



Religion and Sahaj Marg

[...]. I have gone through a lot of literature on what is called comparative religion, and all that you find is one big chapter on Christianity, one big chapter on Buddhism, one big chapter on Islam. You read them and then you are supposed to see what comparative religion is all about. Just like trying to draw a comparison between a horse, a mule, an elephant and a tiger: all that you can say is that they all have four legs, nothing more. [...]

And then we have things like the story of Noah's Ark, where he built a big ship and put two of each kind of things that were existing, to preserve them over the flood. [...] So you see there have been various myths. The Incas have their myths; the Mayans have their myths. So, a myth is nothing but an effort to tell a truth in a way that we can understand, like stories. [...] So you see, through such stories, through such so-called prophets, through such great souls—like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ, Muhammad Sahib of Islam, our own rishis of India, Confucius, Lao Tze in China, so many people you see—the significant thing is that there is a historical period in which they all seem to appear. Like you have daffodils in one season, mangoes in another season, oranges in another season. [...]

So you see, we believe in Sahaj Marg that there is a time which is ripe for spirituality. "Now," Babuji said, "This is the time. If you miss



this time, it may not occur for another ten thousand years." [...] Who knows when it will come? So whether we are at the right time, at the right place, with the right guru—that is the important thing.

[...] I know God in my experience. You know God only in the form of a cross, or in the form of a crescent with a star, or things like that. In my experience, I know my God. He is mine because I have sensed Him. [...] Every individual has a God. And where is He? Right here [pointing to heart]. Because this is where we experience the truth, the God, compassion, love, because God is all these things. God is compassion; God is

love; God is the truth. And I don't need a religion to connect me with someone who is in my own heart.

In Sahaj Marg, this is achieved by meditation. We don't go to church; we don't go to temples; we don't go to mosques; we don't go to the Kaaba; we don't go to synagogues. My temple is right here [pointing to heart]. The temple in which my Lord resides is my heart. And in that temple He is enshrined through eternity. He is the eternal companion. If I seek Him outside, I am lying to myself. I am denying the fact that He is here right in me. [...]

So you see, this is the message of Sahaj Marg. We have nothing to do with religion. We are against no religion. There is no good or bad religion for me. Religion is an institution apart. [...] He is in you. He has been there always in whichever form you were. [...] So our business is to teach the truth through meditation: you meditate; you do the cleaning. [...] You remove the dust and the mirror reflects. [...] You look in and you perceive the truth. Having perceived the truth, you cannot live by a lie again. That is how transformation comes. [...]

Thank you.

*Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari
Address to Scholars, 25th December,
2005 at Tiruppur, Tamilnadu, India*

Thus speaks:

Lalaji

• *Imagine that we are Brahman, the centre, the original element, and the essence of existence. Let this idea be internal first. Then, looking to the external manifestation, think that all these are symbols of our mental feeling. All these have emerged from us and our form. What else can there be excepting ourselves?*

Babuji

• *The quest of mankind, ever since its birth has been to worship God, to unravel the mysteries behind the outward appearances and to grasp the fundamental truth.*

There are various conceptions of God. People look upon Him differently according to their capacity and understanding. The most commonly accepted conception of God is Eternal Power.

Chariji

• *God cannot be a person, God cannot be a thing. God is said to be, in all religions, without exception, omnipotent, omnipervasive, smaller than the smallest, bigger than the biggest.*

If God is everywhere, it is a denial of that truth to have to go to a temple to find Him there. If He is in everything, surely He is in me as much as in that temple. Why not seek Him within me, within my self.

It is not religions that are wrong. It is we who are wrong in sticking to religions of the past.

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African Religions and Spirituality — Part I

Man's approach to God is generally studied through the lens of revealed religions: Christian religions, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., which connotes non-African origins of the notion of religion. Where African religions are said to exist, they are commonly regarded as traditional and fossilized, primal and retarded, primitive and opposed to modernity, oral and fleeting, non-literate and unsound, etc... Consciously or not, the study of the religious fabric of Africa adds to the condescending and domineering attitudes and policies developed on Africa's realities and place on the world chessboard. Foreign religions were used to conquer Africa and establish these attitudes.

Yet, the true picture of African religions is historically inspiring, amazingly complex and rich.

Background

Some commonalities, historical and religious can be found across Africa, in spite of the sociological diversity of this almost 1 billion inhabitant continent split into 54 states. There is a common history of strong kingdoms and empires that were drained of their human resources by slavery and underwent the colonization rule that dismantled their religious, political, cultural and social systems. These historical landmarks delineate three time segments in the history of African societies and religions: the before slavery time, the slavery and colonisation period, and the post-colonial era. Traditional religions pervaded societies and underlying cultures before slavery time. Though some aspects of them were upheld during the slavery and colonisation period and beyond, references to traditional religions in this paper relate essentially to the pre-slavery time. As concerns syncretic religions, they mostly started mushrooming during colonization.

A different perspective

Instead of looking at Africa as a mostly illiterate region inextricably entwined in bloody traditional and ancestral rites, fetishist behaviours, superstitions, hindering and childish creeds and atavistic fears, one should consider it like **any other region in**

the world: a place where souls are to experience specific living conditions and underlying principles on their spiritual journey.

A way of living

African traditional religions should be considered in the same way. To better understand them one has to look at them from a holistic point of view, in that, they pervade all aspects of life.

In traditional communities, man's life was organised with reference to God, Nature and the Community and related behaviours and practices were promoted through monotheist religions. In these religions, the spirits or other entities referred to were deemed to act as intermediaries between a single supreme being and human beings. They were not venerated as Gods.

Past African religions as well as those that survived the slavery and colonisation storms provide their own specific vision of life. They are the expression of this vision, intertwined with all key areas of human experience. Religions, social organization, culture, philosophy, traditional political organizations are as one. Religions direct substantially all aspects of people's life, intelligence, emotions, rules, as well as conditions of existence of individuals as members of a group or community. Traditionally, Africans have in essence a deep religious feeling rooted in their culture.

Faith as the essence

The spiritual background to this religious culture is faith as the essence of man's relationship to God. Faith is experienced at the level of the heart. It is a heart-to-God connection, a soul-to-God relation, a man-to-God attribute. What is important in traditional religions is for each individual to achieve their own and specific relation to God while complying with community rules.

Holistic nature

Through religions, man and communities were targeting inclusion, totality and unity. God was worshiped through ritual objects which were also meant to unify the community and uphold the principle of fusion

and oneness with Nature. These objects are the reference symbols of the collective prayer of the group to God, through the medium of ancestors and other revealed spirits. One way of describing the social and political role of charged liturgical objects is to say that they are the custodians of the community harmony.

Traditional religions were both a community and a space where the visible and invisible worlds interact. These are the world of the living and the world of divinities, spirits, ancestors, and the souls waiting to incarnate. What is considered is totality: the world of human experience as well as the world of all spirit beings.

Syncretism

Today, the religious fabric of Africa has tremendously changed, to cushion the destructive shocks of foreign domination. To survive, religions had to adapt to new societal and global paradigms. So, many African religions have become more international in scope, rituals, expression and appeal. Since the slavery time, some of these religions, like Voodoo, have displayed continued dynamism and developed by mixing with other religious systems through the process of syncretism.

Independent churches

Many interesting cases of syncretism can be cited. These are movements born in response to a need for independence and autonomy from European powers (Kimbanguism in the ex Belgian Congo; the Tembu Church in South Africa etc..). The phenomenon of creation of African independent churches and religions is growing, for instance, with Pentecostal movements and other charismatic churches...

Extracts from a talk given at CREST on August 14, 2006

MMK

A stay at CREST, Bangalore

CREST, the Center for Research, Education, Sadhana and Training, located in Bangalore, India, was recently inaugurated by our Master to impart advanced education to abhyasis in Spirituality, Religion as well as theoretical and practical aspects of Sahaj Marg. Its inaugural session took place from 9-23 August, 2006, during a mild monsoon, under the higher supervision of our Revered Master. About 70 trainees (40 delegates and 30 observers) from about 26 countries benefited from the various lectures delivered by selected delegates identified by Master - I was one of them. Master entrusted me to talk about "Spirituality in Africa, vis-à-vis its tradition of voodoo".

This lecture aroused keen interest proportionate to general ignorance about Africa at large in terms of its history and economic situation as well as its social and religious diversity. The talk and ensuing debate enabled to address the issue of African religions and their spiritual background from a human perspective transcending racial and geographical barriers. Master concluded the lecture by encouraging Africans to be what they are, to depart from any complex of inferiority and to engage resolutely in spirituality. Extensive extracts of the talk are inserted on page 2 and in a forthcoming issue of Echoes of Africa.

Lesson of humility

At the outset, Master had indicated on August 9 that as an objective of this inaugural session, He expected to learn new things he did not know and to draw lessons aimed at preparing the future sessions. Such was my first lesson of humility: Master coming to our human level to grant us his invaluable teachings through a pedagogical approach where students are taken as faculty for specific lectures and related questions and answers. Indeed, the first day, like each one of us, Master en-

tered the classroom, with his shoulder-belt bag. He sat down in the first row and attentively listened to the programmed talks, commenting on some aspects, and making complementary or rectifying statements. Later in the afternoon, as He was asked if He learned something as He so wished, Master reminded us of a principle of wisdom according to which He did not learn



anything.

In other words: He could not claim that He learned something. A subtler answer echoed in me that however complex our research on a given subject, and scholarly our talk, we should not dwell on intellect aspects, because the true meaning of this teaching exercise lies elsewhere.

Master could not join us in the classroom every day. As from the third day due to health problems, He followed the remaining talks and debates from his room. But his presence was felt even more strongly. While talking to other brothers and sisters, He was indeed our targeted audience.

Lesson of hospitality

Though we were mere students in spirituality, Master received us like His guests, and He treated us like princes. The only Spartan conditions at CREST were the sharing of a quasi over-populated and snoring dormitory as well as showers more often cold than hot. As for the rest, we enjoyed the caring hospitality of CREST volunteers.

Lesson of rigor and discipline

All that we had to do was to be punctual and to cooperate by complying with the rules set: waking up at 5 a.m., optional sport exercises at 6 a.m., meditation at 7 a.m., breakfast at 8 a.m. and beginning of lectures at 9 a.m. The rest of the daily schedule was equally structured; there was

no room for indulging in the futilities of the external world. I submitted to the pace of these days clicking back and forth like a metronome, and I started to realize the benefits of the recommended times of meditation, cleaning, universal prayer and evening meditation, in a state of constant remembrance: a feeling of profound peace, as

if an abyssal space was created inside, in the heart, like a black hole annihilating any impression, so that only the peace of His presence could be felt!

A lesson for Africa

After having undertaken some research on the topic chosen by Master, and having given the related lecture to the other brothers and sisters, I realized that beyond this intellectual exercise, Master wanted us all to improve our knowledge of the religions of a given society - African societies, as far as we are concerned. Indeed, a person who wishes to be introduced into the Mission or a long-standing abhyasi, carries a religious culture - irrespective of whether they are practicing or not, because they belong to a society defined and structured by religious currents. These religious patterns are worth knowing so that abhyasis can live a more serene spiritual life in their social environment. It allows also prefects to better communicate on the benefits of spirituality.

Daily Reflections

Religious bondages

Now we are not preaching against religion, we are only pointing out the facts of religion. If rituals could liberate, there should be no more human beings here. I mean, after millions of years, and thousands of years of praying and preaching, and attending these religious institutions - whether a church or a temple, it doesn't matter - what are we still doing here? So you see, we have to judge these things not emotionally, but practically. Is it good for me? Is it doing any good for me? Have I developed an iota on the way? If the answer is 'no', we have to change. So I would like to quote Swami Vivekananda, "It is good to be born in a religion, but it is bad to die in a religion." It is a profound statement that few have understood. It means that I start off with something - a capital, a heritage, a system of philosophy, but I have to grow out of it like out of anything else.

Chariji, Religion and spirituality

on two instruments, and these were fear and temptation. To Master, the idea of anyone approaching God out of fear was totally abhorrent. "When we are afraid of something, we run away from it. That is the natural reaction. Then how can we go towards God with fear of Him in our hearts! It is not possible. Fear can only turn us away from Him. I am telling you that any system, which depends on fear, will only turn people away from God. Now you see, to counter-act this they use the other weapon of temptation - temptation of material welfare, riches, health, and finally of moksha (liberation). Now this temptation works to some extent, but people only want what they can see or smell - physical things. So when they seek such sansthas (spiritual organizations) they go only for material benefits. As a result religion has slowly become diluted. The ideals have fallen systematically."

Taken from My Master, chapter "The Way of the Spirit" p. 92-93 -Rev. Chariji

ourselves bound fast to a particular form or practice without a clear idea of its real significance and final approach, we are probably committing the greatest blunder. God is not to be found within the fold of a particular religion or sect. He is not confined within certain forms or rituals, nor is He to be traced out from within the scriptures. Him we have to seek for in the innermost core of our heart.

Chariji, Salient features : Traditional bondages

God

When God feels that there is one in quest of Him, the Divine grace is set into motion to take him in. If the quest continues with a pining heart it becomes so very forceful that the Lord Himself sets out in quest of him. The intensity of eagerness together with restless impatience creates within him a vacuum for the divine grace to flow in, establishing a connecting channel between the two.

Thus speaks Babuji, p. 2

Religions

On one occasion I had a discussion with Master about temple worship. Master had told me that all religions depended

Traditional bondages

Religion which was generally considered to be a link between man and God, has now become a barrier instead. If we keep

Celebrations of Master's Birthday

Master's 80th birthday is scheduled to be celebrated in Trichy, India. All regions will be involved in the organization of this critical event. Further details will soon be provided by the organizational committee which includes representatives from all the regions.

On the basis of information available so far, I wish to invite all brothers and sisters living in the Africa and Indian

Ocean Region to start the necessary preparations as soon as possible. Let us be as many of us, attending the celebrations. All registrations will be made through the Region-in-charge. This approach will make it easier for the Region to make all necessary arrangements, and ensure that due visibility is given to the Region as a sign of the geographical expansion of the Mission.

All the regions have been requested to give a specific performance on July 23rd or 24th — 30 minutes, as far as our region is concerned. We need to do the needful in terms of identifying an appropriate way of expressing our joy to Master on that auspicious occasion.

You are hereby requested to submit any proposal on the above for consideration by all of us.



Photos

Page 1: Master at his cottage, at CREST, August 8 2006

Page 3: Master and the delegates at the CREST inaugural session, August 23, 2006

Page 4— left: Master entering the lecture hall of CREST

Page 4— right: The meditation hall, with the dormitory building in the background.



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