ISPCK, 2010), 77-78.

[74] R.B. Thieme, Jr. *Spirituality By Grace* (Houston, Texas: Berachah Tapes Publications, 1971), 1.

c) Initiation to Christian Spirituality: Such a Spirituality calls for an initiation. It is a Catechesis or a prophetic ministry of the Christian community by which a group of Christians are enabled in a dynamic procedure and as a group with due respect for their freedom and under the guidance of the Spirit, to discern God's revealing and saving presence and to meet Him in the Spirit of Jesus Christ within their life-situation, environment and community to discover God's plan for themselves and for the world in the light of His word. Thereby, the community acknowledging Jesus as the revelation of the Father and the revelation of man surrenders itself to Him in faith, feels saved and reconciled, finds access to the father in the Spirit of Christ and realises communion with God and with one's sisters and brothers. This encounter, experience and discovery bring about the self-renewal of the person and of the faith –community and thought its witness and ministry the transformation of society. Such an existence announces and accelerates the coming of the kingdom.[75]

1.2.5.2. History of Christian Spirituality

The history of Christian Spirituality is not simply the chronological narration of events that had taken place in the spiritual life of the Christians and the Church down through the centuries. It is the Christian experience of the participation in the mystery of Christ. Of the individual Christians, communities and the whole Church this profound and deeply personal experience of the people of God in their encounter with the risen Lord in the Church, in different historical times, situation and cultures, influenced the life and history of the people and the world at large. The history of Christian Spirituality, thus, acquires a wider scope and meaning.[76]

The sources to the Christian spirituality lie in Old Testament spirituality, New Testament spirituality and in fact in the history of Christian tradition.

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[75] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: National Catechetical And Liturgical Centre,1982),37-39.
[76]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…*, 76.

1.2.5.2.1. Old Testament Spirituality

The Old Testament spirituality is essentially based on the experience of "the Divine" which encounters man and radically transforms him. There is a certain pattern that is discernible in the reactions of human beings when they are encountered by "the Divine": The encounter- man's fear- God's invitation of command – Man's hesitation or resistance- God's assurance – Man's surrender. The experience of "the Divine may also be brought under Hegelian categories: Thesis- Antithesis- synthesis- Action- Reaction- Growth, or even theological pattern as Revelation- Darkness- Clarification- Acceptance (faith).[77]

***The Transcendence and Holiness of God*:** Transcendence of God in itself is often described by the Bible as the Glory of God. The notion of Holiness may be considered as the consequence of God's transcendence in relation to other beings, as expressed in moral terms. Rudolf Otto "identifies the holy with the 'numinous', the mysterious quality of the divine, which he describes as 'wholly other', that which strikes man in the presence of the divine is the difference between the divine and the created. The effect of the numinous is twofold and paradoxical: it is 'tremendous', fearful, and so repels, but at the same time it is 'fascinating' and attracts man". The Transcendence as well as the Holiness of God has been experienced by some individuals and also by the people of Israel as a whole and this experience served as basis for their spirituality.[78]

1.2.5.2.2. New Testament Spirituality

In general in the New Testament, there are four aspects of the experience of God. These aspects of New Testament revelation of the divine are already sketched out in the Old Testament.

[77]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 64.
[78]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…*, 64.

1. There is the Transcendence God the wholly other.

2. There is the Immanence of God. For the great theologians of the New Testament this divine presence is mediated. It is communicated through the incarnation, (John), through the Paschal Mystery (Paul), and through the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, the Johanine Paraclete.

3. God is revealed as a Person. The economy of salvation involves an orchestration of three persons, described in the traditional formula: From the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

4. Finally God reveals Himself in the New Testament as a God who is love: He loves the world, loves His Son and loves the Church.[79]

1.2.5.2.3. Spirituality through the Centuries:

Primitive Christian Spirituality**:** The primitive Church was not an "institutionalised" Church with hierarchical structures, systematised theology and established patterns. It had a spirituality of its own with specific features. The early Christian Spirituality was eschatological, that is, eschatology was the main theological force that prompted and moved the primitive Church forward in its Spirituality.[80] A second Charismatic value of their Spirituality was Christo-centricism.[81]

Monastic Spirituality: *(3-8th century):* After the third century, when martyrdom was not immediately possible, people tried to find substitutes for martyrdom in virginity and asceticism. So they withdrew into wilderness and thus began monasticism. In the beginning it was simply a prolongation of the primitive Christian community as in Acts 2:42f- Community life with sharing of goods,

[79]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 68-69.
[80]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 76.
[81]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 76.

common prayer, Eucharistic liturgy, explanation of and meditation on the word of God.[82]

Medieval Spirituality: (9-15th century): Four religious orders left their mark strongly impressed on the spirituality of the medieval age: a) Benedictine order (Spirituality) b) canons Regular of St. Augustine c) the Franciscan order (Spirituality) and d) the Dominican order (spirituality).

Modern Spirituality: (15-19th century), Early Protestant Spirituality**:** The sixteenth century in Europe was a period of great change and upheaval. The middle Ages gave way to the beginnings of the modern period and a seemingly new world.[83] Our treatment of protestant Spiritualities of the sixteenth century has been limited here to Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist. Since the reformation in England came a little later than it did on the continent.[84] In protestant circles in England and on the continent from the late sixteenth into the eighteenth centuries. Anglican, Puritan, Quaker, Methodist, and Pietiest Spiritualities all made significant contributions. This would not be the case as the eighteenth century progressed. The later eighteenth century, a time of many profound changes, would witness very little in the way of new developments in Spirituality. The French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the rise of rationalism, and enlightenment did not provide the climate or soil for Spirituality to flourish.[85]

In Post enlightenment period, the increasing secularization of society in the nineteenth century and the profound changes that took place influenced the development of religious life and Christian Spirituality at this time.[86]

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[82]D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 77.
[83] Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage* (New York: ALBA.HOUSE,2008), 229.
[84]Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage…*, 243.
[85]Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage…*, 339.
[86]Charles J. Healey, SJ. *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage* , 369.

The Pentecostal movement that emerged in the early twentieth century had a number of historical roots. There was, of course, the scriptural witness of the out pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christians as described in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. There were also the influences that flowed from the various groups connected with the Pietist tradition as well as the Revivalism that flowered in the United States in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[87]

Pentecostalism represents a grass root spiritual movement rather than a noble theological construction. It has not so much produced a new theology as a new kind of spirituality. Veli-Matti Karkkainen makes a pertinent observation about the Pentecostal spirituality: "Pentecostalism has (re) introduced a dynamic, enthusiastic type of spirituality to the modern church. The focus of Pentecostal spirituality is experiencing God Mystically as supernatural. The category of experience is essential to understanding the spirituality of Pentecostals and thus their worship".[88] Human beings are spiritual creatures. The word "Spirit" comes from a word meaning "breath". The presence of life, and therefore God, has been associated with breath through much of humanity's evolution of consciousness. [89] Spirituality means more than to be capable of receiving God into our lives. It means that we are called to know God. One way of describing the act of knowing is to say that to be a *bearer* of the word of God. Be careful how we think of the "word of God". Here it means no more than God's self discourse. God communicates himself to us and we can receive that communication.[90]

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[87]Charles J. Healey, SJ. *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage*, 372.
[88] Mathew C. Vargheese, "Word and Spirit: Reflections and Pentacostal spirituality", Manakala: Faith theological Review, Faith Theological Seminary Vol.9, No.1, (January/2006). 78.
[89] Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality- An Analytical Introduction* Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing,2002), 1.
[90]Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality- An Analytical Introduction*, 1.

1.2.5.3. A Holistic understanding of Spirituality

The world view that one discovers and assimilates when prayerfully reads through the Bible is comprehensive of the total reality and hence truly universal and holistic. A Spirituality that emerges out of it and is nourished by it cannot but be healthy and offer all-round well-being. At a deeper level it will resound with other authentic spiritualities. For the Spirit is in the depth of one's being which is the ground of God and the ground of others. Like the current all realities can be inter-related in depth. Where the Spirit is there is freedom and wholeness: moksha and shanthi. [91]

In the Biblical world view--- God and man, the Church and the world--- the four realities are related not as four separate and opposed realities, but as immanent to one another and making a single whole, though they remain distinct and maintain their identity with openness and dialogue, inter-action and transformation, solidarity and collaboration. This relationship is synthetic and coherent, dynamic and integrating.[92]

The experience of Christ in the faith community also makes us aware of mankind's unknown needs, chiefly liberation from sin, from all its forces and consequences, and from various forms of alienation and frustration. Sin is the root cause of its difficulties and problems, of its struggles and tensions and of its state of injustice and oppression. It also reveals to us that the ultimate remedy to those ills is salvation in Jesus Christ: openness and existence for others, by self gift and self – sacrifice, in genuine love and humble service. Thus Christian experience sheds light

[91] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 54.
[92] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 54.

on all the data of human existence, opens out its many dimensions, indicates its implications and spells out its exigencies in all directions.[93]

When God's Spirit brooded over the waters, chaos changed into cosmos. Cosmos has the connotation of something ordered and beautiful. The Spirit can likewise effect this change in human hearts.[94]

God is Spirit. He is mystery, and we know very little about him, only what he reveals about himself. In our present condition God manifests himself to us in signs and symbols, and the finest symbol and sacrament of God upon earth is the human person. It is within human experience and within the human phenomenon that the Spirit of God is patriotically seen and experienced by us.[95]

In the Sermon on the Mount we find listed a number of the dreams of this Spirit-filled man, humankind's central personality, Jesus Christ, who was commissioned by God to dream dreams for the whole of humankind. Our vocation as Christians, people on a mission to the world, is to go on dreaming these dreams and challenging our world and ourselves with the power of these visions, and to fight the tendency to give up our dreams and succumb to platitudes, which we call the realism of facts.[96]

The Spirit of the risen Lord, breathed upon us and given to us, unites us in a new community of God's people. The Spirit, poured out at the resurrection of Jesus, is not only for us who are aware of it, but is poured out on all humankind, on all flesh, upon the whole earth, upon all who are open to God whether they know him or not. All who are existentially open to God are filled with the Spirit of the Jesus and are

[93] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 57-58.
[94] Samuel Ryan, "*The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*" (Newyork: ORBIS BOOKS, 1978), 3.
[95] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 18.
[96] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 39.

united to the risen Lord.[97] The Spirit is the Spirit of Reconciliation and Be-friendedness.[98] The Spirit always builds a community, and he sends forth those who have had this experience to build further community.[99]

The mission is precisely this: to build the human community as God has dreamt of it. Mission is not to take individuals from earth and rocket them into heaven. It is rather to build a beautiful community here on earth, or, to use the words of Jesus, to build the kingdom of God on the earth.[100]

Mission is a mystery involving the Holy Spirit, the human heart, the heart of the speaking missionary, the hearts of those addressed. It is a mystery involving the Spirit's dealing with people as well as his presence in human hearts, a mystery involving our own understanding of how we should approach God and human beings.[101]

1.2.5.4. Implications to Indian context

We are Indians as well as and Christians. Hence we are heirs to both Indian Culture and Christian faith. Our true and full identity is 'Indian Christian' or Christian Indian'. For this we need to know what culture is, especially what Indian Culture is and what the relation is between Culture and Religion/ Gospel/ Christianity.[102]

The concern for unity among Christians took on new significance with the widespread ecumenical activity that took place in the twentieth century. A Spirit of sincere prayer has always been at the heart of this activity. As the second Vatican council emphasized in its *Decree on Ecumenism:* "This change of heart and holiness

[97] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 67.
[98] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 68.
[99] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 103.
[100] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 103.
[101] Samuel Ryan, *The Holy Spirit-Heart of the Gospel and Christian Hope*…, 105.
[102] D.S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Indian Christian Spirituality…,* 92.

of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can be rightly called 'Spiritual ecumenism'.[103]

[103]Charles J. Healey, *Christian Spirituality- An Introduction to the Heritage…*, 375.

Summary

- The Spirit is the life-force, energy, animation, courage, character, resolve, enterprise, grit, mettle. Spirituality then need not be caricatured as a feeble, pallid thing; rather it is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit in us and in the whole creation. Spirituality is our free acceptance of this relationship and our readiness to live it in our everyday life.
- The spirituality is what the Spirit of God creates, originates, inspires, guides, indwells, blesses, approves, and accepts. Thus, the created world is a spiritual reality. Spirituality then implies being open to reality in all its dimensions. It means being ready to respond to reality and its truth.
- God is spirit, life and the life-force. God's Spirit brooded over primal chaos till an ordered cosmos hatched, of beauty, light and life, and song and dance, to God's delight. In biblical and Christian tradition, the Spirit of God is not something anemic or sad; it is God's creative Power, divine shakti, full of love and therefore rich in inventive capability to which the created world bears abundant witness. Its biblical symbols are water, wind, fire, dove and above all, Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, whatever has to do with the Spirit of God is spiritual and spirituality is our recognition of the involvement of the Spirit.
- Historically, many Christian communities have come under the strong influence of western tradition of spirituality. During the course of history many Christians have considered the deliverance of the soul from body as the chief end of religious experience and spirituality, worship, prayer and practice of religious life have been geared towards this purpose of keeping the soul pure and accomplishing its emancipation from the body and attaining final bliss in the presence of God. It often results in a sort of world negating and other worldly spirituality. It is pointed out by

many modern theologians that the dichotomy between soul and body and correspondingly between human and nature paved the way for the modern phenomenon of indiscriminate exploitation of the resources of the nature for unlimited economic profits, which proved to be ecologically disastrous.[104]

- As we have surveyed, we see a difference in the traditions of spirituality of Hindu, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Christian. However, we also see a mutual understanding of spirituality, such as, humanitarian perspectives and social aspects.

[104]Mathew C. Vargheese, "Word and Spirit: Reflections and Pentacostal spirituality," Manakala: *Faith Theological Review,* faith Theological seminary vol.9, No. 1. (January/2006), 76-77.

CHAPTER -TWO

ADVAITIC SPIRITUALITY OF SISTER VANDANA

Introduction

Sister Vandana was the well known women theologian. Although she was a Parsee, interested in Jesus' teachings, she also longed for and still longs for the living water flowing from the heart of Christ to water her and to quench her spiritual thirst. She also desired that this living and life-giving water should flow into the Indian soil enlivening and inspiring India from within. Her understanding of spirituality was deeply rooted in the Indian culture. She was a woman of tremendous faith and Trust in God-a faith that could move mountains! This chapter deals with her understandings of *advaitic* spirituality.

2.1. Brief Biography of Sister Vandana

2.1.1 Life and career of Sister Vandana

Sister Vandana (also known as Sister Vandana or Sister Vandana Mataji) was born in Bombay on 13 September 1921 in a Parsee family and was called Gool Dhalla.[105] Her Zoroastrian up-bringing in a Hindu milieu facilitated her later inter-faith dialogue. She did her collage from Sophia collage for women, were she was immediately attracted to "the spirit". The young Gool Dhalla's desire to convert to Christianity was initially opposed by her family but as soon as she became of age 18, she was baptised, taking the name Mary. Sister Vandana was first student of Sophia College to convert. Sister Vandana changed her name Gool Mary Dhalla to Sister

[105] P.R. John,S.J. "A Tribute to Vandana Mataji (1920-2013)", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol.77/4 April 2013 p. 308.

Vandana (meaning Prayer).[106] In 1971 she joined the Christa *Prema Seva Ashram* in Pune-a collaborative ecumenical effort with the Church of North India. Sister Vandana adopted the saffron sari of a woman who has renounced the world and became an authority on Indian spirituality. Sister Vandana is a member of the Catholic order, the society of the Sacred Heart. In 1978 she started the *Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir* in *Rishikesh*, promoting the spirituality of the 'cave of the Heart' from which flows the waters of life.[107] She died on 26th February 2013, at the age of 92 at Pune as a Catholic nun of the Sacred Heart congregation.

Born in an Indian Parsee family and converting herself as a Christian as a young lady, Sister Vandana began her foray in to religious tradition with a balancing act – balancing her Indianness with the faiths of Parsee and Christian religions. Thus, she blended in her life, work and writings the Christian faith, Indian culture and Hindu spirituality. Consequently, her thoughts, lifestyle, worship, etc., take on an inter-religious dimension. She eventually lived and died as a Catholic nun of the Sacred Heart Congregation.[108]

Sister Vandana began with a typical Indian search for God, and finding eventually the same in Christ in an ashramic – *advaitic* spirituality she proceeded to put her vision into practices - that of inculturation, dialogue and social action. Her quest for spirituality vended along various venues, testing and getting a hang of each pursuit in the quest, focusing on *advaitic* spirituality and blending the same with the Christian ideal of oneness.[109] Sister Vandana valued her Indian background as God's

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[106] Kristeen Kim, *Mission in the spirit* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003), 78-80.
[107] P.R. John,S.J. "A Tribute to Vandana Mataji (1920-2013)", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol.77/4 April 2013 p. 309.
[108] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 236.
[109] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian

gift enabling her to be in touch and dialogue with other religious people.[110] She felt that the pulse of India and its people lies in their diversity – culture, religion, dress etc., giving theology a rich colour and weight integrating the different views and opinions for relevance, credibility and acceptability. Thus her forays into contemplative living and explorations in to theology have a comprehensive outlook and extent.[111]

2.1.2 Literary Contributions

Sister Vandana's writings have come about from her personal experiences of seeking God in her life. Her search for God began with a quest for inner peace and she found that in changing her religious stance. She reflected and interpreted this life in her writings* speak of her satisfaction in her search for inner peace.[112]

2.1.2.1. Major focus in Sr. Vandana's writings

Of the many writings of Sister Vandana, the one on social action rationalizes the importance of extending *doing* theology in India a fundamental aspect. This finds the under girding in her understanding of theology as that action done in the reality of the world. For this, she took recourse to the up and coming trends in time so as to be relevant and credible.[113]

Thus, she logs on to the Third world Theology and its trends to catch up with the outreach of doing theology in the modern world with all its vagaries and problems

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and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 237-238. Cf. SR. Vandana, SR.C.J., Social Justice and Ashrams, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), 6-8.

[110] SR. Vandana, SR.C.J., *Social Justice and Ashrams*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), 10-12, 28, 30-31.

[111] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 238-239, 240, 252.

* (1)Gurus, Ashrams and Christian (1978) (2)Social Justice and Ashram (1982) (3)Nama Japa (1984) (4)Jesus the Christ (1987) (5)Yoga Sadhana Perennial diary (1987) (6)Waters of Fire (1989) (7)Find your Roots and Take Wings (1991) (8)And the mother of Jesus was there (1991)

[112] Sr. Vandana, , *Social Justice and Ashrams*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), 3-4.

[113] Vandana Mataji, *Living with Hindus-Hindu-Christian Dialogues my experiences and reflections*, (Bangalore: IJA, and Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 67-68.

especially in the third world. She goes further than the traditional understanding of ashram as a mere contemplative, reclusive and exclusive place for meditation into a vibrant community of living theology – doing theology in the world of reality by involvement.[114]

In her book entitled *Gurus and Ashrams* (1978), Sister Vandana recounts her itinerary of her visits to various ashrams and their unique features. The book written to western audience, gives in detail the working of ashrams, defining their origins and rationale, the place of the guru and so on, thus enlightening the reader the dimensions of ashrams.[115]

In *Waters of Fire* (1989), Sister Vandana explores the riches of metaphors in the sacred scriptures in their use in bringing out different facets of *advaitic* thinking, of oneness in reality and spirituality. In course of her explorations, she finds the Gospel of St. John as very pertinent in her pursuit of culling *advaitic* spirituality in the scriptures. She in turn alludes to other *upanishadic* writings that parallel the Johannine similes to oneness in terms of water, spirit, etc.[116]

In *The Mother of Jesus was There* (1991), written to commemorate the anniversary of her *alma mater* the Sophia College in Bombay, Sister Vandana relates the role of Mary and her worship and adoration to that of Women in the Hindu and thus Indian culture.[117]

Life in the contemplative community – the *ashram* of her choice provided her with the freedom and the rationale to study and reflect on the search for inner peace[118]

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[114] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*., 23-24.,
[115] Sr. Vandana, *Gurus, Ashrams and Christians* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 67-68.
[116] Sr Vandana, "Waters of Recognition and Awakening", *Bible Bhashyam- An Indian Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. VI No.3, September 1980, 290. Cf. SR. Vandana, "*Waters of Fire*", (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1989), 26- 29.
[117] Vandana Mataji, *And The Mother Of Jesus Was There* (UP, Himalayas: Jeeva- Dhara Ashramam Society, 1991), IV-X.
[118] Sr. Vandana, "The Prayer of the Heart in The Byzantine and Hindu Traditions" *in Indian Theological Studies*, Vol. XIX, No.1. March 1982, 117.

and more so reflecting on the life of the community and its activities that were enlarged upon the fact of varied hues of that search[119] and its implications for involvement in the life of the society at large in bringing about transformation and renewal of life.[120]

Long before Sister Vandana attained that maturity, she found out that if as religion Christianity has to have relevance and credibility, it needs to be grounded in reality.[121] If reality encompasses the ethos, the identity and the culture of a religion, with its social location well expressed – with all the joy and suffering of the people, then Christianity could very well evolve an inculturation of the Gospel in that context. Moving further on that in that vein, Sister Vandana pursued her quest for inner peace and God in the ethos of the culture therein in terms of the Christian presence.[122]

She said that the Gospel needs to address the contextual issues of India – its poverty, marginalization of people, its diverse religious views, etc., in the light of the fact of the impact of caste, discrimination, exploitation, etc. Thus, these issues take precedence in her writings to give a credible Christian presence in the search for inner peace.[123]

As a contemplative body the *ashram,* which she started on her own, and the various *ashrams* she visited and studied in her search, seems to afford a better place for contemplative life for Sister Vandana. However, her life in the *ashram* does not

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[119] Michael Amaladoss, "The Spirituality of Dialogue: An Indian Perspective", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 6-9.
[120] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), 4., Cf. Anand Amaladass, Editor, *Indian Christian Thinkers* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2005), 271.
[121] P.R. John,S.J. "A Tribute to Vandana Mataji (1920-2013)", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol.77/4 April 2013 pp. 309.
[122] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982), 16-17., *Anand Amaladass, Editor, Indian Christian Thinkers* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2005), 268.
[123] Nicholas Martis, "Ambedkar: Unity of Humanity: The Basis of Dialogue and Spirituality", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 152.

preclude her or others from being interactive with the life outside nor does it restrict her to explore avenues for bridging the gaps of understanding and exclusion and to iron out issues to bring about justice and peace to all people.[124]

That is the reason, why she harbours no bias in admitting people of varied hues and colours, religious views and opinions, so that they together find space for creative activity, understanding, involvement and study to spread that inner peace around. She tried to overcome barriers of division in work, worships, contemplation, and involvement in the social situations of life.[125]

For Sister Vandana, the *ashram* not only provides space and the ambience for individual contemplative life, but also for a life in the community which provides the resources for experimenting and interpreting this inner peace to fruition – to bring about transformation in life and social justice around in society.[126]

To this end, all her writings are marked with that intellectual and individual freedom to think and do in the light of the religious ethos of India where the Christian Gospel takes root in a relevant, credible and meaningful way. Thus, her writings are in a way reflections on the reality of life from a Christian point of view.[127]

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[124] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 240.
[125] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experience*s……, 242.
[126] Sister Vandana, *Find Your Roots And Take Wings:Three Essays Spiritual Formation for the East and the West* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation,1991), 55., Cf. Vandana Mataji, *Shabda Shakti Sangam* (Rishikesh, U.P: Jeevan- Dhara Sadhana Kutir, 1995), 235-239.
[127] Vandana Mataji , *Opening Talk, Vandana, ed., Swami Abhishiktananda-The Man and His Teachings*, (Delhi : I.S.P.C.K., 1986), 13-14.

2.2. Formative factors of Sister Vandana's theology

2.2.1. Parsee Influence

A *Parsi* or *Parsee* is a member of one of the two Zoroastrian communities found throughout South Asia. They are legally and ethnically distinct from the Iranis even though both groups descend from Persian Zoroastrians. According to the *Qissa-i Sanjan* tradition, the present-day Parsis descend from a group of Zoroastrians from *Greater Iran* who immigrated to the western borders of South Asia (Gujarat and Sindh) during the 8th or 10th century to avoid persecution by Muslim invaders who were in the process of conquering Iran. At the time of the Muslim conquest of Persia, the dominant religion of the region was *Zoroastrianism*. Iranians rebelled against Arab invaders for almost 200 years; in Iran this period is now known as the "Two Centuries of Silence" or "Period of Silence". During this time many Iranians who are now called Parsee rejected both options and instead chose to take refuge by fleeing from Iran to India.[128]

Parsees are generally not very concerned with the theological study aspect of their religion. Most Parsees know their religion because it is tied into their identity and know very little about the formal teachings. The main components of Zoroastrianism and the Parsee community is the concept of purity and pollution, initiation, daily prayers, temple worship, marriage, funerals, and general worship.[129]

(1)*Purity and pollution*:- The balance between good and evil is correlated to the idea of purity and pollution. Purity is held to be of the very essence of godliness. Pollution's very point is to destroy purity through the death of a human. In order to adhere to purity it is the duty of Parsis to continue to preserve purity within their body

[128] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.
[129] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.

as God created them. A Zoroastrian priest spends his entire life dedicated to following a holy life.[130]

(2)*Initiation:*-In Zoroastrianism a person is not initiated as an infant like christening. Normally, a child is initiated into the faith when he or she is old enough to choose to enter into the faith. The initiation begins with a ritual bath, then a spiritual cleansing prayer; the child changes into white pajama pants, a shawl, and a small cap. Following introductory prayers, the child is given the sacred items that are associated with Zoroastrianism: a sacred shirt and cord, sudre, and kusti. The child then faces the main priest and fire is brought in to represent God. Once the priest finishes with the prayers, the child's initiation is finished and he or she is now a part of the community and religion.[131] For every ceremony they use particular symbols. For example, during marriage the couple begins by facing one another with a sheet to block their view of one another. Wool is passed over the two seven times to bind them together. The two are then supposed to throw rice to their partner symbolizing dominance. One of the major symbols they are using is fire.[132] Fire is considered to represent the presence of God, and there are two distinct types of fire for the different temples. The first type of temple is the Atash Behram, which is the highest level of fire. The fire is prepared for an entire year before it can be installed, and once it is, it is cared for to the highest possible degree. There are only eight such temples located in India. The second type of fire temple is called a Dar-i Mihr, and the preparation process is not as intense. There are about 160 of these located throughout India.[133]

[130] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.
[131] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.
[132] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.
[133] www. http. Wikipedia, *The Encyclopedia,* 22-02-2014.

2.2.2. Personal Experience

The formative factor of Sister Vandana's theology was her search for God and the inner peace of her explorations in inculturation and in contemplative community life.[134] Probably what marks her *novelty*, may be in updating and catching up with the trends and analyses of the situation in life and gearing up to it to come alive from a contemplative, interpretative and reflective avenue to spread that inner peace to address the issues of the day.[135]

Beginning with the ancient seers and sages in this quest, and their reflections[136], Sister Vandana explores the spaces available in religious, philosophical, intellectual and social spheres to bring in to focus the spiritual experience of finding inner peace - transcending all barriers, to use its potential dynamics for bringing peace and justice in a divided world.[137]

In this her quest, the *advaitic* spiritual experience of unity of all things comes to the fore in her reflections. If this quest takes shape or evolves in a Christian form to find relevance in reality, Sister Vandana would find it not surprising as it affords meaning, credibility and relevance to enlarge the horizons of understanding, bridging the gaps and reconciliation of the opposing forces for transformation in society.[138]

Thus, Sister Vandana's ashramic spirituality takes shape in the Christian mould (as *long* as it affords freedom to experiment, to overcome barriers and to address divisions and issues of peace and justice) incorporating the Indian ethos to find inner peace and its dynamic presence in reality. This particular stance has been

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[134] Vandana Mataji, *Living with Hindus-Hindu-Christian Dialogues my experiences and reflections*..., 66.,
[135] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams...*, 3.
[136] M. Amaladoss, T.K. John, and G. Gispert-sauch, ed., *Theologing In India* (Bangalore: Theological Publications In India, 1978), 83-84.
[137] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams...*, 6.
[138] Sr. Vandana, *Find Your Roots and Take Wings*, 26.

very crucial in her writings that the ashramic spirituality needs to be grounded both internally and externally in the Indian ways to give shape to a Christian presence.[139]

Beginning, thus, with the nuances of *advaitic* spirituality, Vanadana explores the spaces provided by ashramic spirituality so as to conform the same to its Christian mission in its entirety. Her writings have thus had a great impact on the churches in India, its people and its contemplative communities. Her emphasis on inculturation has had a great impact on theological articulation of Indian Christians. Her forte seems to be in combining and balancing the so-called exclusive spaces of contemplative life and work/action/involvement in reality.[140]

Here, dialogue – inter-religious dialogue and the working towards social justice take shape in a dynamic way. Ashramic life thus affords space for maintaining contemplative rigor and discipline, and involvement in action-reflection under a Guru, where equality among men and women, the rich and the poor, lay and religious etc., is maintained as a precursor of what is to evolve as the Kingdom of God, in bringing about transformation in society.[141]

Although Sister Vandana emphasizes in her writings the space for involvement in reality/the life of the society to bring about transformation or social justice and action, through her writings, training, theologizing efforts etc., her involvement and advocacy for action is limited to a passive stance. Further, there is no effort made to *prevent* further marginalization or injustice carried out in reality. Nor does she advocate conscientizing the people nor making aware of the issues of the day for encouraging action on the part of the people or to evoke responsibility on the part of the government (to for policies or acts to overcome divisions/

[139] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 16-17.
[140] Sr.Vandana, *Find Your Roots and Take Wings*, 29
[141] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 20-21., 33-35., Cf. Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*, 250.

discrimination based on caste, colour or creed or language/ region. This may be so, as she lays great emphasis on the individualistic inner peace (beginning with an individual moving to transform the community and society), as a beginning to mark the change in society.[142]

2.3. Advaitic Spirituality in Sister Vandana's thought

Three Anglican sisters and six Catholic sisters of the Sacred Heart Congregation set foot in the Ashram together with an old Brahmin lady, who eventually taught them so much of Hindu spirituality.[143] Her understanding of spirituality was closely related to the Ashramic life. Hindu spirituality influenced her so much. This section deals with the *Advaitic* Spirituality in Sister Vandana's thought.

2.3.1 The Spirit and the Indian Experience

Human beings are spiritual by nature though this has been *forgotten.* This fact has caused untold misery to the human race from time immemorial. Because of this, disunity has been sown in the world – disunity among people, among nature, animals and creation. This has caused basically the *sin* of separation – between God/the Spirit and the human/ the world, and thus disunity among people. The realization of the unity – *advaita* – between the Spirit/God and the humans/world brings about understanding, knowledge and salvation. This has been noted from time immemorial as attested by history, religion and philosophy. Human beings have a propensity to be not only limited by certain biological, social and geographical factors for example, they can transcend their limitations, to be transformed and to become new beings

[142] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 52-53.
[143] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences* (Bangalore: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious studies [CIIS], Rome and Dharma ram Publications [DP], 1994), 237.

(because of the Spirit that indwells one). For this, religion to a great extent has been the avenue, working on the humans by various known factors such as an external moral force, potential, divine intervention and so on. Internally too, by their very creation and nature, human beings are governed by the so called conscience that works in league with the moral force to enable one to be good and truthful and more so to transcend one-self and thus commune with the spirit divine.[144]

Human beings are spiritual by virtue of being governed and indwelt by the Spirit. The Spirit – the external moral force – the divine Spirit, and the so-called Brahman works on the *atman* in the human to work towards the transcendence of the human limitations so as to make him/her reach up to become divine, and even to merge with the divine being or the Absolute. In the experience of this transcendence – transformation/new being/born again experience, one feels the indwelling of the Spirit – the experience of the divine in one while being on earth and that human lives out as a spiritual being.[145]

Such a being, not bound or limited by mortal restrictions transcending human limitations, lives and works as a *divine* being on earth for the good of others – enabling others to experience this transcendence – to be spiritual beings.[146] This human being dwells in the Spirit and vice versa, such that his/her acts and reflections are divine, altruistic, liberative and redemptive. He or she in that experience and nature do not long for earthly desires, do not feel hunger or crave for material

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[144] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 14-15, *See Also:* Sr Vandana, "Waters of Recognition and Awakening", *Bible Bhashyam- An Indian Biblical Quarterly,* Vol. VI No.3, September 1980, 299., Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "*The Quest For A Contexual Spirituality*" (Tiruvalla: Christian Sahitya Samithi, 2004), 66.

[145] Bede Griffiths, "Mystical Theology in the Indian Tradition", in *Jeevadhara The Problem of Man,* Vol. IX No.49, January-February 1979, 262-263., Cf. Steven T. Katz, editor, *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171.

[146] Abhishiktananda, "*Saccidananda-A Christian Approach To Advaitic Experience*" (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), 49.

possessions etc. Instead, spiritual beings live for others, for the welfare of all beings in the world – men and women, nature, animals etc.[147]

This has been the experience of scores of people around the world for generations. They have been known and recognized as prophets, seers, *rishis*, etc., who worked out their own ways and methods to attain this spirituality, and to work and live towards sustaining this spiritual awareness and impact among their fellow beings. India too has had scores of these spiritual beings who lived a humble, divine, truthful and loving life leading others as themselves in the path of peace, justice and humility.[148]

This spiritual living evolved out of one's own inclination towards spirituality as engineered by internal as well as external factors. While the conscience in one enables him or her to be prepared and inviting the Spirit/ the Absolute to be indwelt in him or her, it could be by divine/ external intervention as well. While religions around the world enable the devotees in their own way to relate to the divine/ absolute powers, this spiritual experiences are rare and limited to and expressed by mystic experiences bordering on the fanatical, out of the world experiences, however being rational and wise are not uncommon too. Since their experiences are *divine*, they cannot be measured or gauged, or even rationalized by human limitations and temporality.[149]

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[147] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*….., 243., Cf. Sr. Vandana, "The Prayer of the Heart in The Byzantine and Hindu Traditions", *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol. XIX, No.1. March 1982, 113., Cf. Dominic Veliath SDB, "*Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in a Pluralistic Context*" (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1993), 101-104.

[148] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 27..., Cf. Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*, 248.

[149] Steven T. Katz, editor, *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, 169-170., *See Also:* Sister Vandana, "*Indian Spirituality in action*" (Bombay: Asian Trading Corporation, N.Y), 56-59.

2.3.2. Individual and the Communal:

Spiritual experiences around the world bordering thus on at times irrational or other worldly, and yet supposedly *rational* in a spiritual sense, are individualistic, unique to the region and culture, though not always so. There have been individual or communal frenzies of religious nature – spiritual and ethereal, inviting glances and shocks from people around. However, spiritual experiences- lives and acts have been generally though ecstatic, yet have been down to earth – prophetic, creative, liberative etc., expressed in exhortative speeches, healing miracles, reconciliatory acts, building bridges and so on evoking a great following and creating communes or groups – contemplative societies. These communal-contemplative living have expressed themselves in exclusive/reclusive living – egalitarian and devoted to mundane actions and reflections on the scriptures or meditative living. This exclusive living has been only in the interest of the residents so that they may not be intruded on by worldly or earthly/ mundane matters so as to devote their entire life on contemplative spiritual living.[150]

Ashrams have been the harbingers of spiritual living albeit communal under a *guru* for vision and direction in spiritual matters. The *guru* – as the seer/ *rishi,* of spiritual experience par excellence leads the group of people in responsible living – living in spirit, for others' welfare, in meditative/ contemplative living etc., at times as guided, in creative/involved living in the affairs of the world or people – to teach, to do good, to heal and restore, and to involve in liberative life of the people and in bringing about social justice.[151]

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[150] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, ed., in *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*, 240-241., see also., Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 25.

[151] Vandana, "*Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*", 17., Cf. Vandana Mataji, *Find Your Roots and Take Wings*, 57-58.

Thus, there has been of late a detour in ashramic spiritual living from being a mere contemplative/ reflective and intellectual/ individualistic/uninvolved living, to an involved and creative living in the affairs of the world of injustice, exploitation, discrimination etc., to bring about spiritual impact on society in terms of transformation – towards a more harmonious living of peace and justice out of love.[152]

Sister Vandana has been one of the pioneers in establishing an *ashram* in this vein albeit on the lines of Indian *ashram.* Her involvement in working out an ashramic theology and a paradigm of dialogue among religious devotees or leaders, have been marked.[153]

2.3.3. Spiritual Experiences and the Scriptures

Spiritual experiences and spiritual living need to be sustained for effectual impact, making the life of devotion and action credible, intelligible and relevant. In order to be equipped thus, one needs to be imbibed by the Sprit or the human needs to be embedded in Him. It is the Spirit indwelling in one that guides, corrects and leads him/ her in a spiritual path. This is in brief Sister Vandana's contention of a spiritual being.[154] For Sister Vandana, water in the Bible as in Indian and in their traditions symbolizes God's life-giving, purifying act. Thirst slaking and sanctifying activity. Further, in St. John water has become the means, the occasion and the instrument of God's grace poured out on human beings.

Speaking of the rationale for choosing St. John, as a commentary and on that of water as a symbol of God's spirit, Sister Vandana asserts that as reflection and commentaries on the scriptures are necessarily found as *bhashyas,* they are the normal

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[152] Sr. Vandana, *Find Your Roots and Take Wings*…, 90-91.
[153] Vandana, "*Gurus, Ashrams and Christians*", XIII., Cf. Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 27-28.
[154] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, 4-5.,Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "*The Quest For A Contexual Spirituality*", 21., Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "*Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*", (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 181-183.

mode used in India for growth, in the spiritual sense – symbolizing drawing closer to and the growth towards God, and merging with Him, which is surely the goal of all theologizing. It is, therefore, appropriate that Christians in India adopt this method than the means of speculation on dogmas and articles of faith. Therefore, theologizing in India would mean a prayerful study of these scriptures as the gospels in a contemplative way – thinking with Him, in His presence, and ultimately being drawn to Him beyond thought and sense in to this very depth. As said earlier, theologizing is not merely a head-knowledge – academic or cerebral, but experiential and heart knowledge of God. The theologiser then must be an experienced and a meditator, striving to study the scripture to get to the depth of its meaning and experiencing the same. The *rasa jnata* – one who experiences the depth of its meaning can only enter in to the depth of the spirit of St. John, to resonate and respond to the intuitions of the author.[155]

St. John is chosen, as his method of presenting the life of Christ (in a mystical and spiritual way) is eminently suited to the Indian psyche and spirit. Further, John's theology revolving around the axis of a Creation- Incarnation – Resurrection – New Creation complex parallels the Hindu idea of Creation – Avatar – Realization. The contrast principles as truth-untruth, light-darkness, life-death etc., found in John fits in with the Indian's idea of the desire for changing from *asat* to *sat*(from unreality to Reality), from *tamas* to *jyoti*(from darkness to light), from *mrutyu* to *amartam*(from death to life) (*Brihad aranayaka Upanishad* 1. 3.38). Thus , in John *moksha* is not a blessedness and liberation after death, but a Consciousness (Chit) of the Truth (Sat) which is bliss (Anandam), here and now, born already from abiding in God's love, as in Hinduism. Thus, In John 4, the attitude of Jesus towards worship gels with that of

[155] Sister Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, XIX-XX.

the Hindu notion of transcending the idea of worship as bound by a temple or any localised place. Therefore what is important is the self-transcending relationship with God the Father in spirit and truth. More than the assertions of the Gospel being dynamic or mystical and *advaitic*, or expressing the oneness of God and Jesus, St. John's cyclic, contemplative, discoursing approach appeals to every Indian. The person of Jesus (than the Kingdom of God) thus stands supreme in St. John, as that suits the Indian marking a detour from other scriptures.[156]

- Recognition – In St. John 1: 29-34, the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Messiah because the Spirit came down and stayed on Jesus while he baptized him. Thus the waters became the first to recognize and witness to Jesus. As only he on whom the spirit comes down rests can baptize in the spirit, and the outpouring of the spirit can happen in the messianic age as the Baptist baptized people with only water.[157]
- Water as the symbol of the Spirit – *Living water* becomes the symbol of the spirit himself , later in John (7: 37-39)
- A Marriage simile – A marriage between Water and Spirit seems to exist in creation in Genesis, and further, like a bird hovering, at the time of Noah – the dove bearing an olive branch foreshadowing the coming down of the Spirit as a dove, as at the baptism of Jesus, and the spirit as a mother's love- the feminine aspect of the Trinity –as *shakthi* of God, and at Pentecost as tongues of fire etc. In the Vedic tradition too fire and water are linked often (Rig Ved vii 49:6).

[156] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire...*, XX-XXI.
[157] Sr Vandana, *Waters of Fire...*, 73.

- Purifying waters – As with John, Mark and Luke affirm the cleansing act in baptism, as that of renewing of the Spirit in Paul (Tit 3:5). So too in Tait. Samhita 1:21 and in 1.2.3., the waters purify us.[158]

Ritual cleansing and purifying aspect apart, the inner cleansing – born of the spirit linked with water appears in Ezek 36:25.

As the waters of awakening in Katha Upanishad 3.14 and in V. Samhita 31.18, so too in John 11: 25 and 14:6, the True Man conquers death and in him life abounds.[159]

As *Tat-tatvam-asi – Aham Brahmasmi,* the *equivalen*t of 'Thou art My beloved Son' (Chand. Upanishad 6.8.7/ Br. Upanishad 1.4.10) exemplify the link between the sayings and the acts – the Son of Man will open Hs heart, the coming of the spirit as a dove, the voice of the Father etc. The Father is the Aham Asmi the 'I Am 'of Moses (Ex.3:14/ Br. Up. 1.4.1:10).[160]

The *Advaita* of Christ in Christian experience consists in sharing in Jesus' own religious consciousness – his awareness of divine Sonship (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)[161] and the distinction between Jesus and God the Father, as an 'irreducible compound of Jesus experience' where 'the *advaita* has a place in the Christian experience as in that of Jesus himself'. That means the Christian shares in Jesus' awareness of his *advaita* with the Father. This is Christian *advaita*.[162] The Holy Spirit is the Atman, His Self enters, and the Son is conscious of / for the spirit is the *advaita* – the Oneness of the

[158] Sr. Vandana, "Waters of Recognition and Awakening", in *Bible Bhashyam- An Indian Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. VI No.3, September 1980, 293-294.
[159] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire...*, 56.
[160] Sr. Vandana, "Waters of Recognition and Awakening", in *Bible Bhashyam- An Indian Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. VI No.3, September 1980, 296-297.
[161] K.P.Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta...*, 180.
[162] J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit*, Bangalore: TPI, 1977, p243.

Father and the Son. As the *ruah/ Pneuma* – the Inmost Spirit, the *Antaryami* the Indweller is Bliss – Anandam.[163]

2.3.4. Spiritual Symbolism in Sister Vandana's theology

This being so, Sister Vandana explores the sacred scriptures to find instances, parallels and metaphors of this abiding presence of the One in the human – the spiritual person experiencing the *advaitic* spirituality. For Sister Vandana, *advaitic* spirituality in brief amounts to the realization of oneness in all – the unity that binds, sustains and enables growth – a spiritual experience that is enabled by the Spirit who abides and indwells in the human, and in turn the human opens his heart and life to receive Him, and through whom this experience exudes peace and justice to all around.[164]

For Sister Vandana, this spiritual experience of indwelling of the Spirit in the human has been expressed and articulated in the sacred scriptures – the Hindu and the Christian, in various ways. These instances border on the mystical/ this/otherworldly articulation by means of personal/individualistic or communal, internal / external experiences in terms of metaphors or similes.[165]

In this pursuit, Sister Vandana scours the entire gamut of the scriptures and focuses on for example the Upanishads and St. John, besides others where in the metaphorical symbols and signs[166] the *advaitic* element is indicated as the highest realization to which one can aim as a spiritual person. This oneness has found

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[163] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 6., *See Also :* Sr Vandana, "Waters of Recognition and Awakening*", Bible Bhashyam- An Indian Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. VI No.3, September 1980, 299.
[164] Sr. Vandan, "Religious Congregations and Ashrams", In *Christo*, Vol. 27 No. 1, January 1989, 127., Sr. Vandana, "*Indian Spirituality in action*"…, 50-52.
[165] P.R. John,S.J. "*A Tribute to Vandana Mataji (1920-2013*)", in Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, vol.77/4 April 2013, 308-309., *See Also*: Lily Fernandes, "*Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana*", Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*…, 237-238.
[166] K. P. Aleaz, "*The Indian Christian Pramanas as Constituents of a Theological Method: A Discovery from the Indian Philosophical Pramanas*", Vol. xxii, No.4, Dec 1990 & March 1991, pp. 4-5.

expression in various ways and means in the scriptures. It has been exemplified in Jesus and the same has been captured by St. John the gospel writer, according to Sister Vandana.[167]

As expressions of the spirit of the human, symbols hold the possibility of communicating with the transcendent and the universal Spirit as well as with the people, containing much more than what they can express or signify in a particular time, space or region.[168]

In this mould, Sister Vandana has attempted to use water as a symbol of the Spirit in St. John and in the Indian religious tradition, avoiding facile esoterism and hybrid juxtaposition, or polarization. She communicates her spiritual experiences thus born out of the dual heritage avoiding a mere theoretical discourse or speculative logic, but by integrating and galvanizing them around the focal point of a symbol as water.[169]

For Sister Vandana, all these reflections on the symbol of water in the two traditions bridge and enlarge the horizons of spiritual experiences, springing from and leading to the Spirit who has manifested himself in diverse ways and means in the heart of the Hindu and Christian religious traditions, converging and integrating at the core and opening up to one another in that depth. For this, her reflections of the water as a symbol of the Spirit, based on the scriptures and their interpretations, highlight the different facets of the mystery of Christ finding their seed sown in Hindu traditions in its variegated expressions. Thus water in both the religious traditions are

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[167] Sr. Vandana, "The 'Johannine-Upanishadic' experience: An Indian Meditation on St. John's prologue", *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol.xvi. Nos. 1&2 March-June 1979, 153., *See Also:* Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 12.
[168] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire...*, XVIII.
[169] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire...*, XIX.

symbolic of awakening and recognizing, healing, quenching, satisfying and giving life – of re-birth and salvation.[170]

While thus asserting the ground of theologizing as experience, Sister Vandana seems to miss the context where millions of people lack the basic necessitates as water for drinking, where millions are in poverty and experience other forms of exploitation, etc. In this situation of systemic evil and structural injustice etc., what is the role of religion and culture? Is religion a mere tool to perpetuate the status quo or does it need to take a prophetic role? Theology or theologizing is, thus, a measure in which it has a prophetic thrust or action. That means, indigenization or inculturation of theology needs to incorporate the dimensions of liberation, participation in the life of the world – to promote life and liberty where ever it is needed.[171]

2.3.4.1 A Spiritual Rebirth – Born of the Spirit

Extending the metaphors of water as alluding to the work of the spirit in its pouring out, cleansing, healing etc., Sister Vandana suggests the renewal of life in one washed and ritually made pure as of the Spirit. Thus, for her, spiritual rebirth enables one to enter the Kingdom of God or as john puts it, enables one to enjoy eternal life. As life always revolves around birth and death – death to the old self and being born anew, being born of the Spirit is a spiritual birth (Jn.1:12 ff).[172]

This is the reason why Jesus was said to baptize people with the Holy Spirit over the baptism in water alone, to lead one to spiritual rebirth (Jn.12:7, 33). This marks the messianic action of the pouring out of the Spirit. In the words of Sister Vandana,[173]

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[170] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*..., 79.
[171] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*..., 43.
[172] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*..., 25.
[173] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 26.

> "It is God's Spirit and His gratuitous gift of love which turns man round….It seems improbable or impossible to man but not to the Holy Spirit. This is what Christ meant by 'what is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the spirit is spirit' (Jn.3:6). The Spirit is the principle of new life that Jesus has come to give… for it is by the power of the Spirit that the barrier of death is broken, and a definitive future opened up for men and the world through Christ's Resurrection….Baptism means dying with Christ and rising with Him, that becoming like Him in death we may attain the resurrection from the dead (cf.Phil.3:10f). This is to be born of the Spirit".[174]

This passing on from death to life, Sister Vandana alludes to Nicodemus' coming in the night to seek Jesus and passing on to light from darkness, as a seed sown to die, brings forth life etc.,[175]

Speaking about the life of the spiritual person, Sister Vandana affirms that his or her life is *governed* by the Spirit as 'the powers of life adore the God who is in the heart and he rules the breath of life'. Further,

> 'The' Spirit of God would be understood as the most intimate core of the conscious being, at the level beyond the reach of sense or mind, as meaning his *atman*, his self, since he is the deepest centre, the very 'inwardness' of the divine mystery. He is the breath of our breath. To know this one Atman, was to abandon all other discourse, and to realize that 'This Atman is Brahman'(Brihad Up 3.4.4). The same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the very 'Inwardness' of Christ. His 'self,' the Atman, the breath is given to us, through water and the same Spirit – to be our 'Inwardness', and thus enable us to participate I the very life of Christ and of His Father……[176]

Born of the Spirit, they are free like the wind - they are not dependent on others' ideas, criticism, approvals; they find their happiness in Him whom they have grown to love as their very Self, to know as the Breath of their very life, as of the

[174] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 28.
[175] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 29.
[176] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 41.

Trinitarian life within them. They are moved by the Spirit alone; they go where his wind fills their souls and blows them. They speak – as did Christ – only what the Father, through His Spirit- wants them to speak, for they are filled with the Spirit. The one whom God has sent speaks God's words, because God gives him the fullness of His Spirit (3:34). And whoever 'believes' whom God has sent and who speaks His words' has eternal life: he has it already in this world (cf.3:36). It is only through faith that the baptismal waters can give this life in (of) the Spirit.[177]

2.3.4.2 Sustenance of the Spirit

Speaking elaborately the different aspects of water as a symbol for John to mean purification, recognition, rebirth etc., now Sister Vandana speaks of the continual renewal and growth in life because of the Spirit as the *Jeevan-Dhara*, the living water.[178]

Referring to the incident at the well, where Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water to drink, where John refers to the water that Jesus will give, acts as a spring of water – 'The deep' here, however is the heart; - with a stream overflowing from the infinite Heart of God – into 'the cave of the heart' of man. What Jesus has to offer this woman is quite unparalleled in history. What He has to give man will infiltrate inside of him and become within him a spring of water. The religion Jesus offers is essentially one of the 'inside' the interior, - not of exteriorities, rites, rubrics…but of the Spirit the Atman. The water He gives will slake man's thirst in such a way that he 'will never be thirsty again.'"[179]

[177] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 41.
[178] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 52.
[179] Vandana Mataji, "A Way to world Peace- As an Indian sees it" in *Vidyajyoti Jounal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. LVI, No.7. July 1992, 340.

As all human beings are made in such a way as to get happiness as marking the index of their satisfaction only two things satisfy them. This is well put by the sages of old in the Upanishads:

'He who knows Brahman as the Real, knowledge, infinite, hidden in the secret place of the heart and in the highest heaven, realises all desires in communion with the all-knowing Brahman' (Taittiriya Up. 2.1.1). He must 'know' God – for knowledge of God above – Brahma Vidya- can satisfy man completely and he must know Him 'hidden in the cave of the heart'.[180]

Sister Vandana quotes another verse to substantiate the presence of God in one as imparting peace - "Only the wise who perceives Him as abiding in the soul, attain eternal bliss, eternal peace; - and no others" (Katha Up.2.2.13).[181]

2.4. Ashramic Spirituality

2.4.1. Ashrams

An ashram is a place of hard work (shram). It is generally associated with a group of people whose primary aim is God-seeking, under the guidance of a guru, where a simple egalitarian life-style is maintained. In a typical Indian tradition, the members explore different ways in which this quest for God is achieved, using various *sadhanas* and employing the modes of *bhakti*, *gnana or karma* in loving devotion, contemplation and action.[182]

Ashram life has been regarded from ancient times in India as a very effective way to attain union with God. As the ashram provides a venue for leading a simple, peaceful and austere life it is considered as an ideal place to experience God. The

[180] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 61.
[181] Sr. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*…, 85.
[182] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 3-4.

origins of an ashram are obscured in history, India can boast of ashrams from ancient times based on the different stages of life wherein the final stage of sanyasa, a person would lead a life for God, unconnected from things around him or her, but totally engrossed in spirituality and connected to God. For this, one can find a wandering existence or an ashram to attain that God-connectedness in contemplation, meditation and action.[183]

In brief, an ashram is an egalitarian community of members from various backgrounds but with a focus on the quest for God. The members in course of their sadhana may devise ways in which they can involve themselves in the affairs of the world too to bring about liberative action in the world as a consequence of their realization of the oneness of all – the *advaitic* spirituality in action.[184]

2.4.2. Guru

The Guru or the *acharya* is an important personage in an ashram around whom the life in an ashram is structured. The guru might expect complete adherence to his opinion and obedience to his word in matters of keeping the sanctity of the ashram. The guru, out of his goodness and spiritual knowledge, might seek out people to be his disciples and nurture them to attain *advaitic* spirituality of God-realization in their quest for God.[185]

In the words of Sister Vandana, Each ashram, so different and unique, is born in the heart of the guru and in his personal contact in depth with the in-dweller. The guru is the God-touched, God-experienced man or woman around whom people spontaneously gather to seek Brahma-*vidya*…When the guru leaves his body and

[183] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 5.
[184] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 22.x
[185] Sr. Vandana, "The Guru-Shishya-relationship in the Indian Tradition", *Third Millennium-Indian Journal of Evangelization, III* (2000) 2 April-June, p.62., Sr. Vandana, "*Religious* Congregations and Ashrams", In *Christo*, Vol. 27 No. 1, January 1989 p.127., Vandana Mataji, *Find Your Roots and Take Wings*…., 58.

reaches the further shore and he has no successor, nor real man of God to succeed him as the *acharya* or the head of the *Ashram*, then the *Ashram* may and indeed should die out.[186]

2.4.3. Social Concern

Sister Vandana in her inimitable way proceeds to interpret the ashram life from her explorations in theology and communal living to give colour to its social concerns. For, in brief the very living as a community, as an egalitarian community is a clue to her way of thinking – a remark on the society at large, in its inability to lead an egalitarian life, but also as a way forward to work out a living where this is possible as an indication of the life to come in equality, dignity and confidence. This for her is a theological fact.[187]

2.4.4. Inner peace

For her, the inner peace- its realization and impact, in the cave of the heart is the ground and the rationale on which one's social concern and justice are built up. This inner peace is the core and the crucial ingredient in opening up the eyes of one in enabling and helping to comprehend the reality as one. Her whole theological grounding rests upon this fact of achieving inner peace. This realization enables one to live, work and react to bring about peace wherever it is needed. Thus, the ashramic living for example is itself a reaction to the society at large which lives and thrives on dividing the reality from oneness bringing thus injustice and oppression. The ashramic living as a community of all – inclusive and egalitarian simple and contemplative is itself, thus, a clue to what the society can become if it enables the people to realize their potential by achieving inner peace.[188]

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[186] Sr. Vandana, "*Indian Spirituality in action*"…, 23.
[187] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 42.
[188] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 6

2.4.5. Ashram – A Space for creativity

Secondly, as the ashram provides space and freedom for people to come, live and explore – in terms of contemplative living to attain inner peace, *that* itself is a work of justice. In her own words:

> "If the ashram's search for God-Realization, *moksha* or *Brahma-Vidya* is genuine, there is bound to be a social dimension in the ashram's way of life. *It cannot remain isolated from the struggles and pains of at least its immediate neighbourhood, either directly* – through works – or indirectly, by its very life. The ashram brings peace and inspiration both to those who are oppressed and to those who work towards alleviating their oppression by bringing about justice. Justice springs from inner peace and generates peace….. But *this permanent inner peace* for which every human craves *is itself a work of justice. "Pax opus justitiae."* It comes from establishing a right order in relationships, both with God and men… This is fundamentally the ashram's role – to give peace of heart – not a cowardly or lethargic peace (which is no peace) but the peace of Christ which is given that we too may have our 'face set towards Jerusalem' and, if necessary. 'Lay down our lives for our brethren' in the struggle for peace and justice."[189]

2.4.6. Spirituality for action begins within

Delineating the different aspects of the ashram living as providing clues to involvement in the affairs of the world, Sister Vandana affirms, "The first function of the ashram then is to BE – by its inmates' life of prayer, silence, hard work in simplicity of heart and lifestyle, whether or not it also 'does' works of justice and peace. But nothing in the ashram way of life precludes any or all members from playing an active role in it, - provided always the works – of whatever nature – arise from contemplation and lead us back to it….There are different forms of ashrams

[189] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 6-7.

participating in he work of justice. There may be ashram schools, informal education for adults, conscientisation, hospitals…..”[190]

2.4.7. Ashram – A living against injustice

The form of disinterested service too appealed to Sister Vandana. She asserts thus observing a scholar and a man of God at hard manual work:

> “…It was for me a marvellous and a live lesson not only in *Karma yoga* – pure disinterested service of others which was worship of God, - but also a lesson in the beauty of hard work and simple living…… which in itself is a protest against greed and ambition to possess more. Ashrams are by their very nature – apart from any ‘works’ they may do – a living protest against the injustice which springs from the greed of some and leads to the poverty and destitution of others.”[191]

Sister Vandana thus presents ashramic spirituality as a holistic approach of life, leading to and flowing from a realization of oneness with one spirit and hence a connectedness with the universe and with “spiritual” people regardless of gender, caste and religion.

2.4.8. Changing inner structures

Speaking about changing structures to root out injustice, Sister Vandana asserts that “*the first step to changing structures is the change of our own inner structures*….Effective doing arises out of effective being – out of changed being. The ashram’s primary role of service is to change man’s inner structure”.[192]

Affirming the Third world Theologians (TWT) Or Third world challenges to theology, she says that ‘participating in the struggle of the oppressed for *the transformation of social structures and the renewal of cultures “demands a*

[190] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 7-8.
[191] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 8-9.
[192] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 11-12.

conversion of ourselves and of our distorted relationships.".[193]

Delineating on the nuances of doing theology for example in India /Asia, Sister Vandana asserts that one need not blame the passivity of the Asians for their poverty and discrimination, rather it is their culture and so we need to look for something else which is the barrier to transformation. She finds this in the religious experience of the people – and unless Christian faith comes to terms with this plurality of faiths, it will not be able to understand the Asian ethos but would keep on harping on bettering the people's economic standards. Rather what they need is freedom and dignity for life and full humanity which the religious situation too has curbed.

2.5. Theologizing

Sister Vandana's explorations in Ashram theology are notable as they lead one to a better understanding why the ashram is a conducive place for effective inculturation and dialogue. She asserts that in order a theologian articulate well his thoughts he needs to be an 'experiencer.' That means, he or she needs to be in touch with the reality of the situations in the world in order to be intelligible and relevant in doing theology. That is the reason why Sister Vandana advocated that Indian Christian theology need to be based not on concepts or doctrines as in the West, but on the realities of the India – poverty, unemployment, discrimination, division etc. – in finding solidarity and identity with the reality of the world in the light of the mysteries of Christ who lived and moved with the people and sought liberation for them – for those in need. Unlike in the West, where theology is based on textual analysis, philosophy, dichotomy of life and individuality to a great extent, Indian

[193] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 16.

theology would be based on the sacred scriptures – both Christian and Hindu, in order to be tested against one's own experience.[194]

One of the innovative ways in which one's faith can be reflected upon and intelligently expressed and made relevant in a situation is by theologizing that faith. Sister Vandana has adopted it but with a twist to its medium, meaning and relevance. She has given colour, substance and relevance to it by using contextual and scriptural undergirding to not only discovers faith's nuances in that situation, but also to substantiate intelligibly its meaning and acceptability.[195]

Sister Vandana's attempt at theologizing emerges from a mere individualistic/contemplative/meditative reflections of conceptual knowledge of the Scriptures or philosophy in a theoretical mould to a lived in experience of the world /involved communal living of equality of men and women, thus balancing a contemplative living with a social concern, and expressing that experience of the divine in and through the indwelt spirit in a given society and culture – a spiritual experience in the affairs of the world, people and nature for their transformation. [196]

That means, theologizing need to be undergirded to discover life's deepest meaning and making it meaningful and purposeful. In theology, one searches for this meaning and purpose and finds them in the light of one's faith in dialogue with the reality of our life. For this expression, this experience of the reality of life experienced by one's forefathers, embedded and transmitted thus has to be personalized, lived and enriched in the context today.[197]

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[194] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*….., 241-243.
[195] M. Amaladoss, T.K. John, and G. Gispert-sauch, eds., "*Theologing In India*"(Bangalore: Theological Publications In India, 1978), 81.
[196] M. Amaladoss, T.K. John, and G. Gispert-sauch, eds., " *Theologing In India…,* 83-84.
[197] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 19-20.

Theologizing takes place further in a community of faith – in a contemplative community of faith which lives and witnesses its faith in society and in a given culture, enabling one to express its faith intelligibly and in a credible manner. The Church as the local community involved in the life of the contemporary society and engaged as such in the action-reflection process in faith is geared to articulate itself in theologizing. In the words of Amalorpavadass, "Theologising in India today implies, in other words, that be in the field here and now, one with the human community and the total environment in the adventure of history and pilgrimage of life towards *moksha* (with both involvement in identification and solidarity, and with inner detachment in withdrawal and distance), in our people's struggle for full humanity and liberation.

(1) In communion with the faith-community (Judeo-Christian) and with the wider human and religious community (of India) in its memory of the past (tradition and heritage) and in its hope for the future (in a movement of transcendence and spiritual dynamism).

(2) In a double but integrated vision (Indian and Christian) of the absolute and ultimate Reality in its total revelation within a dialogue and interdisciplinary approach.

(3) Reflecting and interpreting, articulating and communicating the lived experience (*anubhava*) of the present as it converges from many sides at the depth of one's being, by a process of all –round sharing through metaphors and parables, stories and poems, art- forms dances and dramas, signs and symbols both original and acquired.

(4) Realizing inculturation and liberation in all aspects of life, in all activities.

(5) Facilitating the emergence of such faith-reflections at all levels, especially from below at grass root level, linked among themselves in openness and solidarity.[198]

Theologizing then as expression of the faith though has a specificity as to its cultural or regional propensity, it needs to transcend its limitations to a more integrated whole. Further, in order to be authentic in its articulation and expression, the Christian community needs to live and theologize in equal fidelity to its double heritage of faith and culture and belonging to two communities or traditions – one of the faith as the Christian community of faith and the wider human community of common culture and religious tradition.[199]

Being, thus, grounded in the dual aspects of being particularized and universalized in its import, theologizing need not be mere an academic exercise in an intellectual speculation but an awakening and sharing of the inner most spiritual experiences of transcendence and merging of the self and the mystery of being. Not being exclusive of one or the other, this experience can be mutually complementary, reciprocal, correcting, converging and enriching, challenging and reaching towards an in-depth living synthesis of experiences. It is, thus, a combination of experiential and conceptual knowledge, ranging from the mystical to the intellectual.[200]

Sister Vandana's attempt at theologizing emerges from this background to give expression to an indigenous articulation of theology. Notwithstanding the conceptual or intellectual exercise of articulation of the faith in life, Sister Vandana explores the spiritual and the experiential mould as that which colours the Indian and

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[198] D.S Amalorpavadass, Foreword to *Waters of Fire* by Vanadana (Madras : CLS. 1981), p x.
[199] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., "*Beyond Inculturation-can the Many be One?*", (Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ISPCK, 2005), 9., Cf. M. Amaladoss, T.K. John, G. Gispert-sauch (Edit), " *Theologing In India*"…, 81.
[200] Bede Griffiths, "Mystical Theology in the Indian Tradition", in *Jeevadhara The Problem of Man*, Vol. IX No.49, January-February 1979, 267-268.

thus the incarnated identification with reality. She figures the Indian quest for God and meaning for life as being more embedded in ashrams – the community of faith, living in an egalitarian relationship, devoted to a meditative life as instructed by the guru, and involved in the life of the world as well.[201]

[201] Bede Griffiths, "Mystical Theology in the Indian Tradition", in *Jeevadhara The Problem of Man,* Vol. IX No.49, January-February 1979, 267-268.

Summary

- Born in a Parsi family, Sister Vandana's spiritual thought was influenced by Parsi symbols of spirituality. The basic formative factor of her spirituality was her personal experiences of seeking God. She reflected and interpreted this personal experience in her writings it speaks of her satisfaction in her search for inner peace.
- By the *advaitic* understanding of Sister Vandana, human beings are spiritual by virtue of being governed and indwelt by the Spirit. Such a being, not bound or limited by mortal restrictions/ transcending human limitations, lives and works as a *divine* being on earth for the good of others – enabling others to experience this transcendence – to be spiritual beings. This human being dwells in the Spirit and vice versa, such that his/her acts and reflections are divine, altruistic, liberative and redemptive. He or she in that experience and nature does not long for earthly desires, nor feel hunger nor crave for material possessions etc.
- For Sister Vandana, ashram is the contemplative body where a life in the community with equality, individual identity and dignity of life is marked, but also provides the resources for experimenting and interpreting the inner peace to fruition—to bring about transformation in life and social justice. Although Sister Vandana emphasizes social justice and space for involvement, there is no effort made to prevent further marginalization or injustice carried out in reality.
- Beginning, thus, with the nuances of *advaitic* spirituality, Vanadana explores the spaces provided by ashramic spirituality so as to conform the same to its Christian mission in its entirety. Her writings have, thus, had a great impact on the churches in India, its people and its contemplative communities. Her emphasis on inculturation has had a great impact on theological articulation of Indian Christians. Her explorations in ashramic life and activities in terms of equality and openness,

for experimentation in spirituality and involvement too have made a mark in theological spiritual circles. Her forte seems to be in combining and balancing the so-called exclusive spaces of contemplative life and work/action/ involvement in reality.

- Her involvement in the realities of the world has been limited to the extent that the ashramic existence – contemplative life, study of the scriptures, efforts at indigenization and inculturation permitted. Her concerns no doubt impelled by God's love for humankind for their liberation from bondage into a holistic living – a spiritual life have been appreciated. However, there is a lack of understanding on her part in knowing the real Indian – caught up in material want, in religiosity, in caste bondage etc., as of the Dalits.
- As such her involvement in indigenizing Christianity also is limited as she limits her action and existence to ashramic living – a living of contemplation and inculturation. Her foray into social justice and action were altering addition to her concern for the marginalized as she came in to contact with the ecumenical circles where the concern for the people in bondage was expressed.
- Sister Vandana's interests seem to be elitist largely based on the protective, patronizing and contemplative aspects of ashramic *advaitic* spirituality with a limited foray in to the real involvement in the world of poverty, marginalization, exploitation etc. However, her understanding of *advaitic* spirituality in the light of Christian concern gave a boost to her interest and concern for the common humanity at large in to rise up their liberation and holistic living. To that end her spirituality impelled as such by the example of Jesus the Christ in the ashramic/ *advaitic* spirituality gives her credibility to help support the struggles of the people in bondage for liberation.

CHAPTER- THREE

APPRAISAL OF SISTER VANDANA'S SPIRITUALITY FROM A DALIT PERSPECTIVE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

Dalit understanding of spirituality is entirely different from the *brahminic* notion. *Dalit* spirituality is formulated from *Dalit* experiences. Here, a passing reference to *Dalit* situation is necessary, to understand how a *Dalit* evaluates the *advaitic* spirituality. Therefore this fourth chapter deals with the context of *Dalit* spirituality and theological reflections about Sister Vandana's *Advaitic* Spirituality from the *Dalit* perspective.

3.1. Context of *Dalit* Spirituality

3.1.1. Who is a *Dalit*?

The term, *Dalit,* is a broad category. It has been derived from the root *dal* which means to crack, open, split, etc., when used as a noun or an adjective, it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed etc.[202] *Dalit* society is present everywhere in the world. According to Ambrose Pinto, *Dalit*s are treated as sub-humans in Indian Society.[203]Three thousand years ago the caste system was established in Hindu society. Caste system classified people into high and low. Some castes are classified as high or touchable and others as low castes or untouchables. The lowest caste is called the *Dalit*s or untouchables in India. In India *Dalit* identity is known by caste. *Dalit* means the exploited class. In the division of labour, *Dalit*s are made to do menial work. In the caste system, the life of a *Dalit* is

[202] James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of Dalits* (Delhi:ISPCK,1994),6.
[203] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1999), 38.

miserable. *Dalit* people were kept out of education, power, wealth and status. So, *Dalit*s' life was meaningless.[204] *Dalit* refers to both the people who are deprived and dehumanized and the state of being deprived. *Dalit*s are the products of the stratified Indian society based on the caste system, which is sanctioned by *Brahminic* ideology. Their condition is that of destitution, dehumanization, exploitation and they are the least educated in the society. They are socially outcastes, economically impoverished, are socially outcastes, economically impoverished, politically powerless and as a corollary to these, they are skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, subservience, hopeless, despair and abasement. In order to understand more about *Dalit*, it is necessary to analyse the situation of *Dalit*s from the social, political, economical and religious aspects.[205]

3.1.2. Dalit situation from different perspectives

3.1.2.1. Social

Socially they are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. They do not belong to any of the Chaturvarna of Indian Hindu Society. i.e. *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya* and *Sudra.* They are called Panchamas, the 5th Varna. Gandhi the strong supporter of Hindu philosophy had named them Harijan, which means children of God. They live separately in rural areas of India. They have separate wells, ghats, or tanks to hold ceremonies.[206]

Besides its common use, the term, *Dalit*, today is specially being used for those people who on the basis of caste distinction have been considered 'outcaste'. They were 'outcaste', because they were not according to the architect of the system, fit to be included in the four-fold graded caste structure of our society. On the basis

[204] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity*…, 30.
[205] Arvind P. Nirmal, ed., *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological college & Research Institute, N.Y.), pp. 29-30.
[206] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity*…, 96.

of this status, they were made to bear extreme kinds of disabilities in the form of oppression for centuries, which made them almost lose their humanness and finally, they reached the state of being a 'no-people'. In fact, because these people were regarded as outcastes and their struggle, this term *Dalit* has gained a new connotation, which has a more positive meaning. It must be remembered that *Dalit* does not mean low caste or 'poor', it refers to the state of a section of people to which they have been reduced, and now they are living in that predicament.[207]

3.1.2.2. Political / Cultural

Politically they are divided and do not come under any single political party. They have reserved constituencies. Even if suitable candidates are there, they are rarely given party tickets in general constituencies. Even in reserved constituencies the caste Hindu are more in number. The *Dalit* candidates after winning from any party, loses his/her identity, and the caste Hindu leaders control all their political activities.[208] Politically they have no power being at the bottom of the scale. They may almost be treated as slaves. Personally they interiorize all these disabilities and feel inferior. They try to forget their low status either in extravagant spending when they have some money or in drinking.[209]

Dalit identity and Dalit Political participation: Nowadays without political power or participation we can't get anything from the government. Once upon a time, Dr. Ambedkar had said, "You should participate in political movement or power; if you have political power then you would have a changed face in your society. So you must participate in political movement". Our Indian Nation has accepted parliamentary democracy. Many national political parties are playing a crucial role.

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[207] Massey, *Roots: A Concise*…,7.
[208] Ambrose Pinto, *"Dalits: Assertion for Identity*…, 38-39.
[209] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?* (Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ISPCK, 1998),65.

*Dalit*s organised their own political parties particularly Republican Party of India (RPI) *Bahujan Samaj Party* (B.S.P) etc. Even after 50 years of independence in India, the Dalit society has not got proportional representation in politics. Dalit society has not developed. Till now, there is no progressive development in Dalits' life. *Dalit* political parties are conscious about it. But the main national political parties have not fully paid attention towards minority groups. So, *Dalit* society is angry about it. That is why *Dalit* community has come together for their own political purpose. They are going to struggle for their rights.[210]

We could take the *Dalits* of India as an example. They are primarily social outcastes. They cannot eat with others as equals. This social ostracism has a cultural basis which sees society as hierarchically organized according to one's tasks in it.[211] Even people who are opposed to untouchability would defend the rightness of a hierarchical division of labour provided the hierarchy is not transmitted by birth. This is different from looking at human beings, as equals in principle whatever be their function in the group.[212] This hierarchical social system is justified in religious terms in relation to a scale of ritual purity and pollution determined by the kind of work one is doing and is relation to the theory of *karma* or rebirth according to which one is born into a particular hierarchical position in society because of his/her deeds in a previous birth.[213] This social situation also forbids them from participation in religious rituals: they cannot enter the temples, for instance. Economically, most of them are landless labourers or engaged in menial jobs in the village and so dependent on the landlords.[214] Culturally they do not belong to the cultural main stream. It is a distinct popular culture. However they are integrated into the dominant culture as a subaltern

[210] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity*…, 35-36.
[211] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*, 65.
[212] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*, 65.
[213] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*, 65.
[214] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*,65.

culture. For instance, even their relationship to the dominant culture is ambiguous. On the one hand they seem to be resigned to their status, having interiorized their subaltern position in the dominant and occasionally protest against it.[215]

In this way they are distancing themselves from the dominant culture. The efforts of some to use Christianity or Buddhism as an escape from the socio-cultural system have not been successful.[216]

3.1.2.3. Religious

They do not belong to any one religion. They are in Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism and in Islam. They are not treated at par in any of the above religion except in Buddhism. They are not strict followers of any religion. Only to satisfy some of their temperaments and to fulfil need of the time they change their religion without much trouble. This is also a shortcoming on their part for their full identity.[217]

The contemporary Indian context is characterized by the rise in *Dalit* consciousness. There is decreasing willingness on the part of *Dalit*s to put up with discrimination at the village level. *Dalit*s are getting tired of being govern. *Dalit*s have a resulted in an increased violence against *Dalit*s yet the liberative ferment seems to be endemic and its effects are left in the Indian Church.[218]

The *Dalit* Church with upper caste leadership and upper caste theology forgot the social base of the Indian Church. It has accommodated caste system which benefits the caste people, identified with the status quo in terms of social relations among Christians characterised by division, discrimination and domination. It has

[215] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*,65.
[216] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Beyond Inculturation-Can the Many be One?...*,66.
[217] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity…*, 38-39.
[218] John Ravi, "V. Devasahayam (b. 1949)", Anand Amaladass, ed., *Indian Christian Thinkers* (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2005), 86.

grossly failed to generate a critical social consciousness.[219] Hinduism has made us all asses. The British ruled this vast subcontinent with one gun in Bombay, one in Madras and one in Calcutta. Three garrisons controlled the whole lot of Indian asses.[220]

3.1.2.4. Economical

The total population of *Dalit*s is about 30% of this country. According to government statistics, 50% of India's 800 million population lives below the "poverty line". The SC/ST as a whole comes below this line. Our population is 20% SCs and 10% Tribes. The entire 30% is below this "poverty line".[221]

There are various factors which makes this pitiable condition. *First*, their economic condition mainly depends on their occupation. Most of the *Dalit* are daily wage labourers. Though their workload is heavy, they are paid very less. They do not possess large industry or large business. Their maximum percentages are found in agriculture as labourers, margin farmers, in small business and cottage industries.[222] According to Sanjay Paswan about 80% *Dalit* who live in rural areas work in agriculture. Many are forced to do menial jobs. As a result their economic status is very low. Sanjay Paswan argued that, though they do hard work, they will not earn much because the work they still do is only what Manu has ordained.[223] This is the main reason of one important issue, the poverty.[224]

Second, mechanization, liberalization, globalization and development have only made the *Dalit*'s life worse.[225] *Dalit*'s main economic resource is agriculture. But the

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[219] John Ravi, "V. Devasahayam (b. 1949)", Anand Amaladass, ed., *Indian Christian Thinkers* …, 87.
[220] V.T. Rajshekar, *Christians & Dalit Liberation* (Bangalore: Print Media, PLO, 2000), 15.
[221] V.T. Rajshekar, *Christians & Dalit Liberation*…, 14.
[222] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity*…, 38-39.
[223] Sanjay Paswan, *Encyclopaedia of Dalit in India: Constitution* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2002) …,19.
[224] Paswan, *Encyclopaedia of* …,19.
[225] David Haslam, *Caste out! The Liberation Struggle of the Dalits in India* (London: CTBI,1999), 83.

land is lost. The fertile land where food is grown is used to grow cash crops and to build up industries and factories. So many *Dalit*s are displaced from their familiar places.

Third, due to economic deprivation their children are deprived of technical education. Most *Dalit*s enter into the lowest kind of service just after completion of school studies to earn livelihood. In most of the families in rural areas not even a single child is found to receive education to show their identity due to economic backwardness.[226]

Fourth, the lack of awareness in money management. Though they are poor to keep up the tradition, they spend so much money on the occasions of marriage and rituals and festivals. For this they borrow money from the landlords on high interest and it is hard for them to repay the principal amount and so they work as bonded labourers, and their children automatically take their place as servants, when they die.[227]One of the ways economic control is maintained is through the lack of proper education to *Dalit*s.[228]

3.2. Dalit understanding of spirituality

Dalit spirituality is directly dependent on their contextual experience. According to Varghese Mathai,

> Spirituality is concerned with perceiving, relating to and interpreting reality. For doing theology in India, we need to be aware of the Indian reality of oppression, marginalization, exploitation and dehumanization of large sections of people.[229] We need to be aware of the powerlessness of the *Dalit*s and other economically deprived sections in the urban and rural areas. It is in the

[226] Ambrose Pinto, *Dalits: Assertion for Identity…*, 38-39.
[227] Paswan, *Encyclopaedia of* …,19.
[228] Haslam, *Caste out!...*, 84.
[229]Varghese Mathai, *Paraclete The Experience of the Holy Spirit,* (Thiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithi November 1999), 120.

> context of discerning the meaning of the Gospel as the good news of God's solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in the different Indian situations that we are to do theology.[230]

The Reign of God announced in the Bible is the God-human project of forming a community that lives by the Spirit. It is realized when laws that are just prevail and human relationships born of love and recognition of each other as equal partners in the earthly sojourn take place. This 'social spirituality' is the animating force and vision in most of the people's movements.[231]

3.2.1. Spirituality of Human dignity and Involvement

Right to life with dignity is the core of *Dalit* spirituality. According to Poulose Mangai, every human being is a subject and may never be treated as a means to some end. *Dalit*s are not cheap commodities for the economic and political advancement of the dominant sections.[232] Human dignity becomes real only when human rights are recognized and protected. Recognition of human dignity must become concrete in the realization of different rights such as rights to life and security, livelihood, education, property, and gender equity.[233] Samuel Ryan counts people 'struggles for human dignity and human rights among the different ways in which God communicates with believers. The Spirit of God is present in all affirmations of human life.[234]

The theology of *Dalit*s demands that spirituality of persons consists not so much in doing religious things like reciting beads, attending church services and participating in devotional practices but in *doing the duties* of their secular calling,

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[230] Varghese Mathai, *Paraclete The Experience of the Holy Spirit…*, 120.
[231] John,T.K., ""Forward", *Spirituality of People's Movements,* Poulose Mangai (Delhi:ISPCK,2012), xviii.
[232] Mangai, Poulose, *Spirituality of People's Movements* (Delhi:ISPCK, 2012), 205.
[233] Mangai, Poulose, *Spirituality of People's Movements…*, 206.
[234] Mangai, Poulose, *Spirituality of People's Movements…*, 246-247.

through theocentric consciousness, in self-less involvement in socio-political life.[235] But by the opinion of Samuel Ryan, it is in small and big events like poverty, caste, oppression, we should search for spirituality: people's spirituality and spirituality of and for spirituality.[236] Poverty and oppression, and response to oppression; response of compassion in our hearts: and action of resistance against what is happening is spirituality. The stories of the people, what is happening to them, and what we do with the happenings are the places we mine for spirituality.[237]

Exclusion is another major threat faced by the *Dalit*s. Even priests and religious seek to participate directly in political life since they do not cease to be citizens of their country. In exercising their natural civic and political rights, they come to friction with tradition-bound bishops. In spite of such a tragic and oppressive situation, enlightened and committed priests renew their fidelity to their Lord Jesus, the crucified by casting their lot to work *with* and *for* the rejected and the apartheid, instead of keeping themselves apart solely for the service of the altar. Given this sad situation of friction, a re-evaluation of Catholic priesthood and parish-centred church, institutionalized by the Council of Trent, is urgently called for. Unfortunately many bishops were ill-prepared to read the signs of the times and help dialogically in search of more relevant expressions of prostitute religion and even God in order to get economic and political profits.[238]

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[235] James Massey (Edit), *"Indigenous People: Dalits-Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate",* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 283.
[236] Samuel Ryan, *"*A Search for an Asian Spirituality for Liberation*",* edited by, Kurien Kunnumpuram, In *Spirit and Truth: Indian Christian Reflections on Spirituality and Worship* (Mumbai: ST PAULS,2012),110.
[237] Samuel Ryan, *"*A Search for an Asian Spirituality for Liberation*",* edited by, Kurien Kunnumpuram, In *Spirit and Truth: Indian Christian Reflections on Spirituality and Worship…,* 111.
[238] James Massey, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits-Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), 283-284.

3.2.2. Spirituality of Justice and Empowerment

In all the struggles for dignity and justice in trade unions, the peasant movements, etc., spirituality is implied. This spirituality is liberation. If we believe in God as the ultimate and ineluctable imperative of justice, love, freedom, and peace, we must hold that at the basis of every struggle and every move for and life and dignity and rice for the riceless, there is a divine force. There is the Holy Spirit, there is a profound spirituality that, once and made explicit, can add clarity, strength and a sense of direction to life and to struggles for life.[239]

There are scholars like M.M.Thomas, who are of the opinion that spiritual empowerment is necessary for political action. M.M.Thomas says, "A Spirituality rooted in the sense of human solidarity in sin and grace and also in the Churches as the community of divine and mutual forgiveness, with faith in the eschatological forgiveness of the Kingdom, is in this context the source of the spiritual liberation of liberation movements". The more we understand God in terms of the historical process of liberation, the more the experience of the Spirit moves towards the centre of our theological reflection. And our understanding of God's relationship to the people of God and their relationship to history is shaped by understanding liberation as a process. The changing face of some revolutionary movements and the continual need for new forms of liberation make it clear that liberation is both a goal and process and that the reality of our lives is shaped more by the process than by the fulfillment of liberation. [240]

When we examine the experience of the Holy Spirit in the context of contemporary liberation movements, we come to see the Spirit as a source of radical

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[239]Samuel Ryan, *"*A Search for an Asian Spirituality for Liberation*",* edited by, Kurien Kunnumpuram, *In Spirit and Truth: Indian Christian Reflections on Spirituality and Worship* (Mumbai: ST PAULS,2012),115.

[240] Varghese Mathai, Paraclete The Experience of the Holy Spirit, (Thiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithi, November 1999), 120.

change. James Cone says, "The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son at work in the forces of human liberations in our society today. In our context, the Holy Spirit is helping black people making decisions about their togetherness, which means making preparation for our encounter with white people.[241]

3.2.3. Spirituality of Ecological sustainability

The life, culture and sensitivities of the *Dalit*s are more closely linked to the earth. For them earth is not an object of human exploitation. The Charter of *Dalit* Human Rights of NCDHR characterizes the *Dalit*s as "the people of Mother Earth, people from a labouring community, people who believe and live a sustainable life and people who belong to and are rooted to the community." The subalterns live with a deeper sense of harmony with nature and their movements advocate a more conservative approach towards the earth and its resources. They remind us of our dependence on Mother Earth for our survival[242]

3.3. Appraisal of *Advaitic* Spirituality from a *Dalit* Perspective

3.3.1. Material vs Spiritual

The spirituality of *Dalit*s is material. Because Thomas Kadankavil argued that, "the ethos for the subaltern cultures is to create a common cultural ethic, one that reenergizes the masses so that they can engage in productive activity. The image of God is built around the production process. These images are institutionalized through the imagination of the subaltern people which is rooted in their day to day human existence and in the relations between productive forces and nature."[243] *Dalit*s cannot accept the spiritual aspect, i.e., the transcendent God who dwells in the above.

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[241] Varghese Mathai, *Paraclete The Experience of the Holy Spirit*…, 120.
[242] Poulose Mangai, *Spirituality of People's Movements*…, 247.
[243] Thomas Kadankavil cmi (Edt), *"Religion and Politics From Subaltern Perspective",* (Bangalore: Dharma ram Publications, 1999), 77.

Michael Amaladoss argued that what is needed is an integrative and inclusive approach that spells out a spiritual path for today, without detriment to particular vocations, especially to a life of renunciation as a symbol of the eschatological future.[244]

We can now point to a few of the differences between the Advaita and the *Dalit* Spirituality. Similar to Christian spirituality, *Dalit* Spirituality, the ultimate unity is a communion of persons, human and divine. The Hindu tradition, while it does not ignore the other, focuses on the self and self-realization. For a Christian, the community is an integral dimension of one's life and *sadhana*. But the relation to the other could be discovered in the depths of the self. The Hindu radically relativizes the world and history: it is the field (*Kshetra*) in which *sadhana* takes places, but in order finally to take one out of it "Lead me from the unreal to the Real..." The Christian does not absolutize the world either, but the world becomes the symbol and mediation of the mystery and thus seems to have a consistency, which is a little different from looking on it as *maya* (illusion).[245]

In Surjit Singh's view, the values at stake in Advaita Vedanta are of personality, of history and of time. It is confusing to call God personal in Advaita system. Also according to Advaita, ultimately individuality of a person is lost in the Absolute. Hence Surjit Singh wishes to safeguard the reality of personality, human and divine, of history, of time, of the world by recapturing the New Testament significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christian thought has maintained that God-human Person is an eternal fact, thus preserving the importance of human as well as historical existence. Ultimate Reality is not only divine but divine-human. If some determinate aspects of the Real are involved and grounded in the actual, then

[244] Michael Amaladoss, S.J.,*Becoming Indian The process of Inculturation* (Rome:Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies (CIIS);(Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications(DP); 1992), 99.
[245] Michael Amaladoss, S.J., *Becoming Indian The process of Inculturetion* ..., 107.

the features of the actual are preserved in the Real beyond the cosmic process. It means that individuality in so far as it aligns itself with the pattern of Ultimate Reality, will be affirmed and preserved.[246]

The Divine-Human relation in Jesus Christ has the characteristics of involvement, interaction, interpenetration and a new paradigm. Divine-Human relation in Jesus shows the capacity of relatibility in the inner structure of God; God is Saguna, personal. It shows the working of God in both an individual human person and also in socio-historical groups. Moreover, Jesus shows that God and a concrete human person move towards each other through the valley of the cross to the mountain top of the resurrection. Christ is the foundation which enables human movement from estrangement with God, self, and the world to reconciliation with God, self and the world.[247]

3.3.2. Advaitic: a Spirituality of exclusion:

Sister Vandana's spirituality is closely related to the Ashramic life. Life situations *Dalit* have no relationship with the Ashram. They are always far away from the Ashram. In Vedic understanding *Dalits* are excluded people. They have no direct connection with God. The Ashramic understandings limit the presence of God in particular place. There are some who reject Advaita Vedanta. For example P.D.Devanandan thought that the Hindu Vedantic theology cannot give an ideological basis for the new Indian anthropology; only the revelation of God in Jesus can.[248]

In the rejection Model we noted the view of P.D.Devanandan that the classical Hindu Vedantic theology is incapable of giving an ideological basis for the new anthropology emerging in independent India and where it is failing to find a solution, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ has got an answer to give. The different aspects

[246] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1996), 210.
[247] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 210.
[248] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 212.

of the answer are: When God became a human person; it affects a revolutionary significance for the world. A person gets an understanding of life as one in which God Himself purposely involved. Christ gives meaningful ideological basis for service (*diakonia*) as one in which God's redemption power is at work in our day-to-day life liberating the individual and renewing human society. If human being is God's creature and God is human being's creator, God is the God who involves in world-life and history. Christian thoughts stand for the idea of personality as applied both to finite being. Individuals can enter into creative relationship in community due to their being bound together as persons in relation to the Person Lack of emphasis of the sinful nature of human person and the purposive will of a personal God as well as over emphasis on the gulf-between the transcendental being and *Karmasamsara*-life are the characteristic limitations of Hinduism which can be overcome by the following facts related to the revelation of God is actively involved in world history and God's redemptive plan is cosmic in its scope.[249]

3.3.3. Advaita: restricted social relation

In India this restricted relation to nature was not modified qualitatively as far as the village community was concerned. Primitive mode ("Asiatic mode") of production characterised social production in agricultural and industry in rural India. In the social-cultural sphere, the social relations were expressed through the ideological and institutional aspects of *dharma* as preserver (conserver) of *varna* ("caste") and *asrama* way of life, which, together with the related theory of *purusarthas*, rigidified and restricted social relations contributing towards changelessness and stagnation.[250]

[249] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 209-210.
[250] S. Kappen, *Religion, Ideology and Counter-Culture* (Bangalore: Horizon Books, 1987), 191.

Thus, it is significant to note that there are many theologians in India who receive *Advaita Vedantic* thought totally in their endeavour of constructing Christian thought. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya interpreted Trinity as *Saccidananda* as well as creation as *maya*. He conceived the second person of the Trinity as *Chit* and the person of Jesus Christ in terms of *Vedantic* human nature. If the knowing Self is the Father, the known Self or the self-begotten by Father's knowledge is the Son and Chit represents this meaning. After maintaining God as absolutely different from all appearances as in *Advaita Vedanta*, Carl Keller pointed out that Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances. According to K. Subba Rao, the Divine Guru, Jesus, leads us from the '*ajnana'* of egoism, body and matter to the *jnana* of the affirmation of the non-dual Spirit. Human destiny is to become perfect or Christ through renunciation and Jesus's help is needed for us to reach this goal.[251]

In S.J. Samartha's view, the theory of multiple *avataras* is theologically sound in the pluralist context of India. K.P. Aleaz expounded the person of Jesus as the extrinsic denomicator (*upadhi*), the name and form (*namarupa*), the effect (*karya*) as well as the reflection (*abhasa*) and delimitation (*ghatahasah*) of *Brahman*. The function of Jesus was interpreted as to manifest the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvam*), illuminative (*jyotih*) and unifying (*ekikrtya*) power of the Supreme Atman.[252]

We can awake to the Father Sat, through the representative Chit, Jesus Christ. Towards the end of his life Abhishiktananda could experience the saving Christ only as pure self-awareness-I AM. Bede Griffiths continues Abhishiktananda's thought and conceives atonement as return to unity, as awakening to our true being in the Word. The created being participated in the communion there is in Godhead between

[251] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,*, 210-211.
[252] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,*, 211.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[253] Raimundo Panikkar is of the view that the role of *Isvara* in Vedanta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought. It is not *Isvara* but Christ, who can be proper link between the world and God, Christ, who transcends Christianity and is the center of reality in a the anthropocosmic vision.[254] Sara Grant stresses the difference in the experience of '*aham brahmasmi'* between Christ and ordinary humans. Christ is the antithesis of self-assertion which is sin as *avidya* and thus is the redeemer.[255] Sister Vandana like Abhishiktananda is for a theology of experience-we should have the Upanisadic experience and in that experience bring forth the Trinitarian experience as the culmination of *Advaitic* experience. She suggests a Christological interpretation of the Upanisads.[256]

3.3.4. *Dalit* liberation against *Advaitic* Spirituality

Dalit theology runs counter to existing Indian Christian theology which has been articulated mostly by upper-caste theologians who, they claim, ignored the interests of the *Dalit*s. A.P.Nirmal argues such a theology has no appeal to the *Dalit*s. He wrote:

> Indian Christian theology in the past has tried to work out its theological systems in terms of either *Advaita* Vedanta or *Vishishtadvaita*. Most of the contributions to Indian Christian theology in the past came from caste converts to Christianity. The result has been that Indian Christian theology has perpetuated within itself what I prefer to call the '*Brahminic'* tradition. .... One wonders whether this kind of Indian Christian theology will ever have a mass appeal.[257]

Dalit theologians' use of theological terms, such as prophetic theology, people's theology and political theology, is borrowed from Black liberation theology. As

[253] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 211.
[254] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 211-212.
[255] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 212.
[256] K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta…,* 212.
[257] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate,* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 27.

liberation theologians have stressed, the transformation of society in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.[258]

Dalit liberation theologians have nothing to say against vernacular preaching. Nevertheless they have ignored the impact of vernacular preaching, in particular, missionaries' contribution to the revival of native language and culture. This section addresses this particular issue and also explores the advantages of preaching the Gospel as a means of awakening *Dalit*'s consciousness and subsequent social transformation.[259]

According to Azariah, becoming the followers of Christ not only brings individuals and communities to the transforming influence of Christ, but also unites them into communities to act as instruments of change. He himself was a witness to the fact that his own Triunelvelli Nadar community had undergone a social change through the influence of the Gospel. Consequently when he became an evangelist among the *Malas* and *Madigas* of Andhra, being true to the missionary tradition, he was successful in bringing social change which was welcomed by the *Dalit*s who longed for self-identity and social mobility. In other words by carrying on the tradition of the Anglican missionaries, he understood the Church as not only an agent of evangelism but also the bearer of civilization. He wrote,

Where Christianity goes, education, civilization, and habits of cleanliness in body, dress and food, in speech and conduct, are the concomitant results. This has been again testified to by shrewd observers.

[258] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*,.28.
[259] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, 158.

Azariah and his co-workers accepted social changes as "the very essence of the gospel of Christ and therefore an integral part of the Christian message". They asserted that, "its sure sanction was Jesus Christ Himself".

Therefore for Azariah the religion of Christ was an instrument of liberation. But James Massey argues:

Why do the *Dalit*s continue to suffer oppression and discrimination even after joining a very egalitarian religion like Christianity? The answer lays in the history of Indian Christians i.e. histories of various missions.[260]

The study reveals that apart from their socio-economic and political aspirations, the *Dalit*s became Christians as part of a religious quest. Along with other reasons, *Dalit* converts abandoned their faith in their gods and goddesses from religious conviction. The desire of relief from social oppression was not divorced from a religious quest. The missionaries appeared to respect their motives as normal and allowed them to be influenced, (which the Brahmins will never do), so that they elevated them. Thus, as was shown, for the missionaries Christianization itself was conscientisation and provided the *Dalit*s with a positive Christian consciousness – an important factor for social transformation.[261]

Accordingly *Dalit* theologians have decided to evolve a common *Dalit* ideology to assist the depressed classes in realisation of their goal. Though the insights of Ambedkar may have some relevance for the struggle of the *Dalit*s, Ambedkarism may not be the answer for all the problems of the *Dalit*s. He pioneered *Dalit* separatism and wanted to use religion for achieving political ends. This is particularly the case in reference to their religious problems and social values which

[260] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate…,* 296-297.
[261] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate…,* 331-332.

the missionaries had always to deal with for awakening their consciousness and subsequent socio-economic and political transformation.[262]

For *Dalit* theologians social change among the *Dalit*s depends on certain processes which are, for the most part, a protest ideology of class conflict and anti-caste Hindu feeling. Their strategy is to raise the consciousness of the *Dalit*s about their oppressive situation and its causes and to change that situation through class struggle. So *Dalit* theologians aspire for socio-economic and political liberation of the *Dalit*s which would result in an egalitarian social order. This was a process also advocated by the Latin American liberation theologians and Black theologians who used Marxist social analysis. This hypothesis and a statement of faith have yet to demonstrate its efficacy.[263]

Since *Dalit* theologians interpret *Dalit* consciousness as protest against the oppressive Brahmanical Hinduism, they perceive conversion to Christianity as a sociological movement led by the *Dalit*s or by the missionaries or by both. They maintain that the *Dalit*s left the caste ridden Hinduism and embraced various religions such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity to escape social oppression; but to their disappointment even after conversion their social status did not change.[264]

In evaluating contributions made by Indian Christians to Indian Christian theology in the past, Nirmal contends that they are mostly from the high caste converts to Christianity. Thus, Indian Christian theology has perpetuated within itself what he calls 'the *brahminic* tradition'. This tradition has further perpetuated intuition-interiority oriented approach to the theological task in India. Therefore, such

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[262] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate…*, 334.
[263] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate…*, 334.
[264] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate …*, 334.

an attempt has not had any mass appeal. Further, for Nirmal, "the last word in Indian Christian theology was not said by Brahma Bandhava, Appasamy, Chakkarai and Chenchiah. There is no need to idealize the glorious past of Indian Christian theology represented in the writings of these men".[265]

Since *Dalit*s are a sociological reality, *Dalit* theology takes social and sociological dimensions seriously. The classical Christian theology as well as classical Indian Christian theology has regarded philosophy as most adequate medium for communicating Christian theological truths. Whereas for *Dalit* theology, as it is for all liberation theologies, sociology is more important and therefore, it is more concerned with peoples and their life, --life with all its absurdity, illogicality, inconsistency, incoherence and unsystematicness.... *Dalit* theology serves the interests of the *Dalit* people because they are an oppressed people. It does this by empowering them for their liberation struggle.[266]

3.4. Alternate Approaches in Spirituality

3.4.1. A holistic approach

Holistic and multidimensional process of the transformation of individuals in their faith and praxis is the core of alternate approach. For many people spirituality consists in such things as prayer and contemplation, and salvation. The socio-economic and political activities, especially the spirituality of mission, also have a great deal in the holistic approach.

[265] Franklyn J. Balasundaram, *Contemporary Asian Christian Theology*, (Bangalore: ISPCK, 1995), 153-154.
[266] Franklyn J. Balasundaram, *Contemporary Asian Christian Theology…*, 161-162.

3.4.1.1. Transcendent understanding

For missionaries, ethnic and national identity was not the proper way of shaping the identity of the Christians. The dignity and worth of a person depended on what God had done in Jesus Christ for that particular person. The discovery of self-identity and self-worth as a child of God revealed in the Scripture was an influential factor in the formation of new Dalit consciousness and identity. The invitation and security to the poor and the oppressed. Moreover, according to missionaries the Dalit identity fellow believers locally and universally. Amos yong has pointed out:

> Christian salvation includes both the transformation of human beings into the image of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the transformation of all creation into the new heaven and new earth by the triune God. Hence the main components of a Christologically directed and pneumatologically driven soteriology entail fleshing out what I call the multidimensionality of salvation given through the Spirit; elaborating on the eschatological and pneumatological dynamic of the experience by the power of the Spirit commensurate with this view.[267]

Salvation is a *holistic* and multidimensional process of the transformation of individuals in their spiritual, natural, and social environments; this gives meaning to the experience of the forgiveness of sins and to the deliverance from the principalities and powers of this age. The saving work of the Spirit transforms human persons precisely by reconciling them to God, to teach other, and to their natural habitats. There is no necessary antagonism either between the salvation of the spirit and the salvation of the body or between the new birth and the social or "green" gospels.[268] Christian identity is not confined to place or race. Our identity is to be as Children of God – "He destined us for adoption as response to those alienated from their identity is to bring them into relationship of wholeness. The foundation of this is the

[267] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh-Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 91.
[268] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh-Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, 117-118.

reconciliation of which the cross is a sign and the basis. "He himself is our peace who made the two one" (Eph 2.14).[269]

Another criticism was that the salvation theology taught by the missionaries promoted psychological dependence, political passivity and communal exclusiveness among the depressed classes. For Wilson, this view of sin and salvation shows that salvation theology is not only built upon the edifice of human weakness, but also nurtures a low self-image and a sense of helplessness. Further he says that like the Hindu social *dharma*, it locates the roots of the Dalit predicament within the Dalits themselves, from birth, and not in the oppressive institutions of society.[270]

However, the present study seems to contradict Wilson's view. The Dalit Christian leader V.S.Azariah and his converts were of the opinion that the missionary theology or salvation theology was positive and promoted self-respect among the oppressed classes. "They were convinced that the Christian Gospel provided the only real solution to the Dalits' problems'.[271] Vinay Samuel contends:

> Unlike the missionaries the strategy of the British Raj was to leave religion alone; recognising later that religion and culture were indivisible, to focus on culture and make a Western separation between two. This left the Raj free to reform the culture (on the grounds that religion was not involved) and retain the image of a culture in decline which has no indigenous means image of a culture in decline which has no indigenous means of renewal. The British Raj therefore focused on those who were 'cultural leaders' – the Brahmins and upper-castes. They used education and employment as their means of engaging with the culture to shape the caste elites and mould the culture to their ends of modernity.[272]

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[269] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, 339.
[270] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, 354.
[271] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, 354.
[272] Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion-Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate*, 361.

3.4.2. Immanent: the action oriented Spirituality

(1) *Responsibility:*--Spirituality for today is the need for the response-able spirituality, i.e., the contextual spirituality. According to Antony Mookenthottam, it is Christian responsibility to work with God to realize his plans for his people.[273] The new world will be envisaged, designed and built around people: with children, women and men as its centre and meaning. The securing and fostering of human welfare, dignity, freedom, creativity and solidarity will be the goal and purpose of the new social relations we weave, of all new political processes, all economic dealings and cultural developments.[274] The Sabbath was made for human well-being, and not humans for the Sabbath"(Mk. 2:23-27). A spirituality that follows God, places the Human at the centre of its concern. The human is the decisive value, governing all else. Therefore the well-being of all human being is the responsibility.

(2) *Vision for a new world:* - (a) Mutual Acceptance:- An essential factor in today's spirituality will be the weaving and cherishing and of a vision of world solidarity, recognizing the equality, dignity and rights of all persons, groups and nations, irrespective of geography, race, colour culture, gender, age, or status.[275]

(b)Sharing the Resources: -Sharing and fellowship implies forgiveness that beautiful reality on which Jesus laid such emphasis and on which the entire New Testament experience of salvation hinges. Humankind indeed is one family, in the presence of the one Father of us all, living in one home and sharing a common table, namely the earth and its resources. In the opening chapters of Genesis God gifts the earth with all its wealth and wonder to the first humans, representatives of the whole

[273] Antony Mookenthottam, "To the Reader", *Spirituality of People's Movements* (Delhi:ISPCK,2012),xiii.
[274] Kurien Kunnumpurath, ed., *In Spirit and Truth,* (Mumbai: ST PAULS, 2012), 29.
[275] Kurien Kunnumpurath, ed., *In Spirit and Truth,* 30.

humanity.[276] All the believers lived together, irrespective of race, colour culture, gender, age, or status, had all things in common and distributed them to all as any has needed. Irrespective of cast and religion all human-being have to share the earthly resources. (c) Bridge the gap between the rich and the poor: - The gulf between the rich and the poor in every nation and among the nations of the world are becoming wider and deeper. An intricate system of exploitation, perfected through a few centuries of imperialist-colonial domination and deceit, has been set up on a global scale to entrap the many and benefit a few: a system which places profit and power above people and their life, and which has a history of accumulating capital through slave trade, slave labour and armed conquests. To be spiritual today is to hear the cry of the poor as God does, take their side in analyzing and denouncing the subhuman system, and work with all sensitive people to replace the system with one that honours people's rights, and accords with the social character of human existence, a distant but telling reflection of the triune divine community.[277]

3.5. Theological Reflections

Spirituality has come out of the dichotomy of body-soul, secular-sacred, nature-grace and spirit-matter and begun to take an integrated view of human existence.[278] Theology must be open and responsive to people's desire and struggle for human dignity, human rights, justice, truth, peace, and communal harmony.

According to Sister Vandana, human beings are spiritual by virtue of being governed and indwelt by the Spirit. The Spirit – the external moral force – the divine spirit, and the so-called Brahman works on the *atman* in the human to work towards

[276] Kurien Kunnumpurath, ed., *In Spirit and Truth*, 30.
[277] Kurien Kunnumpurath, ed., *In Spirit and Truth*, 31.
[278] Mangai, Poulose *Spirituality of People's Movements*.,284.

the transcendence of the human limitations so as to even reach up to become divine, and even to merge with the divine being or the Absolute, such that in the experience of this transcendence – transformation/new being/ born again experience, one feels the indwelling of the Spirit – the experience of the divine in one while being on earth, such that that human lives out as a spiritual being proper.[279]

Such a being, not bound or limited by mortal restrictions/ transcending human limitations, lives and works as a *divine* being on earth for the good of others – enabling others to experience this transcendence – to be spiritual beings. This human being dwells in the Spirit and vice versa, such that his/her acts and reflections are divine, altruistic, liberative and redemptive. He or she in that experience and nature does not long for earthly desires, do not feel hunger or crave for material possessions etc. Instead, spiritual beings live for others, for the welfare of all beings in the world – men and women, nature, animals etc.[280]

This has been the experience of scores of people around the world for generations. They have been known and recognized as prophets, seers, *rishis*, etc., who worked out their own ways and methods to attain this spirituality, and to work and live towards sustaining this spiritual awareness and impact among their fellow beings. India too has had scores of these spiritual beings who lived a humble, divine, truthful and loving life leading others as themselves in the path of peace, justice and

[279] Bede Griffiths, "Mystical Theology in the Indian Tradition", *Jeevadhara The Problem of Man*, Vol. IX No.49, January-February 1979, 262-263., see also Steven T. Katz, editor, *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 171., cf. Abhishiktananda, "*Saccidananda-A Christian Approach To Advaitic Experience*" (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), 49.
[280] Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*….., 243., Sr. Vandana, "The Prayer of the Heart in The Byzantine and Hindu Traditions", *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol. XIX, No.1. March 1982, 113., Dominic Veliath SDB, "*Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in a Pluralistic Context*" (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1993), 101-104.

humility.[281]

Jesus' spirituality is a spirituality of shore-less compassion. It is not only our physical ills and needs that move His heart to intervene creatively, but the wounds and filth of our mangled hearts too prompt Him to act on our behalf. He served the afflicted people, even overruling Sabbath laws and risking the murderous wrath of authorities (Mk.1:14- 3:6; Jn.5:9). The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the maimed, the leprous, the fever-stricken, the deformed, the paralysed and victims of haemorrhage were restored to health and happiness throughout the land.

In asserting the function of ashrams as the embodiment of simplicity, humility, solidarity with the poor – a body of people living an egalitarian life of contemplation with no barriers or restrictions, enabling creative activity for strengthening oneness – with God and the World – people, nature and other living beings, providing dignity and stability to the needy – ashram itself is an attempt at bringing transformation in society which lacks equality, harmony and justice. For Sister Vandana, the very ashramic living – contemplating on God, doing manual work, helping others, doing theology – dialoguing with others, experimenting with inculturation to get to the root of cultural riches and diversity (so that Christian faith could be enshrined therein), etc., amount to give a clue to a beginning already made towards bringing about justice and peace. The ashramic very living is thus a sign of that Kingdom to come.

Concluding her reflections on the strengths of ashramic living as in contributing towards social justice, she wonders:

> "Because of these values, it is possible that concrete ways of the whole man could germinate in ashrams. Christianity has not and may never evolve a scientific analysis of society as Marxism has done. But a life of equality (no casteism), of fraternity and compassion, (ahimsa) – arising out of contemplation

[281] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 27., see also.Lily Fernandes, "Ashrams and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Experience of Vandana", Augustine Thottakara, CMI, Editor, *Spirituality of Dialogue: Indian Experiences*….., 248.

(seeking Brahma Vidya as one's primary goal in daily life) – could these perhaps possibly produce tools to remove structured injustices? If at all, it would be precisely because they endeavour to remove the injustices in our own 'inner structures."[282]

Affirming further that it is "ultimately only if the people in the ashram are living a life of selfless service and love - arising out of their contemplation – that the ashram would be able to fulfil this role" of bringing about a new vision in social justice.[283]

"*This outer world situation of injustice and corruption is precisely what makes the ashrams – and what they can offer – significant*, and why people literally … flock to them. It s the inner world and inner space they seek – (with which the ashram deals primarily). To 'seek the first the Kingdom of God and his justice,' - they begin to realize – must be sought first within in our individual inner worlds, if it is ever to be established in the outer world. The ashram appears to them a lamp lit in the midst of the darkness (the guru is one who leads from darkness to light), a centre of love in the midst of hatred and an oasis of peace in the midst of violence. It is when each one of us has peace in her/his heart that we can bring about peace and justice in the world at large."[284]

[282] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 54-55.
[283] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 56.
[284] Sr. Vandana, *Social Justice and Ashrams*…, 58.

Summary

- The status of Dalits in India is deplorable. They are very backward and marginalized at all levels of our society. The image of Dalits in caste epistemology is impure, weak, way ward, evil, and inferior. It should be controlled. The experience and labour of Dalits are not considered as having any "value"—it is counted for nothing, unless it can be exploited to aid the profit- oriented market place. Dalits work under the most exploitative, dehumanizing and unhealthy conditions, neither their work, nor wages are regularized. There is no self-employment among Dalits. Their educational status is very low. Being not educated properly, they cannot go for a good or white collar job and they can't make entry into the organized sector. In the unorganized sector they work as wage-labourers, and they do not get any benefits that workers in the organized sector are entitled to. These women have to work in jobs with a low-status. There is no certainty of work round the year.
- Dalit Understanding of Spirituality is the Spirituality of Liberation, Spirituality of Human dignity and Involvement, Spirituality of Justice and Empowerment, Spirituality of Ecological sustainability. Right to life with dignity is the core of the *Dalit* spirituality. Every Dalit is also a human being is a subject and may never be treated as a means to some end. Human dignity becomes real only when human rights are recognized and protected. It is needed to include the Dalits and the marginalized people to get the meaning of spirituality in its fuller sense.
- From a Dalit Perspective *advaitic* Spirituality is the Material vs Spiritual, it is the Spirituality of exclusion. In the *advaitic* understandings of Sister Vandana, spirituality is not the finding of earthly materials. It is only divine, such as sitting in the presence of God in the holy place and reading scriptures, conducting prayers etc.

There is no need of crying for the earthly things. This view is far away from the Dalit situation. For them Advaita is restricted social relations and Dalit liberation is against *Advaitic* Spirituality.

- This so specially in terms of the Dalits, who have been caught up in the age old problem of caste that has marginalized them from mainstream life, depriving them of a full life, education, health and a holistic living. Her concern for them – the marginalized in terms of social justice has been only a lip-service as she embarks on spiritualizing her concerns. That means, her concern has been only curative rather than a preventive action or measure. So this is not a systemic correction but a superficial action.

- An alternate Approach in Spirituality is the holistic approach. Holistic and multidimensional process of the transformation of individuals in their faith and praxis is the core of alternate approach. For many people spirituality consists in such things as prayer and contemplation, and salvation. The socio-economic and political activities, especially the spirituality of mission, also have a great deal in the holistic approach.

CONCLUSION

The Spirit of God is always active in the universe and in the various religious traditions of the world. The great admiration of Jesus for the faith of the Roman centurion (Mt.8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (Mt.15:21-28) are instances that indicate the activity of the Spirit in various religious traditions. All the same, in the past the church and Christian theologians did not pay adequate attention to this reality.

Dalits, one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world, are socially untouchable, politically powerless, economically poor and religiously voiceless. The 'real people of the land', the Dalit of our country are excluded in almost all areas of life. They are still victims of a cruel and oppressive socio-religious order. They are victims of patriarchal and andocentric customs as well as natural and accidental catastrophes. They have no power to resist these kinds of inhuman activities.

If one looks at the whole history of the Dalits in India, particularly over recent years, one may well ask, why speak of a new future, when the number of poor has increased, the distressed and needy have multiplied, injustice of every sort is eaten and drunk by the Dalit with their daily bread and water. How can we sing of our hope for justice, our longing for love in exile from our self and our country? We have more reasons to weep than to laugh for joy! Nevertheless there is hope for a new future and this hope is through the meaningful use of spirituality. The present research is an attempt to exercise spirituality in proper way on the theological basis.

This research embarked on finding an appraisal of Sister Vandana's *advaitic ashramic* spirituality from a Dalit perspective. Sister Vandana's attempt in defining spirituality from an *advaitic* stand goes along with the Hindu or Indian ethos. It flowers within an ashramic existence – a living marked by contemplative living in a

community and a mystical experience of the divine within a material world. This research is divided into three chapters. *First* chapter is discussing about the spirituality in general, what is spirituality, the history of spirituality, different religious understandings of spirituality, especially Hindu understandings, Buddhist understandings, Islamic understandings, and Sikh's understandings. The end of this chapter deals with the Christian and the biblical understandings of spirituality.

The *Second* chapter deals with the methodology of the research. The *advaitic* spirituality of Sister Vandana is its main focus. Her life situations influenced her understandings of spirituality and this area deals with the life and her influences. The ashramic life was the main formative factor of her theology. She always focused on the spiritual perspectives of the life than the material. For that she found the *advaita* is better than any other.

The *Third* chapter is dealing with the situation of Dalits in the Indian scenario. Dalit Understanding of Spirituality such as the Spirituality of Liberation, Spirituality of Human dignity and Involvement, Spirituality of Justice and Empowerment, Spirituality of Ecological sustainability is also dealing. Dalit understandings of *advaitic* spirituality, an alternate approach in Spirituality, i.e., the holistic approach, the theological approach is also discussing here.

From a Dalit Perspective, *advaitic* Spirituality of Sister Vandana is the Material vs Spiritual, it is the spirituality of exclusion. In the *advaitic* understandings of Sister Vandana, spirituality is not the finding of earthly materials. It is only divine, such as sitting in the presence of God in the holy place and reading scriptures, conducting prayers etc. There is no need of crying for the earthly things. For Sister Vandana, Christian spirituality finds its echo in the *advaitic* spirituality in terms of an exclusive community living, away forms the world and yet with occasional forays

made in to the realities of the world, to find the mystical experience of the divine in mundane things of life. While this ashramic existence may be purely exclusive and the *advaitic* notions of the mystic is away from the world - for one self and an individual effort – studying the scripture etc., for Sister Vandana impelled as such by Christian notions of spirituality gave her a new insight into get involved in the world of suffering and bondage as of the Dalits to provide a way out in terms of liberation and freedom.

This view is far away from the Dalit situation. Without the satisfaction of the basic needs such as proper food, good health, shelter, they can't imagine divine aspects of spirituality. This was derived no doubt for the example of Jesus the Man who came down to earth, to become man to be involved in the liberation of humankind from all bonds. His Identity with the suffering humanity, his solidarity with the suffering and his involvement in the world was again a sure motivation for all the spiritual people to follow in that path and lead others to liberation – in terms of action in social justice. Sister Vandana is focusing only on the divine realm. Earthly living necessities have no priority. Therefore, for Dalits, *advaita* is restricted social relations and *advaitic* Spirituality is against Dalit liberation.

Dalits have thus found in Christian spirituality a needed impetus in their efforts and struggles to find a meaning in living – a fullness of life in Christ away from the bondage of caste. They have come to this cross-road after making sure that they are the masters of their destiny. They are not anymore bound by caste let alone by fate or karma. They are impelled by the understanding of their spirituality as one of combat where they struggle on their own along with the example of Christ and footsteps to realize their dream of living a liberated life away from restrictions. Thus

in conversion to Christianity, Dalits' spirituality has taken on a new hue of constructive living of which the following points could be summarised:

1. They have come to realize that there is a way out of this morass.
2. They need to struggle to come out to find this way of liberation.
3. They need to be united in their effort at casting away the caste rigidity.
4. They need to achieve this liberation with in history and time – It is no more a dream in the future.
5. Their struggle is a spiritual struggle against all powers that oppress them.
6. Their spirituality is not devoid of a mystical experience of the divine impetus that they have derived from Christ and his example of solidarity with the marginalized.
7. They are also concerned about their oppressors who oppressed them so far depriving of them leading a full life in terms of employment, education, lifestyle etc.
8. Their spirituality is one of these worldly struggles to bring the mystical and spiritual to bear fruit and to bring bear on the mundane matters of life – poverty, suffering, bondage, deprivation and discrimination.

To this end Dalit spirituality in the light of ashramic/ *advaitic* spirituality as per Sister Vandana' s forays in to the world to bring about liberation and social justice gives Dalits and all others who need a holistic living experience a boost and a hope for a new world.

The holistic approach is Holistic and multidimensional process of the transformation of individuals in their faith and praxis is the core of alternate approach. For many people spirituality consist in such things as prayer and contemplation, and salvation. The socio-economic and political activities, especially the spirituality of mission, also have a great deal in the holistic approach.

Jesus is always with the afflicted or victimized. He is hope for those who are suffering. Both the Old Testament and New Testament give ample evidences to this fact. After having looked at the present scenario of Dalit is evident that the need of the hour is new spirituality of Dalit. Because of the oppression, of class, caste and Dalit the least access to education and other opportunities for social and economic mobility. Their liberalization does not lie purely in economic or political terms, but social and cultural liberation must also be taken into account.

If hope is vital for human beings, it is not that something exists in advance ready-made. It has to be sought, nourished, shared, supported, made actual through signs in order to remain true and strong. Dalits are the night watchers of hope waiting for the dawn. They are certain that when the night is over, the bright sun will shine and that even in the middle of the night there are often twinkling stars.

Christianity in its core has the message of God's identification and solidarity with the broken and wounded humanity in order to heal and make it wholesome. When half of the human community is denied their true selves as human beings, those committed to the liberative message of Jesus cannot be silent in this situation.

On whole the level, all have to unite to assure a minimum standard of living to all people everywhere, so that all can meaningfully and with dignity participate in the production and distribution of goods and so that all are assured of the necessities of life. It is in the struggle for justice that one can begin with freedom and dignity, created in the image of God to be the creator of good and the fullness of spirituality.

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