



**PROFESSIONALISM AND SPIRITUALITY :**

# SOME RELATIVE ASPECTS

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## 1.1 Introduction

The concept of professionalism is based on the ideological orientations of the industrial and socio-political revolutionary events that took place in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These epoch-making events of human history, particularly, the Industrial Revolution of England (1760–1840) and the French Revolution ((1789–1799) that showed way for a number of similar events in America, Germany and other parts of the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, are the seeds of the concept of 'right man for the right job'. The transition from *home production* to *machine production* of goods called for people who were skilled enough to operate the machines. This occasioned the emergence of skilled-based training which is central to the concept of professionalism. Today, generally speaking, professionalism is understood as the sum total of qualities required for efficient delivery of a piece of work.

Spirituality, on the other hand, is as old as the human mind. Although there is no standard definition of the term 'spirituality', it is understood as the condition of being concerned about the spiritual or unworldly aspects rather than about material or worldly things. In the ideological as well as practical fields, the term conveys different connotations to different people both at the individual level and the group level. If a group of people practices spirituality by going to religious places of worship offering prayers and seeking blessings, another group practices it by blessing the

worshippers as representatives of God. For some people, it is a faith leading to bliss attained from good works, while some others would believe that spirituality is a mental state and therefore, it is personal to one's mind and belief. But, nonetheless, all these differing views converge at one level of thought, i.e., at a state of self discovery, when a person attains the ability to see his/her real self – birth, life and death. Since all living beings emerge through birth and disappear through death, this 'self discovery' takes him/her to appreciate the realities of all other lives alike. This attainment triggers the mind to think beyond – what after life? This is where spirituality begins. Its domain encompasses all those spheres mind can reach – it goes beyond the borders of academic disciplines, religions or cultures. As Janis (2007) has put it, spirituality is :

- Beyond religion, yet containing all religions
- Beyond science, yet containing all sciences
- Beyond philosophy, yet containing all philosophies.

## **Spirituality and Religion**

The two terms are similar as well as dissimilar to each other. Similar because both deal with the aspects related to the mind and belief, not bodily objects. Dissimilar because, one deals with an organized culture and practice, while the other encompasses the entire spectrum of the mind. In this regard, Burkhardt (1989, 60-77) states that spirituality is that part of human character which "gives meaning to one's life and draws one to transcend oneself". The concept of spirituality is broader than that of religion because religion is only one way of expression of spirituality, the other expressions being prayer, meditation, interaction with others, and establishing a relationship with the Nature, with God or a higher power. According to Recharad Pettinger (2007) of the Sri Chinmoy

Meditation School, "Religion is a path to God. Spirituality is also a path to God. However they have differences in approach. The essence of religion is *Fear God and obey God*. The quintessence of spirituality is *Love God and become another God*."

Despite all similarities and differences, the ultimate goal of both spirituality and religion is the same – conquering the truth of life and the inner self in order to attain bliss. Different religions are only the different human ways of worshipping and reaching out to God. Spirituality being the basis of religion and religion being the mode of spirituality, both are complementary to each other and therefore both can cause a positive effect on the minds of the people in cultivating virtues.

## **Is Spirituality Relevant to Professionalism?**

The kernels of professionalism and spirituality are supposedly opposed to each other. The term 'professionalism' connotes skill, commitment and quality and the yardstick of measuring their success is the composite result, i.e., delivery. The delivery here is more of material delivery. On the other hand, the concept of 'spirituality' itself is abstract in nature and spirit and therefore, its *modus operandi* and goal too are non materialistic. Then can these opposing concepts relate to each other? The answer is yes. Let us see the following excerpt in this regard :

*"Notice that spirit sounds similar to words like inspire and expire. This is especially appropriate because when you're filled with spiritual energy, you feel great inspiration, and when the spiritual life force leaves your body, your time on this earth expires. These are two of the main themes of the*

*spiritual journey:*

- Allowing yourself to be filled with inspiration, which also translates into love, joy, wisdom, peacefulness, and service.
- that an inevitable expiration awaits to take you away from the very circumstances you may think are so very important right now.”

(Janis, 2008)

Indeed, a sound spiritual faith – be it in God, religion, humanity or even oneself – serves as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for facing the challenges of life. Revisiting the deeper meanings of words like ‘lifetime’, we realize the availability of our ‘work time’. In fact, it forms a part of professionalism that one remembers and takes into account the time available to him/her for accomplishing a piece of work. Here what is imperative is that the person looks beyond the time of his/her present profession and calculates the maximum lifetime available to him/her *vis-à-vis* the works that he/she intends to do. In fact, a person does things in the best way when he/she is aware of the expiry of the time available.

Another important function spirituality does is keeping one’s mind pious and pure. This state of mind helps nurture divine qualities like faith, love and forgiveness which ease out overcoming professional hazards like stress and depression. In today’s highly competitive and result-oriented world, a good number of professionals fall prey to depression being unable to resist stress which eventually leads to serious illness like hypertension, diabetes and heart diseases. Such problems can be reduced to a great extent with the help of love and

emotional support from a network of family members, friends and the society at large. In such cases, faithfulness and hopefulness find their way in and instills a sense of optimism in the mind of the affected person(s). A faithful and hopeful person sees and expects a positive outcome from all acts or events including those perceived negative. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is an effective tool to bring back ease and happiness. A revengeful mind is normally created by past hurts. This hungry mouth looks for opportunities to satiate its hunger. When done, it gets satisfied, but it creates another hungry mouth in the other person, thus, creating an unending series of hungry mouths. The medicine to satisfy this hunger forever is forgiveness, a practice that is encouraged by all religions, all institutions and all well wishers. According to a study conducted in 1997 at the Stanford University, the college students who were trained to forgive someone who had hurt them in the past were found to be significantly less angry, more hopeful and better in dealing with emotions than those not trained. Researchers have also found that emotions like anger and resentment cause stress hormones to accumulate in the blood and the pleasant feelings of forgiveness help control and reduce this accumulation (Univ. of Maryland Medical Centre).

## **A Glance at the Indian Context**

In the Indian context, spirituality and religion do not have significant differences as they have in the context of western countries. In India, religious or spiritual practices are a part of people's day-to-day life. The country which is home to all major religions of the world, though in varying numbers, is perhaps the only country where one or the other religious festival is celebrated every alternate week. According to the *Census of India 2001*, 80.5% of the Indians follow Hinduism making it the dominant religion of the country with some sectarian groups spread over various parts. Some minor native religions of the country have also been assimilated to

Hinduism as a result of their followers' socio-cultural integration with the dominant culture. The other religions constituting the rest of the population are : Islam 13.4%, Christianity 2.3%, Sikhism 1.9%, Buddhism 0.8% and Jainism 0.4%. In spite of this scenario, India as a nation does not follow any particular religion. The 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of India adopted in 1976 added the word "secular" along with "socialist" to the preamble to the Constitution India making the nation neither religious nor irreligious nor anti-religious. It means that the country follows a policy of total neutrality in respect of religion.

Since religion is the broadest mode of practicing spirituality, a multi-religious society like India must have an inter-religious social tolerance and acceptability apart from the state policies. The basis of certain spiritual practices like yoga and meditation rests on the broad ideological foundation of some religions, but such practices have done exemplary jobs in the past in promoting tolerant mindsets among the people of various beliefs. Spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda who practiced all religions and Srimanta Sankardeva who preached humanity as his religion, have very effectively delivered the messages of peace, tolerance and brotherhood that are essential for co-existence. Through the remarkable works of such leaders, spiritual centres like Ashrams and Namghars have come up in India which are today regarded and approached for attaining peace and mental strength.

The Indian spirituality is uniquely rooted in the Nature – it centers round the philosophy of mutual love and respect not only among human beings, but also for other living beings created by God. The practice of preaching animals and attaining divinity through *tapashya* (meditation) under trees,

etc. are parts of this belief. The strong faith in naturalism, realism and the belief that the ultimate abode of all lives is Nature whose undisputed master is its creator, have made it possible for tens of diverse cultural and religious groups live together over the ages. With the world going more and more capitalistic and materialistic, the Indian way of spiritualism has drawn large numbers of people from around the world. Having said this, it is important for us to realize that there are some undesirable practices associated with the Indian spiritualism. Alongside the belief that animals like cows and elephants are sacred creatures – the *avatar* of God, the Indian spiritualism also allows animal sacrifice – the same folk of animals like cows, goats and buffaloes are mercilessly slaughtered in the name of pleasing gods and goddesses. This confused and self-contradictory state of Indian spiritualism has awakened the conscience of many thinkers who have begun campaigning against the practices of blind faith.

## **The Dark Side of Indian Spiritualism**

As seen above, spirituality is the holy process of connecting oneself with the ultimate reality. People can establish this connection through their inner selves and therefore, they are the best judges of what they do. But, many a time, we find ourselves in a state of confusion on the path of our spiritual pursuance when we require a guide, a pathfinder to lead us and anchor us back to the right track. Here we seek help from our *gurus*. A guru is often described as a 'dispeller of darkness' who guides us to light when we are in darkness. According to Sri Pramhans Yogananda, "... a true, God-illuminated guru is the one who, in his attainment of self-mastery, has realised his identity with the omnipresent spirit. Such a one is uniquely qualified to lead the seeker on his or her inward journey to perfection." The sanctity of guru-disciple relationship is

immeasurably and incomparably deep in India. Sant Kabir Das in one of his verses called *sloka* says in this context :

*“Guru Gobind dou khade, Kaako laagu pay,  
Balihaari guru aapne, Govind diyo bataaye”*

The above *sloka* which summarises the holy relationship between a guru and his disciples may be translated as “I face both God and my guru. Whom should I bow to first? God being formless and guru being the path to god, I shall bow down to my guru first”. But we have seen in the recent times, some crooked-minded persons have put a dark stain on this relationship. Taking advantage of the spiritual emotions of the believers, these opportunist impostors pose themselves as empowered beings who can perform miracles and who can reach out to God. A fake guru, through various tactics, first cajoles the believers into accepting his attained capabilities and powers and puts the believers in a state of fear and hope – that they are going through terrible times which may turn dangerous if not treated immediately and, of course, that he can do this with his heavenly powers. As it is said that ardent believers are easier to be fooled than non-believers, they fall prey to the evil designs of these impostors.

## **In Conclusion**

As spirituality concerns the mental system of a person, it concerns the most important part of his/her character. The mind controls an individual's acts and therefore, it is of utmost importance for him/her to have a sound, sober and balanced mindset. In order to facilitate this state of mind in ourselves, we transcend our worldly life and try to understand its deeper and mystical meanings. We humans are prone to any sort of situation while treading on our life path. Very often, we find ourselves in the midst of our own inner struggles. We go on detecting others' faults, but overlook our own. Therefore, we need a *saviour* whom we believe to be greater

than ourselves in all respects, not only to save us from difficult situations, but also to guide us in our acts. As spiritualism establishes a sort of connection with such a power, it acts as our guide and the ultimate referee.

A strong spiritual belief helps build a strong mind which acts as the catalyst for doing our intended works – bet it in our profession or otherwise. It melts down the borders of our minds and establishes an interconnectedness between ourselves and everybody we live with, everybody we work with and everything that we see around us. This feeling gives us strength to do our works justly, effectively and confidently.

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