

Cosmic Harmony as Cosmic Sacrifice

A Scientific Hermeneutic of the Hindu Mysticism of Love

The rich Eastern allusions to love and altruism draw substantively complementary theoretical tools from the metaphysical and theological underpinnings of the emerging scientific worldview. The “cosmotheandric” vision of reality which is the core of the Hindu mystical perspectives binding the perennial problematic trio of philosophy and theology, viz., God, world and the human, in an intuitive matrix of communion and interrelatedness serves as the solid metaphysical and conceptual foundation for an ontology of love and as the universal axiomatic norm for an altruistic praxis. This religious vision is very much corroborated by the metaphysical underpinnings of the recent revolutionary developments in modern science especially in physics and biology. The rich Hindu metaphors of *Yajna* (sacrifice) *Dharma* (Righteousness), *Bhakti* (Devotion), *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), etc., share analogical regions of convergence with the scientifically coined cosmic epithets of harmony, unity, symmetry, interrelatedness, etc. Thereby both science and religion can be said to have become so hermeneutical and metaphorical to such hitherto unprecedented levels whereby the same reality described by science as cosmic harmony is in a way addressed by the Hindu mystical mind-set as the all pervading *Brahman* or as the all-loving *Bhagavan*.

The central characteristics of love and altruism as emerging from the Hindu vision is that it is cosmic and universal in nature embracing not only the human and other living beings, but also the inanimate and non-sentient beings. It also drags the traditional moral concepts like action, sin, virtue, good, evil, etc. away from a moral plane to an ontological realm. Considering some of the central notions of Hinduism can elucidate this.

Yajna is one of the central metaphors of Hinduism, promulgated by the *Veda*-s, *Upanishad*-s and the *Bhagavatgita* – the sacred scriptures of Hinduism. *Yajna* is understood not as a ritualistic phenomenon but as a cosmic reality. *Yajna* refers to the whole interconnected cosmos, a web of relations bound together in love and self-giving. Even a piece of stone is an active partaker in an ineffable mystery of love, openness and self-giving. *Yajna* is not an act of worship of God but the great function which links gods and men. They believed that if the specialist in sacrifice performed the sacrifice in the proper manner, the actions of the gods also would be performed at the appropriate times and places according to the cosmic norm (*rita*). Otherwise the cosmos would turn into chaos. The idea here is that the cosmic duration as well as the prolongation of human life far from being a natural endowment is the result of a carefully organized series of sacrificial and divine acts, which depend upon one another. Sacrifice was performed to help gods to maintain the cosmic order (*rita*) because the existence of the cosmos is a co-responsibility of divine acts and human acts. Sacrifice is not offered to any God to propitiate him or to obtain from him welfare on earth or bliss in heaven because sacrifice by itself is able to produce these results.

The Hindu mind-set incessantly tries to find affinities to link causally the three realms of their universe, i.e., the realm of the sacrifice, the realm of the natural phenomena (the macrocosm), and the realm of the human self (the microcosm). They also believed that the affinities discovered revealed a hidden identity. That means that there exist some similarities between these realities. If these realities are identical in a way, the activity at one point of the chain can produce the result at another point. This is how sacrifice produces the effects. This method of perceiving a hidden identity between the realm of the sacrifice and the realm of the macrocosm is called the method of *nidhana* (the method of identification).

For instance, the Satapata Brahmana says, “The sun would not rise if the priest did not offer sacrifice” (Satapata, 1,3,1,5). *Yajna* is thus regarded as the naval of the universe. Everything originates from *Yajna* and returns to *Yajna*. *Yajna* lives on the life and activities of the beings in it. Hence it is the ontological responsibility of each being in the world, especially the human, to contribute to the running of the sacrificial wheel (*Yajna chakra*). The very origin of the *Yajna* is associated with a cosmogonic myth in which Purusha, the primordial being, is said to have performed sacrifice whereby the different parts of the Purusha turned out to be the different parts of the universe. Thus the whole world is the resultant of the gratuitous self-giving of the Lord.

Here sin is understood not moralistically, but ontologically, as ontological selfishness, a refusal to participate in the *Yajna*. Sin is a refusal to be part of the movement of the cosmic sacrificial wheel. By sin one excommunicate oneself from the center of the cosmos. Such a person is described as unreal (*asat*). The sacred text Gita says that he who enjoys the blessings of the *Yajna* and gives nothing in return to it is a “thief.” Each human is endowed with an ontological responsibility for the well being of the entire cosmos. Every movement, every action and every gesture of the humans has its cosmic repercussions, either as contributing to the cosmic harmony or as destroying the harmony of the cosmos.

The praxis points of *Yajna* can be articulated through a few other metaphors viz., *dharma* (righteousness), *karma* (action), *bhakti* (love or devotion) and *ahimsa* (non-violence). *Dharma* is a comprehensive word generally meaning holding, holding together, sustaining and maintaining; it connotes the source of its holding, holding together, etc. The locus of *dharma* is the ‘being’ that is held together and which manifests itself through the specific ‘*dharma*’ constitutive of its nature. And finally this being, in order to be what it is, that is, in order to be true to itself has to realize its own *dharma*. Hence to speak of *dharma* is to refer not merely to Man’s ethical and ritual practices but much more to the Nature and the Source of his very being. *Dharma* comprehends the origin, the development, the interactivity and the final fulfillment. To mention any one of these is implicitly or ‘operatively’ to include the others, much the same way as when one explicitly talks about any one human activity and implicitly presupposes the whole organic being of the human.

It goes against the common understanding of the Spiritual. For it expects the perfect men to delight in, to go in ecstasy over the Welfare of All Beings (*Lokasamgraha*). Humans are to achieve perfection by delighting in the Welfare of all beings and humans will be perfect when they can take delight in the Welfare of All Beings. Thus perfection is not an individual’s search but a communitarian concern for final Communion. In Bhagavat Gita, Individual perfection is a meaningless phrase because Perfection is communitarian. Communion alone is perfection. [For a detailed discussion of the Concept of Dharma in this connection, please see Francis D’Sa, “Dharma as Delight in Cosmic Welfare: A Study of Dharma in the Gita,” in Biblehashyam VI (1980), pp. 335-357. For my discussion of theme Dharma in Gita I have relied on Francis D’Sa.]

If the Dharma of the Supreme Lord is to hold together this Cosmos in being, then the Dharma of human is nothing other than remaining faithful to this being-held-together. The Gita teaches how to do this through the margas or ways of Karma (action) and Bhakti (Love). As the word suggests this marga has to do with doing, work and activity. Attachment is another word for selfishness and karma marga proposes an attitude of mind through which renunciation in, not of, action is practiced. This renunciation is of the fruit

of action. Karma marga says the action has to be done for the simple reason that it has to be done and not because of the results it produces. Whether it is the action or ritual or that of everyday life, it has to be done because it is necessary and not because it is pleasurable. Renunciation of the fruit or result of action means the pleasure or pain that flows from it and not the effects that follow. We are asked to renounce not the digestive process that follows from eating but the pleasure that eating gives. More precisely still, it is not the pleasure or pain that is denied, but what is expected of us is that we do not make them the motive for our eating; we eat and we eat what we eat not because it is pleasurable but because we have to eat what is set before us. And when there is a choice of food we make the choice not on the grounds of the food being pleasurable or not pleasurable but on the basis of health, economy, etc.

Synonyms for selflessness in the Gita are detachment, equanimity, sameness and indifference, or *nishkamakarma* (selfless action). Selfless action is only one side of the coin. The other side is the welfare of all. Every action should have the intention of the promotion of the proximate good, but also the promotion of the Welfare of All (*Lokasamgraha* Gita 3:25). It is not enough that we intent the welfare of the entire creation in our action but should also take delight in the welfare of the entire creation. This is indicated by the phrase *sarvabhuta hite ratah* (ecstatic delight in the welfare of the all creation, *Gita* 5:25). It is not any ordinary delight that is envisaged, but the greatest kind of an ecstatic joy. The word used here is *ratah* which is coming from *rati* indicating sexual pleasure, the greatest physical pleasure known to man. We need to go ecstatic over the goodness and welfare of others in a manner exceeding the sexual delight.

Does one need omniscience to discern what is promoting the welfare of all? What the Gita expects is not omniscience but concern for all before undertaking any course of action. The attitude of concern, concern that one's action is not harming anybody is what is probably meant by the phrase. The concept of *Yajna* in the Hindu worldview connotes interconnectedness and interdependence as in an organic body. Hence work for sacrifice basically connotes work for the welfare of all.

Bhakti (Love, Devotion) is yet another metaphor carrying the cosmic and universal nuances of love and selflessness. Modern translations of bhaj, the root of bhakti, are love, beloved, devotee, devotion, etc. However *bhaj* primarily means to divide, to share, to be a part of, etc. Therefore *bhakti* is dividing, sharing and participating, to love and to be loved. These meanings of bhakti keep in the background their original imagery of the part-whole. In Gita, the Absolute is looked upon as *Sarvah* – the One-who-is-the-All. In this context, the bhakta is one who is a part of the “one-who-is-all.” The *bhakta* is part of the *Sarvah*. Though the whole cosmos is part of the *Sarvah* it is not called *bhakta*. To be a bhakta one has to be more than a mere part of the *Sarvah*. One has to be consciously and willingly a part of the whole. The bhakta has consciously to participate in the whole and thus realize his/her fullness and fulfillment therein. Bhaj refers then firstly to consciously being a part of the whole and secondly to the conscious and free yearning to be united with the whole. As the Gita tells: “In all beings the same am I; none do I hate and none do I fondly love; but those who acknowledge me with their heart and mind as the One (whose) part they are, they are in me and I too am in them” 9:29.).

The *Sarvah* is on the level of being, the same towards all; on the level that is, where he is the source and sustenance of beings. However on the level of consciousness and love there is a special relationship between him and his *Bhakta*-s, that is best translated as communion. For in communion we have unity in diversity. “Who sees me everywhere, who sees the All in Me, for him I am not lost, nor is he lost to Me” (6:31).

Gods whose food can be shared by humans are called *Bhagavan* (the Lord). The Sanskrit root of *Bhagavan* is *bhaj* which means to divide, partake of, share with, etc. Humans also can be *Bhagavan*-s whose wealth becomes shared by others. Thus *bhakti* (devotion) stands for the idea of fondness and love based on kinship.

Like *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga* too has to be cosmic and not limited to any clique, clan or caste. *Bhakti* may begin at home but it cannot end there, except of course when the whole cosmos becomes one's home. For it is *bhakti* that turns a house into a home. By definition, *bhakti* has to do with the whole of the Cosmos. The part belongs to the whole and this whole the Part seeks in all and not just in a few selected things.

The way of *ahimsa* (non-violence), positively put is a way of love so powerfully and successfully used by Mahatma Gandhi at the political and social domains. *Ahimsa* or non-violence implies not just the abstinence from killing or violence but more basically it connotes the love and service extended to every living being.

I wish to draw no one-to-one correspondence between the Cosmic *Yajna* of the Hindu religion and the scientific worldview. However I am inclined to think that the metaphysical and mystical nuances of the emerging scientific perspectives renders such a mystical vision of love and action more intelligible. Here I am inclined to take recourse to one scientifically postulated metaphor, i.e., harmony. It is a cosmic metaphor. There is ample evidence for thinking and believing that the gigantic cosmos in which we live is an intrinsically interconnected web of relations. Modern science has come up with the most exciting discovery of the interconnectedness of the universe. New evidence is pouring in to show that the different parts of the universe are linked to each other intimately. It is getting more and more clear that the universe cannot be tinkered with without affecting the rest. The vastness of the universe poses no threat to its interconnectedness.

The Human Genome Project and related developments show the unity in diversity of the living world. Venter points out that the "genome research shows humans to be 'clearly part of a biological continuum.'" Studies in consciousness would further corroborate this point. All these data reveal the deep unity existing among the innumerable living beings. Does this scientifically proven physical and biological unity point to some trans-physical union between the beings? If so there can be no better union between human and infrahuman beings than that of love as implied by the Indian vision. While the sciences take us to the borders of the cosmic harmony it is unto religion to enable us to identify this harmony with a principle of love where everything is harmoniously built up on a cosmic mechanism of mutual self-giving and self-sacrifice. While the methodic precautions prevent us from any unwarranted juxtapositioning of science and religion on this point, metaphysically speaking there seem to be enough scope for identifying a cosmic chore for love and to describe the actions and interactions of the world as analogically altruistic. The convergence of the human and the cosmic on the bosom of a self-giving divine love can form the hermeneutical circle from where we could draw the authenticity of our multifaceted experiences of being in the world and of our interpersonal existence.

The cosmic mode of being and the holistic way of existing is not a metaphysical abstract devoid of the beauty and qualifications of life. It sets up an entirely new set of concrete meanings and authentic experiences to our life. Such a scientific and religious vision finds its brilliant synthesis in the poetic and mystical vision of Fyodor Dostoyevsky: "Love all God's creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, and love each separate thing. If thou love each thing thou wilt perceive the mystery of

God in all; and when once thou perceive this, thou wilt thenceforward grow every day to a fuller understanding of it; until thou come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal.”

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