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Pune Journal of Religious Studies

**Ethics of Human Life
Interdisciplinary Perspectives**

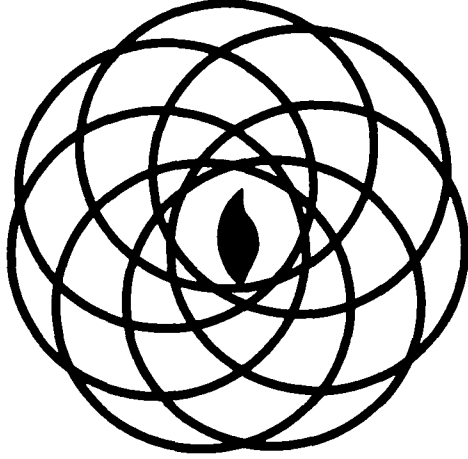


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Life is the most fundamental good of any living being and body is the primary prerequisite for the most fundamental good to exist. Life is not an abstract entity. Life exists in a body. Human life exists in a human body. Without a human body, human life becomes impossible. Such simple arguments can oppose abortion. We need however strong moral norms to defend, promote, preserve and protect human life. We need sound arguments to say why we should protect a human life at all. There is something unique about human life. Uniqueness of human life gives a priceless value and demands protection to every bearer of human life. There are, of course, varied, similar as well as contrary views on various ethical issues concerning human life.

Change, growth and reproduction are the fundamental properties of any form of life from the simplest bacteria to humans. However, beyond these properties, there lies an unchangeable moral value in humans, as this issue of *jnanadeepa* explicates. Not everyone agrees to the fact that moral value of human life is inherent and absolute. Some may consider that moral value of human life changes or increases according to the gradual growth or usefulness. There are many opinions regarding understanding of human dignity, beginning of human life, moral status, sacredness, etc. Accordingly, there are absolutist as well as gradualist views of the moral status of human life. Modern biosciences have challenged the very idea of human life due to reproductive and genetic technologies that can produce or design new humans. They invite us for discussions on human life.

With the advanced knowledge on biological development of human beings, more than ever the question “when does an individual human being begin to exist?” has come to the forefront. While an element of mystery continues to encircle human life, modern sciences have fathomed human life much more than before. Yet, there are more questions than answers. The answer/s to the abovementioned question from the perspectives of biology sets the basis for the ontological status of a human being, which in turn becomes the basis for the moral value of the individual human being. Though we cannot and should not make a

normative statement directly from a statement of biology in order to avoid naturalistic fallacies, it has to however rely subsequently on the ontological status and ultimately on biological facts, in order to know the moral status of human beings.

The ontological status of a human life is crucial to attribute to or recognize its moral status. On the one hand, we cannot attribute a value to someone who does not exist, and on the other, a mere biology is not enough to give moral status to the being. The non-arbitrary and absolute beginning of a human life, at least from a biological point of view, is at conception. However, there are varied opinions on the ontological status of the human life that comes to exist at fertilization or conception. Depending on the answer to the ontological status, the ethical debates on issues such as embryo research, embryonic stem cell research, abortion, female foeticide, gender determination, suicide, euthanasia, etc., have taken different directions or conclusions. There are also other moral and social arguments used to either support or oppose these ethical issues or researches.

This particular thematic issue of our journal *jnanadeepa* deals with “*ethics of human life from the interdisciplinary perspectives.*” There is a wide range of questions regarding human life beginning from conception to death. Some urgent ethical issues have been chosen for scholarly reflection on this issue. The views are of the authors. This issue begins with an article by Stephen Jayard on purpose, meaning, meaningfulness, dignity and sanctity of human life. The unimaginable advances in the modern science and technology, especially in the fields of biosciences, genetic engineering and reproductive treatments, seriously challenge the age-old notion of life and the very meaning of life. The author attempts to show that the sanctity and dignity, meaning and meaningfulness of life will not be affected by the modern biosciences. He says that the biosciences may help us improve our life, but they cannot assure us that life is meaningful. We must therefore go beyond the biosciences, biology and technology to find the meaningfulness of human life which would otherwise run the risk of being thrown into a form of commodity.

Next there is an analytical study of spirituality, ethics and human life from the perspectives of different religious traditions in India. Stephen Chundamthadam asserts that a sound ethical foundation is important for any seeker of truth to progress in a genuine spiritual life. Genuine spirituality deals with life and values of the person individually as well as collectively as humans, and seeks harmony with the whole of creation. The author believes that a genuine, ethical, spiritual and moral human living is the solution to the rampant atrocities, violence and injustice in the world. Humanistic as well as religious spirituality focuses on ethical living and helps to overcome struggles of human life in the present life. Ethical values promoted by religions can thus bring in lasting peace and harmony.

Nishant Irudayadason attempts in the following article to provide clarity on the moral issue of abortion from scientific, philosophical and legal perspectives. Having carefully analyzed diverse opinions and arguments which have long dichotomized the abortion debate emphasizing on the rights either of the mother or of the preborn, Nishant concludes that the very dichotomy is false and abortion is anti-human, anti-life, anti-preborn and anti-woman. Abortion can thus never be an act of women empowerment. It affects both the mother and the preborn. Hence, he argues that choosing not to voluntarily interrupt pregnancies is a moral choice with a dual purpose of both empowering women and protecting the preborn.

Subsequently, Charles Davis deals with the moral value of the preborn in Classical Hinduism, in which there are moral and social arguments that reiterate the moral status of the unborn humans and demand absolute protection. There is consciousness in the preborn right from the moment of conception. The preborn are sacred and are endowed with the inviolable right to life in their possible journey to attaining salvation. In the light of Classical Hinduism, as the author concludes, it would be immoral to destroy the life of the preborn for any purpose or any research however noble it might be. A rare exception of removal of foetus was practiced in extreme cases where the life of the mother was in danger, though Suśruta – the father of surgery - appealed that attempts must be made to save the life of both mother and child.

The article “Baby Donors” deals with commercial gestational surrogacy in India. Lourdhu Jeevaraj analyses the issue of surrogacy and evaluates the use of the increasing technology in India. Indian government encourages medical tourism of surrogacy without sufficiently having discussed its ethical intricacies, possible exploitation and malpractices. Surrogacy violates the sanctity of marriage and the dignity of women and the child. The right of a child to be born through rightful biological parents is challenged in surrogacy. There are also often many legal problems due to surrogacy. Commercial misuse of surrogacy is possible in India where economic poverty is a reality. Jeevaraj defends that human life has a priceless worth and science and technology must play the role of promoting and enhancing human life and should not make human life an object for monetary transaction and commodity for buying and selling.

Then the alarming problem of “Suicide in India,” which puts India to shame, is discussed. Suicide is increasing in India. 601 farmers in Maharashtra committed suicide in the first three months of 2015. While there are other reasons such as psychiatric disorders, social and cultural factors, economic stressors have caused more suicidal deaths in India. Jose Thayil says that suicidal behaviour is determined by a number of social factors, although it is deeply a personal act. Suicide should not be considered a permanent solution to the problems in life. Life is a gift from God and everyone must treat their life with love and respect. There is a great need for personal accompaniment of persons with suicidal tendencies in addition to suicide prevention programmes. The ecclesial community has a duty to improve the quality of life and save human life.

V. M. Jose discusses about euthanasia in India with a specific reference to the case of Aruna Shanbaug who more than 42 years remained within a world of a hospital bed at KEM Mumbai where she was earlier sexually assaulted by a ward boy on 27 November 1973. Having discussed the various ethical standpoints on euthanasia, the author promotes palliative care to take care of the suffering. Euthanasia is not a solution to alleviate human suffering. He proposes that we must stand for compassionate care of the dying while standing against any form of killing.

There is then a discourse on death by Kuruvilla Pandikattu. Constantly knowing and reminding ourselves that we are going to die would change our life-style personally and collectively. Ordinarily we tend to deny death. Looking into the face of death directly and fearlessly can put us in touch with our own true self and free us from daily bondages. This would make personal and societal transformation possible. In the second part of his article, the author tells us in the light of Tonybee's study that individuals die but civilizations do not. If we let our civilizations die, that may be the end of human life. Pandikattu ends his article with a few reflections on fostering life from the recent Papal document *Laudato Si'*. Knowing our personal death, not letting the death of civilizations and protection of environment – all of them – need ever renewed moral and spiritual courage and conviction.

Finally, there is a paper by Martin Alukaputhussery from a perspective of virtue ethics promoting peace and non-violence for a better India. He says that the teachings of Buddha and Christ are the greatest heritage that humans have received from the past. In the context of violence, terrorism, corruption, persecution and conflicts, the author believes that the teachings of Buddha on non-violence and of Jesus Christ on peace through beatitudes would help us dissipate fear and hostility and promote peace and harmony. The followers have the role of becoming peacemakers like their masters.

This issue has thus tried to understand the priceless worth of human life in the context of many bioethical issues. Every article has in some way tried to illuminate human minds that human life is a gift, and it must be protected and promoted against all odds of problems. Ethics opens the eyes of the scientists and researchers to use modern technologies to improve human life and not to destroy human life. Human beings create technologies, which should not be allowed to control human beings. Human beings are the masters of their technologies. Human wisdom is required to see the differences between human subjects and technological objects. Virtues and values help them to value human life beyond biosciences.

I hope that this issue of *jnanadeepa* will promote serious reflection and discussion on ethics of human life and help the readers to recognize the moral value of human life, and the dignity and the sanctity of human beings in oneself and in others and thus lead to building peace and harmony in our society.

**J. Charles Davis, Guest Editor
Director, Centre for Applied Ethics**

Meaning and Meaningfulness of Life: Beyond the Boundaries of Biosciences

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Abstract

Life ÷ a complex phenomenon. It has been studied, down the centuries, by various disciplines, from several aspects. On the one hand life sounds very simple as we all live and see it as the platform for any achievement and so it automatically becomes meaningful. On the other hand, especially with the arrival of advanced technologies and possibilities in Biosciences, like cloned humans and artificial intelligence, we are forced to redefine the very notion of life and revisit the understanding of its dignity and meaning, which have been preserved and adored in the past. As the phenomenon of life is under scanner, the demarcation between life and death is also questioned. It is in this scenario this short paper attempts to, with a brief analysis of the notion of life and death from the perspectives of Biosciences, show that the very domains of sanctity and dignity, meaning and meaningfulness of life, lie beyond the purview of Biosciences, while gladly and gratefully acknowledging the great services rendered by the Biosciences.

Keywords

Biosciences, Life, Death, Meaning and Meaningfulness

Life is an all-embracing phenomenon. Anything and everything can be somehow connected to life. It is generally understood that life is a mystery to be lived and not a problem to be solved. Life is the most fundamental and beautiful phenomenon as it provides a chance to experience goodness and beauty in the world, but at the same time, the same life becomes challenging and disturbing when it loses not only all its glamour but even its very purpose; this sad situation, at its extremes, pushes one even to end her life. If life, for some reason or the other, loses its meaning and purpose, it becomes a pain to be alive. In the modern times, more than ever before, there is a serious discussion to see whether life in general, and human life in particular, is sacred and valuable, if at all. The unimaginable advances in the modern science and technology, especially in the fields of Biosciences, genetic engineering and reproductive treatments, seriously challenge the age-old notion of life. The sanctity and dignity of life, which has been preserved and adored by all almost all philosophical schools, cultural traditions and religious ideologies in the past, seem now to be weakened. In the wake of serious possibilities of cloned humans and artificial intelligence one is forced to redefine the very understanding of life, and along with it, its meaning, purpose, dignity and sanctity. Any reflective person will be alarmed to imagine a situation where human babies can be “made” in the laboratories, with desired traits, say, with hair and eyeballs in a particular colour, with high level of IQ, with ears and nose in a particular shape, at a preferred spot on the face and so on. In the context of biosciences making breakthroughs and redefining life, will the sanctity and dignity of life also be redefined or rejected?

This short essay attempts to show that the sanctity and dignity, meaning and meaningfulness of life will not be affected by the modern Biosciences. Though these sciences may certainly help us in understanding the intricacies of life-phenomenon but, no matter how advanced they may become in future, they will not shake the claims of the value and sacredness of life. I begin with a brief presentation as to how life is understood in today’s Biosciences. Then, I reflect upon life-and-death, as both are inter-related and today’s sciences seem relocate the demarcating line between life and death. Finally I analyze the notions of ‘meaning

and meaningfulness' of life, in order to conclude that they both lie beyond the purview of Biosciences, or any natural science for that matter.

PART I

UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING LIFE

What is life? – a million dollar question! Humanity has always been struggling to figure out what exactly life means. While reflecting on life one has to grapple with several fundamental questions, like: What is life? What is its meaning, if any? What is its purpose? Is it valuable? If so, is it intrinsic or extrinsic? Is life Sacred? Several disciplines like, Theology, Philosophy, Psychology, Cognitive Sciences, Biosciences, Religion, Humanities and so on take up these issues for serious reflections. Since the emergence of Philosophy of Science in the 20th century, one of its components, Philosophy of Biology, has gained more momentum in the past two decades. It struggles to find out what, if anything, is special about living things?... Are the concepts, models of explanation, theories and research methods used in Biology fundamentally different from the Physical Sciences? If not, will they merge with Chemistry and Particle Physics?

A very good and comprehensive volume on human nature edited by Malcolm Jeeves raises several pertinent questions, like: C. Michael Steel (a clinical medical geneticist) asks, "Would a cloned individual have his or her own distinct identity? D. Gareth Jones (a Medical Neurobiologist) asks, "When do we become persons? And when do we cease to be persons?" ... Warren S. Brown (a Neuropsychologist) asks, "If strong religion experiences can be linked to certain forms of brain activity, how do we understand other spiritual experiences? Do we interpret our spiritual experiences as a way the brain can function (normally or abnormally), or as manifestations of an immaterial soul?"... Lindon Evaes (a Behavioral Genetist) asks, "Do genes play a role in areas traditionally thought to be purely social in origin, including our religion and values?" Gaius Davies (a Psychiatrist) asks, "Is spiritual awareness confined to an elite or common to all?" Diogenes Allen (a philosopher) asks, "What can we learn from the long history in philosophy and theology of evaluating religious experiences, including visions and mystical

experiences?” Joel Green (a Biblical scholar) asks, “What have biblical studies contributed to a unified portrait of the human person?”¹

Paradoxically we all know what life is, but we cannot define it.² Like any other experiential reality, like love or time, we know what it is, but once we try to define it we are helpless. As Augustine said about time, we also can say for life - we know what life is, if no one asks us, but we don't know if someone asks us about it. On the one hand, we can easily see the value and the meaning of life, due to its utility, achievements and potentialities etc. On the other hand, the meaning and value of life are challenged in the modern times due to the steady increase in the stress and frustration, disappointments and anxieties, leading to a sort of meaningless void! That is why, we unfortunately see an increase in the rate of suicide and in the number of people with psychological and physical illness.

Life has always been seen to have absolute value and so one has to save life by all means. Today the emphasis is on the 'quality' of life, not on 'life' as such. Modern biosciences challenge the very idea of life due to its recent reproductive and genetic technologies. Earlier life (birth) and death were seen as two separate and distinct moments (or events); life always meant joy, whereas death implied sorrow. But today the dividing line between life and death becomes increasingly blurred; for instance, the distinction between '*biological life*' and '*personal life*' - A person is said to have biological life if he or she is on the ventilator, whereby various parts of the body perform their normal biological process. But his or her 'personal life' has stopped if that person has no brain functions. In considering the brain-dead person, there is a further distinction between *the whole-brain death* (cases where cerebral hemispheres and brain stem are dead) and *higher-brain death* (cases where only the cerebral hemispheres are destroyed, but the brain stem may be intact). The whole-brain death refers to the 'biological concept of death'; biological life comes to an end. At this level there is no difference between the life of a human being, or an ant or an elephant. But higher-brain death refers to the loss of 'personal life'. Personhood comes to an end with the loss of the cerebral hemispheres, for all that significantly defines human

existence, namely, our individual personalities, consciousness, uniqueness, memory, ability to judge, acting with a purpose, enjoying and worrying – all disappear.

However at this level the biological life may still linger on. Those with the higher-brain death are clinically referred to as ‘persistent vegetative state’ (PVS). Their mental activity will be totally absent, while some bodily functions like some reflexes and gastrointestinal functions may be present.³

Further, life is valued not just for the sake of life, but its quality.⁴ The notion of life, its origins and endings, forms of life, creation and destruction of life and the very nature of life – all these issues, which were taken for granted even a few decades ago, now pose serious challenges to moral, legal, theological, philosophical and scientific disciplines. Today Genetic Engineering has a decisive role in producing, extending, redesigning of life-forms, not only for humans, but also for animals and, plants and microorganisms. Difficult questions are now put to the medical professionals, philosophers, theologians, psychologists and to the general public, like how long should we prolong one’s life, when a patient is the permanent vegetative state (PVS), and at what cost? and so on. Genetic essentialists (genetic reductionists) see life as possession of a genetic blueprint. Life itself is consequently based on the selfish desire to reproduce itself and, therefore, humans are mere epiphenomena of a primordial genetic drive to self-replicate, and human moral or ethical systems are a complex admixture of altruism motivated by strategic sacrifice, which benefits one genetic trajectory or another.⁵ Critical biologists critique against the genetic essentialist approach.⁶

In fact, only the contemporary Biosciences take up the discussion on life as an entity in itself, whereas so far only the manifestations of life were taken for consideration. According to sciences, a being is taken to be living if the following signs are seen: movement, reproduction, evolution, growth and development, intake of food, metabolism of cells, DNA and the genetic code and so on. It was taken for granted that there is a clear and distinct separation between living organisms and inorganic matter. But today Molecular Biology and Particle Physics reveal that even matter is mysterious; it is not “material” at the final analysis.

The sub-atomic particles seem to be energy-states floating around, and thereby matter is ceasing to be 'material', so to say! The borderlines between life and non-life, between life and human life, death and life, are increasingly becoming thin. What is life exactly? Where does it lie exactly? It is in the blood cells or DNA or chromosomes or genes? What is the exact difference between living and non-living bodies? For instance, the body and the neural structure of a person, died just a fraction of seconds before will more or less look like a body that is living – if so, what exactly distinguishes the living and the non-living bodies? – such questions don't seem to get settled! Moreover, though thousands and thousands of species have been studied today and the scientific community has more convincing knowledge about various life-forms, their inner structure and the growth and development over the millennia, but still, as Carl Sagan is convinced, "There is no generally accepted definition of life".⁷

PART II

DEATH IN LIFE AND LIFE IN DEATH!

Serious reflections on life, as noted above, naturally force us to think of death as well. From the time immemorial death has been a subject of serious reflection. For some death makes life absurd and meaningless, as everything is going to be ended with death, while for others it is death which, in a way, makes life meaningful. Death gives me the urgency to achieve something as I am not going to live forever. *Jean Paul Sartre* (1905-1980) would say that our freedom, though we are condemned to be free, enables us to find meaning in this life. For him death lies outside of one's existence. For when I am dead I cannot see my dead body, I cannot have any experience and all that happens since then is decided by others; this makes meaningless to refer to 'my' death. *Martin Heidegger* (1889-1976) sees human existence as 'being unto death'. Though he derives the insight from the Pre-Socratic tradition, he elaborates on this to show that death is not something that faces us at the end of our lives, rather my very being is pervaded by death. The moment I am born I begin to die and that is only the way I can live my life in this world. Generally death, especially when it unexpectedly occurs, and to young people at that, has been treated as something undesirable, painful and

dreadful, by almost all cultures at all times. We see death as something negative, but, according to *Lucretius*, an ancient Roman philosopher and a poet (99 B.C.–55 B.C) death can never be painful or negative, because the person who dies is no more there to experience its negativity. We are never worried about the l...o...n...g period that has gone before we are born, say about the fourteen billion years of the evolution since the Big Bang! Similarly the time after my death also I need not worry, because I will not be able to do anything about it; so death is not a negative thing in itself, so argues *Lucretius*.

Unfortunately we don't know much (even anything!) about death for certainty except that one day we all will die. Death appears dreadful because we don't exactly know what it means to die and what happens after that (may be, apart from faith perspectives). We have seen people dying, we have seen what happens to their bodies after their death, and how it affects others, especially their loved ones and so on... but we have not actually, physically died. Like any other experiential reality, death also escapes our full and final definition. Death becomes a bit more mysterious, because when I experience that, I am not there to share it with others, because with death I also disappear. Because death is certain, every living being naturally longs to perpetuate its progeny, it dearly longs that its generations to live after its death. This progeny is in a way a tool to meet the challenge of my death and that is possible in and through sexuality, and that is why, the sexuality is also equally certain and strong.

Every day that we live takes us one step closer to death. Sometime back I came across a computer game; it will ask you to enter your date of birth and the number of years that you want to live. Let us say, you type '85 years'; at the next click of the button, the computer will provide how many years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds remain in your life; it is about 2, 64 3,840,000 seconds are remaining. At the next instant a clock will start ticking away; every moment a second will be reduced; and if you keep watching it is thrilling and frightening as well...you watch the number slowly and steadily reducing... sooner or later it will reach zero... and at that moment you will cease to live and there you are... yes, you ARE NO MORE! Thus, both life and death are inter-twined and that is why discussions and debates on death equally abound as many as on life.

Thus both life and death are, so to say, two sides of the same coin. One cannot live without ‘dying’ and cannot die without ‘living’. We cannot exactly make out whether we die as we live, or die as we live! As a traditional Christian prayer in Tamil puts it: “A candle burns as it melts, and it melts as it burns; similarly, you oh human being, you are living as you are dying, and dying as you are living!” In other words, every breath that I inhale is the sign of life, and every breath that I exhale is the sign of death; when I exhale for the last time in my life, and that is it... I am not there to take it again! In fact, I must ‘die’ to every moment, and move on to the next, if I don’t want to die to this moment, I will not be able to move on to the next moment, and thus I cannot live! Our death, in a way, makes our life meaningful.⁸

PART III

MEANING AND MEANINGFULNESS

There, unfortunately, is no set of necessary or sufficient conditions to hold life to be meaningful. The discussion about the meaning of life has been there from the ancient times. Some argue that life has no meaning. For instance, Schopenhauer argues that various types of suffering, physical and psychological, different types of struggles to achieve their livelihood or to achieve certain goals, disappointments and anxieties... all lead one to be negative towards life and decide that life has no meaning. When the goals are not achieved, even after repeated efforts, one can easily grow tired of life and turn to be totally pessimistic about life. On the other hand, even after one’s goals are achieved, in due course of time, one ends up with boredom, and looks for some other goals to be achieved. Thus there is no point in living as one is being kicked back and forth between boredom and suffering.⁹ Of course one must realize that not all people see life as meaningless because of suffering and unrealized goals in life. They do see the joy and satisfaction of achieving some ends lasting longer in their lives and they have contentment. They also see some sufferings to be valuable in teaching them great lessons or at least help them to enjoy pleasures better.

Some quote Darwinian model of evolution¹⁰ to claim that life is full of random process, based on mere chances, where one cannot

find any meaningful role for 'any purpose or meaning'. They claim that in the process of evolution there is no role for purpose, and this in turn might imply that life is pointless and directionless. In the whole process of evolution they argue that everything is random. They¹¹ argue that Darwin has 'purified' biology of teleology. But not exactly! Natural selection is not merely a random process; and it does not deny teleology; for, when in a review of Darwin's work in *Nature*, the distinguished American naturalist Asa Gray claimed that Darwin had brought back teleology to natural science, Darwin immediately sent a note to Gray, saying, "What you say about Teleology pleases me especially, and I do not think anyone else has ever noticed the point. I have always said you were the man to hit the nail on the head'. This ringing endorsement of Gray's point is underscored by Darwin's rich use of teleological explanation throughout his career."¹² Thus we understand that the Darwinian theory of evolution has place for purpose.

Another argument proposed to show life to be meaningless is the very fact of death. Without any clear assurance, perhaps apart from religious perspectives, for life after death, one sees death to be the end of everything and with death all the joys and sorrows, feats and failures, achievements and disappointments of one's life face a sudden and abrupt end, making the whole life a meaningless void.¹³ But limitedness in time and the fact of death need not necessarily make our lives meaningless. As noted above this limitedness gives us the urgency and the motivation to achieve something worthwhile before we meet death. Therefore it is perhaps meaningful to say that it is death that makes life interesting, as infinite life will be boring. Death also helps us to prioritize things in life. Life would be perhaps prosaic and be lacking motivations totally if there is no death waiting at the end.¹⁴ Some like to hold a *via media*: life in itself may be meaningless, but one can find its meaning, if one wants. Due to the fact of death and misery, life is indeed absurd but it is not all that negative as there is a possibility of making it meaningful. For instance, Albert Camus is of the opinion that life is absurd due to the inevitable process of aging and eventually leading to death. But he is convinced that life can still have meaning, though he is not clear about what that meaning is.¹⁵ Thinkers like Thomas Nagel would make a distinction between life that is *subjectively meaningful* and *objectively meaningless*.¹⁶

But there is a danger in leaving the meaning of life to the individuals. Total subjectivist approach might lead some unhealthy and awkward conclusions, like, say, one may just decide to eat, drink and always make merry, and that sort of life may be completely meaningful to him or her. But can we really leave it at that? To tackle this issue Susan Wolf proposed two criteria to make life subjectively meaningful: namely, there must be an active engagement in life and that engagement must be in some projects of worth.¹⁷ Though this proposal addresses the issue, yet it does not really solve the issue, because of the possible ambiguity in the concept of 'worth'.

Victor Frankl defines humans as seekers of meaning (or meaning-seeking animals). He suffered untold brutality and all sorts of humiliation and tortures at the Nazi concentration camp. He lost all his relatives except one sister. Though he lost everything, fortunately he did not lose meaning in life. In spite of his own suffering he was trying to keep the hopes of his fellow prisoners alive. They just hung onto his lips, when he spoke to them. He was convinced that "human life, under any circumstance, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life included suffering and dying, privation and death".¹⁸ By giving meaning to their lives he found meaning in his own. This deep experience led him to develop *Logotherapy*, which helps those who face '*existential frustration*' to find meaning and responsibility; one is forced to answer the questions posed by life and that makes one to responsible in fulfilling that answer. Therefore the essence of existence is this responsibility, and it is this responsibility is that which gives meaning to one's life. If these are not found, one is led to a kind of neurosis and life becomes all the more burdensome for the individual and the others as well. When one loses meaning in life one is led to a sort of 'existential vacuum', facing boredom. This affects them very badly, causing void within them, even provoking them to the extremes of committing suicide. When 'the will to meaning' is not met with one is easily led to alcoholism, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, which can be seen as the manifestations of vacuum. So Logotherapy goes beyond logical reasoning and moral exhortation but to enable them to find meaning in life. Meaning in life differs from person to person, depending on the life circumstances, which are unique to

the individuals. Even for a person it changes day to day, or even hour to hour. To look for meaning in life in general terms is like, according to Frankl, asking 'what is the best move in chess?' As the ingenuity of any move in chess depends on the opponent's move, the meaning in one's life depends on one's own challenges and opportunities. As our deeds change and experiences change, naturally "Meaning in life is always changing, but never ceases to be".¹⁹

I like to see Frankl's analysis of meaning as 'meaningfulness'. Nietzsche's oft-quoted words, he who has a 'why' to live, can bear with any 'how' are the real motivation in the life of Frankl, who is convinced that humans have the ability and freedom to transcend the immediate conditions, no matter how delightful or distressful it may be, to have high hopes in life. Every moment one is invited to make a choice and obviously this choice cannot be made on reason alone. Human being, therefore, in my opinion, is *a seeker of meaningfulness*. Though meaning and meaningfulness are not unrelated, there is a distinction between them; while meaning is fairly available to all, meaningfulness is personal and available only to the individuals concerned; while the former is fairly objective, mutable and explicable; the latter is rather subjective, immutable and inexplicable. For example, if someone reads a letter sent to me by my friend, she will get the meaning of it, provided the language is known to her. But when I read the same letter, I obviously get more than mere meaning, because I know the person who has written to me; I get the vivid memories of the past, say, the time that we spent together, and this I call 'the meaningfulness' of the letter. This aspect is unavailable to other readers, who don't know my friend who wrote it.

More than meaning, it is the meaningfulness is that which empowers one to face difficulties in life. If one is not convinced of this meaningfulness life becomes all the more arduous. One can make a distinction between *suffering and pain*, where the former is explainable with adequate reasons, while the latter is not. For instance, two students fail in the exam. One knows well that the preparation was not good, and the performance in the exam was also quite bad, and so it was quite understandable that he has failed. Whereas, the other one is fully convinced that the

preparation for the exam was very good and the performance too was excellent, but still (s)he failed, and now wonders why and how (s)he failed. Though objectively speaking the ‘failure in the exam’ is the same, tolerable for the former, and unbearable for the latter, precisely because the latter does not know the reasons for the failure.

Further, love enables us to see the meaningfulness, rather than just meaning. Love is the only way to understand the other fully. Without this love one cannot get into the ‘skin’ of the other person, nor to empathize with them. It is easier for a believer as it is divine to love and to be loving. This love enables one to see what is potential in him or her, rather than seeing only what is already actualized. Even God also does the same. He sees the possible graceful future, rather than the troublesome past, of a sinner. *Humans see the past-sinner in the present saint, while God sees the future-saint in the present sinner.* A saint is a probable sinner of the past and God does not bother about it, while sinner is a possible saint of the future, and this God takes it seriously, precisely because God sees the potentialities for good future of the sinner, and not his or her bad actualities of the past. Similarly, it is love that enables a woman to tolerate her drunkard husband, because she is able to see the potentialities in him to change into a good man. If she loses this aspect of meaningfulness, rooted in love, she would also lose hope in his change to betterment. That is why we can say ‘love’ is a magic thing; it can make or mar a person’s life. When someone longs for this love, one can even kill him or her, by not showing that love, and at the same time one can change someone’s life, one can make someone’s life meaningful by showing the love that he or she dearly longs for.

Though humans are biologically very much part of creation and share a lot with other creatures, yet they seem to be far different from all of them, in terms of reason, will power, ability to imagine, the exercise of control over natural passion and sexuality, the expression and exercise of aesthetical appreciation and above all the ability to go beyond the immediate environment. However, we cannot easily define life, nor its meaning or purpose, as we saw above, *because the “questioner” and the “questioned” are one and the same here.* In a way it is better that we don’t understand

our life or its meaning to their minute details, for if they can be thoroughly predicted and clearly programmed, the mysterious element of life will be lost. Our emotions like love, trust, hope, awe and wonder, anxiety, fear and the sense of aesthetics and humour – all will be obsolete, if we can completely map what life and its meaning mean. Some degrees of ambiguity and obscurity certainly add colours to life. Modern neuroscience may succeed in mapping the areas of the brain to find out what happens when one is filled with love or hatred, fear or tranquility. Psychology may come up with convincing theories about the good effects of love and the bad effects due to its absence. *But none of the scientific disciplines can exactly define what love is, and since it is this love that makes one find meaning and meaningfulness in life, science can neither comprehend love nor meaning and meaningfulness in life.*²⁰

CONCLUSION

Any science may help us to have a better grasp of life and its mechanisms, at its micro and macro levels. But no matter how these sciences advance, they will not assure us that life is meaning and meaningful. For instance, If we decide that the whole universe is pointless and not worthy of our serious investigation, then no science is possible. From the strenuous efforts of the scientists we learn that they are convinced of the idea of the *fundamental intelligibility* of the universe: “Intelligibility is what we come to know when we have insights that answer our questions. Intelligibility is what makes sense of the puzzling observations and questions that we pursue. By their ongoing questioning, therefore, scientists are seeking the intelligibility of the natural universe. In this way they are already engaging in a certain kind of *faith experience*”.²¹ To struggle to obtain the intelligibility is equated with a faith experience; similarly, meaning and meaningfulness of life cannot be comprehended by Biosciences, but by love and faith.

The ability to see meaning and meaningfulness in life is so essential that it is said: lose wealth, you lose *nothing*, because wealth can be begged, borrowed or robbed; you lose health, you lose *something*, because all of the health cannot be regained; but you lose meaning in life, you lose *everything*! Believers are

perhaps able to easily find meaning in this existence, as this life is going to continue in a different 'mode' after death, but non-believers think that with this death everything is over. For them life is just meaningless; for them life would be, as Shakespeare says, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, a sad tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!"²² But even the non-believers also need not come to such a frustrated conclusion; for, my days are limited and counted, let me do the best before the 'end' arrives. We can decide to use the days of life in a meaningful manner. We may really show some interest to accomplish something solid before we go away, to live a life that is worthy of being a human person, to do something good for others, to make a positive impact, in whatever way we can, upon others. Because we know that we are going to die one day or the other, there is a sense of urgency to accomplish and achieve something in life; on the other hand, if we are going to live forever, we will not show interest in anything... in learning, in achieving, in developing and so on; we will easily become lethargic and complacent, we will not be motivated to do anything at all; nothing will interest us because after all we are going to live forever!

The complex phenomenon of life cannot be comprehended by one discipline. Interdisciplinary approach is the appropriate way to understand life. One-sided approach to life will be limited in its achievement. To find the meaning of human existence philosophers and scientists must work together. Scientists while exploring the meaning of humanity must not remain blind to the philosophical assumptions that underlie their investigations. So Malik points out that "Philosophers.. debate the nature of human subjectivity without considering its rootedness in biology... [while]... natural scientists consider the biological origins of humanity's special qualities without entering into discussion of human agency"; we must avoid looking at humanity from purely naturalistic viewpoint, nor as purely cultural being; and Malik concludes "each is equally one-sided and equally flawed in its attempt to understand what makes us human".²³

Biosciences, therefore, can offer good tools to fathom the mystery of life a little more but to allow them to define life or its dignity and meaning, would risk of making life a commodity; the job of these must be "...a matter of understanding the good life, rather than commanding the tools to manipulate life process".¹ To look for meaning of life merely in Biosciences will be like looking for the right thing in a wrong place, or the wrong thing in a right place... but in both the cases, we will be the losers! Why should we, as rational beings, who are able to develop Biosciences, be the losers after all?

Notes

1. Malcolm Jeeves, "Introduction", in *From Cells to Souls and Beyond - Changing Portraits of Human Nature*, Malcolm Jeeves, ed, Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, pp. xiii-xiv.
2. 'Life' can be referred to the 'process of living' or, as biologists and philosophers understand, it may be contrasted with the lifelessness of non-living objects. Some authors would see the noun 'life' as just a reification of the process of living, and it does not exist as an independent entity. Physicalists reduce 'life' to the physical functions of an organism, while vitalists deny this move to focus on several autonomous characteristics of a living being. But now, the present tendency is to remove the extremes of both the positions and to propose a paradigm known as 'organicism'. [See" Ernst Mayr, *This is Biology – The Science of the Living World* (Harvard University Press, 1997) – Printed in India by Universities Press (India) Ltd, Hyderabad, 1999.
3. D. Gareth Jones, "The Emergence of Persons," in Malcolm Jeeves, *From Cells to Souls and Beyond- Changing Portraits of Human Nature*, Malcolm Jeeves, ed., (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 17-18. Also see: Jeff McMahan, "The Metaphysics of Brain Death," *Bioethics* 9 (1995), pp. 91-106; and Multi-Society Task Force on PVS, "Medical Aspects of the Persistent Vegetative State I," *New England Journal of Medicine* 330(1994), pp. 1499-1508.
4. Sara Franklin, "Life," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Chief ed. Stephen G. Post (New York: MacMillan Reference, USA, 2004), pp.1381- 1387.
5. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University

- Press, 1989).
6. Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).
 7. Carl Sagan, "Life," in *Encyclopedia of Britannica*, 15th ed, Vol 4, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992), p. 985.
 8. I have elsewhere elaborated this idea; see: Stephen Jayard S, *A Book That Cannot Be Titled* (Trichy: Ilanthalir Publication, 2015).
 9. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), pp. 310-319.
 10. According to the Darwinian model of evolution by natural selection specifies five fundamental features of organic life: a) Organic populations are parts of an *ancestor-descendant history*; b) The members of such populations *inherit* traits from their ancestor and *pass them on* to their descendants; c) They also *vary* with respect to those heritable traits; d) Owing to their tendency to increase their numbers geometrically, the members of such populations *compete* with each other for limited resources; e) The environment in which they live is infinitely complex and constantly changing. [See: James G. Lennox, "Philosophy of Biology", in *Introduction to the Philosophy of science*, ed. Merrilee H. Salmon et al., (New Jersey: Prentice hall, 1992), p.271].
 11. T. Michael Ghiselin, *The Triumph of the Darwinian Method* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); and L. David Hull, *Philosophy of Biological Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
 12. Quoted by James G. Lennox, "Philosophy of Biology", in *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Merrilee H. Salmon et al., (New Jersey: Prentice hall, 1992), p.299
 13. See: Metz Thaddeus, "Recent Works on the Meaning of Life", in *Ethics*, Vol. 112, No. 4, pp. 781 – 814; and Kurt Baier, "The Meaning of Life", in E. D. Klemke, ed., *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101-132. 14. See: Bernard William, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality", *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Caridge University Press, 1973), pp. 82-100. 15. See: Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1969), pp. 1-138.
 16. Thomas Nagel, "Birth, Death and the Meaning of Life," *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 208 – 231
 17. Susan Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of Good Life", in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 14, pp. 207 – 225. 1997.
 18. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1993), p.77-78.
 20. I have discussed some of these ideas elsewhere to show the need of going beyond rationality to the level of reasonableness to experience
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13. See: Metz Thaddeus, "Recent Works on the Meaning of Life", in *Ethics*, Vol. 112, No. 4, pp. 781 – 814; and Kurt Baier, "The Meaning of Life", in E. D. Klemke, ed., *The Meaning of Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101-132.14. See: Bernard William, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality", *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Caridge University Press, 1973), pp. 82-100.15. See: Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1969), pp. 1-138.
16. Thomas Nagel, "Birth, Death and the Meaning of Life," *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.208 – 231
17. Susan Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of Good Life", in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol.14, pp.207– 225.1997.
18. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1993), p.77-78.
20. I have discussed some of these ideas elsewhere to show the need of going beyond rationality to the level of reasonableness to experience the fullness of life. See: "The Role of Reasonableness in the Construal of Human Fullness - Reflections from Philosophy of Science", in Mohan Doss / Andreas Vonach (eds.), *Human and Cosmic Fullness: A Multidisciplinary Approach .iup - Conference Series*, Innsbruck 2012; pp 191 – 202.
21. Patrick Byrne, "Is the Universe on Our Side? Scientific Understanding and Religious Faith", in *The Lonergan Review*, III, 1, Nov 2011, 140-161, p. 149. Emphasis mine.
22. William Shakespeare' Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5; See: [http://everything2.com /title/A+tale+told+by+an+idiot%252C+full+of+sound+and+fury%252C+signifying+nothing](http://everything2.com/title/A+tale+told+by+an+idiot%252C+full+of+sound+and+fury%252C+signifying+nothing); accessed on 15 July, 2015.
23. Kennan Malik, *Man, Beast and Zombi: What Science Can and Cannot Tell Us about Human Nature*, Rutgers University Press 2002, p. 54 [ISBN-10: 0813531225; ISBN-13: 978- 0813531229].
24. Life" – by Carl Mitcham and Addam Briggie [in *Encyclopedia of Science, Technology and Ethics*, vol. 3, ed in chief: Carl Mitcham (MI, USA: Thomson Gale, 2005), pp. 1128-1131, p. 1130. Note: In addition to the sources referred to in the footnotes the has also been consulted for this paper: *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. By Haugh LaFollete, Vol V (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd), 2013.

Ethics, Spirituality and Human Life

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Abstract

This paper is an analytical study of the three concepts i.e., spirituality, ethics and human life from the perspective of different religious traditions in India with a view to arriving at the interfacing factors in them. A sound ethical foundation is very important for any seeker aspiring to progress in genuine spiritual life. Human life is the field in which ethical and spiritual values are practiced both as an individual and as a member of the larger society. Genuine spirituality deals with the life and ethical values of a person as well as the society which leads to transformation. Humanistic spirituality represented by Carvaka, Buddhism and Jainism; and Religious spirituality represented by Hinduism, Islam, Parsi, Sikh and Christian religions focus on ethical living and the struggles of the people in the present life. Any spirituality to be genuine should address the struggles of the people; promote human values based on ethical principles. Ethical living and a spirituality based on moral values is the solution to the rampant atrocities, violence and injustice in the world.

Keywords

Ethics, morality, dharma, humanistic/religious spirituality, harmony, peace, right living, care for creation

1. Introduction

Stoics and Epicureans¹ in the West, Confucianists² in China and Carvaka philosophers³ in India approached life from a humanist perspective. Enlightenment, advancement of science and technology and critical study of the Bible further strengthened the secular humanist approach to life. These philosophers did not accept the existence of any supernatural beings or god. Against this approach the theist religious traditions in India considered human life as a temporary stage of existence for the soul to purify itself before it is finally liberated. Unlike the secular humanists' view, life in this world is only a means for the final liberation. But, both the secular and theistic world views accepted the need for ethical living either because of the concern for the other or because of the belief that one will have to experience the results of one's actions in the present life or in the life to come. More than the divine sanctions, it should be the good of the common humanity that should be the basic criteria for deciding the moral principles that determine the laws governing the individual and societal life.

A sound ethical foundation is very important for any seeker aspiring to progress in genuine spiritual life. Well-disciplined life style and intense meditation with the guidance of an enlightened teacher will enable a person to understand the mysteries in spiritual life. During the Upaniṣadic period, spiritual seekers lived in solitude engrossed in meditation. Buddha exhorted his followers to be their “own refuges,” and to live as “islands to themselves.”⁴ A conducive atmosphere both within and around is required for the pursuit of spiritual life. Ethical values are the guiding principles in everyday life. The doctrine of karma is the fundamental principle based on which the ethical principles are formulated in most of the religious traditions in India. This doctrine states that every action (includes thoughts, words and actions) good or bad will have its results which will determine the nature of birth the soul will get in the next life. Karma theory is not fatalistic but there is room for improvement by doing actions purely guided by altruistic motive in a totally detached manner.

2. Method, terms and concepts used in this paper

This paper is an analytical study of the three concepts i.e., Spirituality, Ethics and Human life from the perspective of

different religious traditions in India with a view to arriving at the interfacing factors in them. The quality of human life may be enhanced. People will be better equipped to handle some of the problems in their life from an ethical perspective keeping in mind the larger good of the society. The term ethics is used in this paper as the practice and reflection on the normative as well as the reflection on the meaning and moral conduct. At times ethics, morality and dharma are used as synonyms though they have distinctive meaning in different contexts. Human life is the field in which ethical and spiritual values are practiced both as an individual and as a member of the larger society. All the three concepts are complimentary in promoting peace and happiness of a person leading to the final goal that is liberation. A liberated person's experience of peace and happiness should promote peace and harmony in the society and in the world. The entire creation comes under the purview of such a person's life and world view.

3. Dharma in Hinduism

The concept *dharma* can be traced back to the usage of the noun *dharman* and other verb forms derived from the root *dhṛ* in the *R̥g Veda*. In the 'Hymn of the Man' (*Puruṣasūkta*) there is a reference to the term dharma as ritual laws. "With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice. These were the first *ritual laws*."⁵ RV. 10.90. *Dharma* means that which sustains life (*dhāraṇāt dharmamityāhu*). "The *Law of Dharma* states that every individual is unique and has a unique personality, mission and destiny. We all are unique beings. When you reflect upon life, you recognize that you have experienced this uniqueness."⁶ Each individual is unique and endowed with infinite potentialities. It is up to each one of us to realize these potentialities and actualize them for each one's growth and for the development of humanity. Humanity has reached the present stage of development because of the dedicated work and sacrifice of millions of people in the past. So we have a responsibility to contribute our share for the further development of humanity.

Hindu Ethics (*dharma*) is based on some of the fundamental tenets of the Indian philosophic-religious tradition. They are, the authority of the Vedas and Smṛti, the immortality of soul, the possibility of liberation, the existence of a supreme reality

Brahman, the doctrine of karma and rebirth, the three ways of liberation (knowledge, devotion and action), the four main castes, the four main stages of life and the theory of the four ends of life.⁷

3.1. Dharma as the sustaining force of the universe

Prajāpati, through his life of self-control, giving and compassion enjoins divine authority to ethical principles (*Br.* 5.2.2), the sacred mantras will lead one through the path of good deeds (*Mund. Up.* 1.1). The four sources of dharma are the Vedas (*śruti*), the remembered sacred texts (*Smṛti*), common ethical code (*sadācāra*) and one's own happiness (*ātmatuṣṭi*), *Manu* 2:12). For John McKenzie, “*Dharma* (morality) serves as a sort of platform over which one may climb to a position from which it becomes easier to teach the higher, but when this position is reached it is no longer needed.”⁸ According to John M. Koller dharma, “In its widest sense it refers to that which sustains and hold together the universe itself.”⁹

Dharma is presented as the cosmic order or cosmic harmony (*Ṛta*) in the Vedas. According to Michael Witzel, “This untranslatable concept thus is similar to the later Hindu *dharma*. The opposite concept of *druh-* (*Avest*, *druj*) “deceiving, cheating action. (Be-)trug” (cf. Engl. be-tray) signifies *active* untruth. Another contrast to *Ṛta* seems to be *nir-ṛti*, the absolute disappearance (*nir-*) of “active, creative truth, law, order,” that is absolute destruction, a sort of hell of absolute darkness, with no food, drink, possibility of children, etc. (*RV* 7.104).¹⁰ Dharma sustains the individual and the society. When dharma is neglected there will arise disharmony, injustice and violence.

3.2. Dharma ensures the welfare of all

Śaṅkaracharya in his introduction to his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, defines dharma as “The law of righteousness (dharma) is what directly promotes the prosperity and emancipation of living beings.”¹¹ Dharma is a system of discipline which is divided into two, the dharma of works (*pravṛtti dharma*) and the dharma of renunciation (*nivṛtti dharma*). The former focuses on embracing works and the latter focuses on renouncing works. These are the two fundamental principles based on which

the stability of the universe is ensured.¹² Human life cannot be individualistic it has to be communitarian. Only in the society an individual's potentialities can be fully actualized. *R̥g Veda* stresses the communitarian aspect of human life, united we walk, united we speak and united we feel and think.¹³ According to the creation account in the Genesis (1:28), human is the caretaker of the creation in that capacity each one becomes co-creator with God. An individual has a responsibility (*svadharma*) to promote the common good, (*jagadah sthitikāraṇam*) and the well being of all beings (*lokasaṁgraha*). According to the B. G. Individual dharma is the innate nature of a person. The Gita says, "one's own law of righteousness, though defective, is better than that of another though well-observed."¹⁴ In Manu's code, ethical validation was based on the *brāhmiṇic* interpretation of the sacred texts. The basic criterion for this validation was the hierarchical caste structure in the society. "Since the Brahmins controlled society totally and defined life in terms of ascetical austerity and other-worldly bliss, the overriding moral tone was that of the forest. The Vedic World –affirmation which had been eclipsed in the Ups remained hidden."¹⁵ For Manu the fruit of dharma is fame in this life and bliss in the life to come, (Manu 2:5, 9; 4: 156-58; 12:81). Dharma enables one to establish friendship with all creatures, social harmony with different groups of people and cosmic welfare of all.

3.3. Mokṣa and universal moral values

Though Hindu Ethics, as they are presented in the scriptures, is directly connected with attainment of mokṣa, they give importance to universal moral values. The moral values will help a person to progress towards mokṣa. "They present such a conception of mokṣa that even social morality by itself becomes directly relevant for the attainment of mokṣa. mokṣa for them is nothing other than what Tagore specifically calls realizing oneself into other and others into oneself, or else, realizing the Universal Self within the individual self."¹⁶ Mokṣa has a meta-ethical sphere where a liberated soul is not bound by the moral regulations of the society because such a person has abandoned the society and all possible pleasures for self- realization. He/she has gone beyond the realm of dharma.

Rig Veda's approach to human life is more of life affirming than pessimistic based on heavenly moral sanctions. Some of the philosophers consider Rig Veda without having any clearly articulated ethical principles. "Weber may be forgiven his inaccurate judgment that the *Vedas* contain no heavenly moral sanction. He formulated this position from his insight that the *Vedas* are also devoid of allusion to *nirvana* and to what some would call pessimistically ascetical traits. This discovery is supported by the lack of a Vedic reference to the mystical and other worldly goal of *mokṣa*."¹⁷ Hindu morality is closely connected with the goals in life (*puruṣārthas*). Ethical precepts (*dharma*), wealth and power (*artha*) and pleasure and love (*kama*) are oriented towards liberation (*mokṣa*), (*R. V. I.113.5-6*). Ethical values (*dharma*) should be the guiding principles in acquiring wealth and power and enjoying pleasure and love. Rig Veda acknowledges the positive aspects of life in the "Hymn to Dawn," "Bringing all life-sustaining blessings with her, showing herself she sends forth brilliant lustre..., Arise! The breath, the life, again hath reached us; darkness hath passed away and light approacheth. Shine then today, rich Maid, on him who lauds thee, shine down on us the gift of life and offspring."¹⁸

After analysing various arguments Roderick Hindery comes to the conclusion, "It may be reasonably supposed that there are concurrent instances of the moral, the amoral, and the tensions between them. Or, if one insists on taking the *Vedas* as some kind of cohesive whole, then it is most logically inferred that the moral, amoral, and their mixtures are all dialectically/complementarily present."¹⁹

3.4. The Upaniṣadic understanding of ethics

The Vedic morality was mainly centred on the duties and responsibilities of a householder based on the concept of sin and appeasement of gods. But the Upaniṣadic seers proposed a new scheme of morality associated with ascetical life. In the Upaniṣads, ascetical life is considered as superior to that of a householder's life. (*Mud. 1.1.12*).

"They who practice austerity (*tapas*) and faith (*śraddhā*) in the forest,

The peaceful (*śānta*) knowers who live on alms.

Depart passionless (*virāga*) through the door of the sun.

To where is that immortal Person (*Puruṣa*), the imperishable Atman.” (*Muṇḍa. Up.* 1.2.11).

The Upaniṣadic ethics was developed based on their understanding of ascetical life. Ascetical life redefined ethical values to have a holistic, non-dualistic view of life.

3.5. Non-duality of Brahman and Atman as the basis of ethics in the Upaniṣads

This shift of focus was based on the insight that the Brahman and the Atman are one and the same and the need for “shaking of good and evil” (*Muṇḍ. 3.1.2*). Some of the important Upaniṣads asserts the non-duality between Brahman which is the ultimate reality and Atman which resides in jiva. Brahman is inseparably connected with jiva and the world (*Māṇḍ. 7*; *Br. Up.* 1.45; 2.4.14; 4.3.30; 3.7.3-23 and *Chand. Up.* 6.13.1-3). Brahman is the source and foundation of morality and jiva partakes in Brahman's role in sustaining the cosmic order. In the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyi in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* regarding immortality, Yājñavalkya says, “Then, he said: Lo, verily, not for love of the husband is a husband dear, but for love of the Atman a husband is dear.” (*Br. Up.* 2.4.5). This non-dual dimension can be extended to all aspects of life and everything in the world. Non-dual approach does not belittle anyone, does not exclude anyone or anything, but it is an inclusive attitude in altruistic love which includes the nature and the entire creation. “Non-dualistic identification with others in *Atman* is thereby conceived as the simplest, most satisfactory answer to long debated problems about love and self-interest resurrected by modern “philosophical egotism”- what is naturally good for yourself ...is naturally good for the whole country.”²⁰ All are expected to develop universal virtues like compassion, self-control (*Br. Up.* 6.2.16) non-violence, love and concern for all. But liberation is the final goal, liberation from repeated births and death (*saṃsāra*). According to Śaṅkara, in the final stage, virtues become irrelevant for a liberated person (*jīvanmukta*), because such a person is beyond the empirical understanding of ethical values.

3.6 Dharma as the guiding principle in different stages of life

The *Dharmasutras*, elaborately deal with the rules and regulations at various stages of life. A life based on ethical principles through four stages of life that is student life (*brahmacarya*), family life (*grhasthāśrama*), life in the forest (*vānaprastha*) and finally a life of total renunciation (*sanyāsa*) will enable a person to acquire the cardinal virtues like non-violence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), non-possession (*aparigraha*) and celibacy (*brahmacharya*).

These Sutras deal with dharma “proper behaviour,” beginning with that of Veda student, and moving to that of a married man (*grhastha*), his daily and seasonal ritual duties, family life, to the death rituals and ancestor worship and inheritance; some also include the duties of a king and his jurisprudence, the four stages in life, and long sections on atonements for wrong behaviour. These rules have provided the basis for medieval and modern Anglo-Indian Hindu law.²¹

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad equates dharma with truth.²² God is the ultimate source of dharma, each individual contributes to the cosmic welfare by fulfilling each ones responsibilities.

These virtues are to be practiced in the strict sense in thought, words and actions so that a genuine seeker will be blessed with positive qualities like loving friendliness (*maitri*), compassion (*karuṇa*), joy (*mudita*) and equanimity of mind (*upeka*). When attachment is completely destroyed with the grace of God one will get the right knowledge about reality which will give enlightenment and liberation. A liberated soul (*jīvanmukta*) may continue to live in this world for the benefit of other souls which are caught up in the cycle of births and deaths. But the nature and quality of such a soul will be completely different from that of an ordinary person's life. A liberated soul will be guided by ethical values and altruistic principles. Such a soul will see everything in God and God in everything.

4. Dhamma as the foundation of spiritual life in Buddhism

The term *dhamma* (since the term *dharma* is more associated with brahminical literature, in order to refer to the ethical precepts

(*śīla*) in Buddhism we use the Pāli term *dhamma*) is used in the early Buddhist scriptures to refer to just and righteous ruling in the case of kings (*dhammenarajjamkareti*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV.90), as practicing justice or righteousness (*dhammamcarati*, *Majjhima Nikāya* II.78) or as acquiring of possession lawfully (*dhammena*), or unlawfully (*adhammena*, *Majjhima Nikāya* II.257). So the term *dhamma* is used in the early Buddhist literature as right conduct and behaviour towards others and every living being in this world.

As in Buddhism, ethical principles are the basis of Jain spirituality. Jains believe that the soul which was originally pure, because of its association with matter becomes impure. Actions will only increase the impurity of the soul. In order to be liberated one has to have control over all actions. Ahimsa (non-injury) is an important mandate in the Jain religion. Everything in this world is to be treated with love and respect. Proper control over mind, speech and actions is an important aspect in Jain spirituality. Austerities are practiced in life, eating, sleep and dress. Right faith, right conduct and right knowledge are the three jewels.

5. Spirituality and moral values

Many people in the modern world with secular ideas feel uncomfortable with the term 'spirituality.' "George Soares Prabhu, therefore, would suggest the word *dharma* for the word "spirituality." *Dharma* is central to Hindu and Buddhist traditions."²³ Whereas, Samuel Rayan uses the term, "openness and response-ability." This means objective understanding of reality, openness to be invaded by the reality and willingness and readiness to respond to situations and realities in life.²⁴

Traditional spirituality is more concerned about pious devotional practices, rituals and ceremonies aiming at life in the other world so the sufferings and the struggles of people are of no interest to them. Traditional religions developed a spirituality based on this world view. Jordan Aumann defines spirituality from this perspective:

In its widest sense, spirituality refers to any religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one's actions proceed. This concept of spirituality is not

restricted to any particular religion; it applies to any person who has a belief in the divine transcendent power and fashions a life-style according to one's religious conviction. In this context, one can speak of Zen Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim Spirituality as well as Christian Spirituality.²⁵

Christian Spirituality consists of “attitudes, benefits, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards supernatural realities.”²⁶ Traditional spiritualities, supported by rituals and ceremonies, focus more on the transcendental supernatural realities.

Genuine spirituality deals with the life and ethical values of a person as well as the society which leads to transformation. Christian spirituality is partaking in the Christ event (life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus) through personalization of Christ's mystery. Spirituality is a life of total detachment lived in the awareness of the indwelling and all-pervading spirit. Unlike the traditional definitions, these focus on individuals, love, justice and society and the need for transformation of conscience. Spirituality in its wider sense refers to one's “loves and attitudes,” “quality of one's heart and life,” and “right relationship to God, to people, and to the earth.”²⁷

5.1 Humanistic spirituality

Ethical values and concern for the creation were not important for the *Mīmāṃsakas*.²⁸ They focussed on ritualistic spirituality as a means to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Ethical values were the foundation of the humanistic spirituality of Carvaka, Buddhism and Jainism. Their ethical values included concern for nature and animals. Carvakas protested against animal sacrifice and exploitation of the ordinary people by the priestly class in the name of gods and life after death. According to Carvakas, even the enjoyment of pleasures, which they accepted as the highest goal of life, should be based on certain ethical principles. Buddha was least interested in metaphysical discourses or dogmas. He was concerned about ethical living of all sections of people: kings, princes, brahmanas, low caste,

masters, servants, monks, ordinary people etc., He was against any kind of caste discrimination in the society; he argued that the nobility of a person is not based on birth but on deeds. Compassion and love were his predominant characteristics. Hence his philosophy can be rightly called an Ethics of practical Religion. Charity was the basis of Buddhist religion. The four Noble Truths, is the essence of the Buddha's teachings, which he explained in his first sermon to his old colleagues at Isipattana. Buddhist spirituality is based on the four noble truths that is there is suffering in this world, there is a cause for suffering, there is an end to the suffering and there is a way to end the suffering. Buddhist spirituality has four important aspects: not harming (*ahimsa*), loving kindness (*maitri*), giving (*dāna*) and compassion (*karuṇa*).²⁹

5.2 The Essence of Hindu spirituality, loving surrender to the Lord

Hindu spirituality is perhaps best represented in the existential struggle of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. Arjuna, when confronted with question to fight or not surrenders himself because he was confused, did not know what is right and wrong, he was unable to take a proper decision. (B. G. 2:7) Then Lord Krishna, guides Arjuna through three ways of liberation i.e., the way of action (*karma mārga*), the way of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) and the way of devotion (*bhakti mārga*). Finally Krishna tells Arjuna, “give up all your actions, take refuge in me; I shall give your liberation,” B G 18.66. Hinduism stresses both the transcendent and the immanent aspects of God. Spirituality for them is both a search and life based on rituals and ethical values. The second Vatican Council speaks about Hindu spirituality:

In Hinduism the divine mystery is explored and propounded with an inexhaustible wealth of myths and penetrating philosophical investigation, and liberation is sought from the distresses of our state either through various forms of ascetical life or deep meditation or taking refuge in God with loving confidence.³⁰

Two aspects are stressed in this description of Hinduism

that is the divine mystery and the concept of liberation.

The spirituality of the Bhagavadgita can be understood from two perspectives, that is Ramanuja's qualified monism and Śaṅkara's absolute monism. For Ramanuja, spirituality is total surrender to the Lord in love and service; for Śaṅkara, it is enlightenment through knowledge about Brahman.

The Yogi who has reached full illumination
Contemplates through the eye of knowledge
Everything in itself, and perceives that
everything is himself
And nothing else.³¹

The term 'yoga' stands for spiritual inquiry in the Bhagavadgita. Gita is the result of the existential agony of a sincere seeker in the person of Arjuna. The seeker finds himself in an acute crisis situation of life. His search for liberation from the existential agony is the main theme and the underlying dynamics of the text. *Sādhaka* experiences disharmony within and seeks harmony (yoga) with himself, with the world and the Divine. Gita represents a constant interaction between human and God represented by Krishna and Arjuna. In this interaction, Indian spirituality emphasizes uniqueness of the goal, single mindedness and continuous pursuit. Mokṣa alone is the ultimate aim of life. Liberation can be attained through a qualitative change in life and values of a person.

5.3 Spirituality is experience of bliss

Yogic spirituality is a unique way to beatific experience (*kaivalya*) and supreme bliss.³² Patañjali defines yoga as restraint of mental modifications, control of thought-weaves.³³ *Chitta* consists of three factors that is mind (*manas*), intelligence (*buddhi*) and ego (*ahamkāra*). Meditation *dhyāna*, is an unbroken flow of thought weaves towards the object of concentration³⁴ which leads to the final aim *samādhi*. Practice of yoga is a spiritual pilgrimage towards the very foundation of a person. When, in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not distorted by the mind of the perceiver that is absorption.³⁵ Absorbed in meditation, the seeker sees God within himself and all things in God.

5.4 Spirituality is harmony with creation

In tribal worldview the starting point of spirituality is harmony with creation i.e., the earth, nature, animals, trees, mountains, rivers. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is therefore, the spiritual foundation of tribal people. One sees the Supreme Being in creation. Tribals, being aware of the presence of the Supreme Being in everything and everywhere, try to live a good, upright, ethical and moral life which is quite a genuine spiritual life. Their natural goodness comprising simplicity, sincerity, honesty, hard work, etc., is certainly the reflection of their inner spiritual life.

The creation constantly communicates with God in silence and in eloquence.³⁶ God has entrusted his precious creation to the care of humans so the earth and the creation are ours, Ps 115. It is a common gift to all, it is our common home.

This shared earth is both the basis and sacrament of gentle human community... We are earth: bits of it which have come to develop a mysterious interiority, the capacity for reflexive thought and for freedom and love.³⁷

The earth and creation proclaim the glory of God. Referring to the canticle of Francis of Assisi, tribal culture all over the world and Indian tradition in particular, Rayan considers the created beings as sisters and brothers and earth as Mother earth.³⁸ The earth and the creation are precious both for God and for the humans, they are to be treated with respect and reverence. An important aspect of spirituality today should be the care and concern for nature. This aspect of respect is there in most of the world religions; what we need to do is “to adopt simple lifestyles, to use things with mental maturity and responsibility to the community, to the earth, to future generations and to the Creator, ensuring that no plant or animal species is lost forever, and that nobody tomorrow is deprived of the blessing we know and enjoy today.”³⁹

6. Human life and ethical living in Zoroastrianism

The underlying theme of the Zoroastrian ethics is the fight between the settled peace loving agrarian community and the

nomadic aggressors represented by two fundamental principles *i.e.*, Truth (*asha*) and Lie (*druj*). Though the human beings are created free, good and evil in the world is the result of human choice (*Y* 30.3-4). Like the primeval twins,⁴⁰ humans in their life can choose good or evil.⁴¹ Those who choose good will be the followers of Ahura and those who follow evil will be the supporters of Ahriman.

Ahura Mazda “the Wise Lord cannot be considered responsible for the appearance of Evil. On the other hand, ahura Mazda, in his omniscience, knew from the beginning what choice the Destroying Spirit would make and nevertheless did not prevent it; this may mean either that God transcends all kinds of contradictions or that the existence of evil constitutes the preliminary condition for human freedom.”⁴²

The supreme Lord was extremely generous to humans by giving three blessings of Immortality, Righteous Order and the Kingdom of Welfare *Yasna*. 34.1. So humans in return through good thoughts (*humata*), good words (*hukta*) and good deeds (*hvarshta*) are expected to express their gratitude to the Lord and lead an ethical life in this world, *Y*.34.2; 45.8. Like theology, ethics in Zoroastrianism also was elaborated during the Sassanian period with the help of Magi. The essence of Zoroastrian ethics 'do in holiness anything you will' places the responsibility of actions on each one. Eternal reward or punishment after death is determined by one's actions in this world;⁴³ souls of the good people will pass through the bridge of *Chinavat* and enter the House of Song (heaven), *Y* 51.15; whereas the souls of the wicked people will be condemned to the House of Lie (hell), *Y* 49.11, 51.14. Zoroastrians give high priority for ethical living⁴⁴ and moderation in life.

“Good life in rich pastures and security against the blood-thirsty men of lies;” “the luck –bringing cow was created for man, not to be neglected, but to graze upon peaceful pastures.” The aristocrats are the hereditary foes of the peasants, and they are also the prophet's opponents. Zarathustra fights for the cause of the oppressed peasant class; and this social reform-which is at the same time the

transition from the way of life of the nomad to that of the agrarian and thus of the settler- is carried out in the name of the God, Ahura Mazda, who will not violence, robbery, and suppression by the nobility but justice and hence a proper ordering of the society.”⁴⁵

Ethical values in personal life were closely connected with an ideal social life as envisioned in the *Avesta* where there was no oppression, injustice and cruelty even to animal.

7. Conclusion

Conflict between good and evil is a reality in the life of individuals and groups. Ethical living and humanistic spirituality may strengthen the good in their fight against the evil. Both humanistic spirituality represented by Carvaka, Buddhism and Jainism; and Religious spirituality represented by Hinduism, Islam, Parsi, Sikh and Christian religions focus on ethical living and the struggles of the people in the present life. Any spirituality to be genuine should address the struggles of the people; promote human values based on ethical principles. Ethical living and a spirituality based on moral values is the solution to the rampant atrocities, violence and injustice in the world. Ethical values can bring in lasting peace and happiness in the life of a person. Groups and nations may live in peace and harmony without the fear of the other. Ethical living includes care and concern for the earth, nature and creatures. As co-creators humans have the responsibility to protect and safeguard the creation. The earth and the creation are precious both for God and for the humans, they are to be treated with respect and reverence. A life founded on ethical values can help a person to progress in spiritual life, a life of love, compassion, friendship and mutual help. Then spirituality and morality interface each other in establishing better human communities.

Notes

1. Stoics are Greek school of philosophy which taught that freedom from passions is the goal of humanity 4 BCE and Epicureans another school of Greek philosophy which advocated pleasure as the highest principle 4 BCE. Cf. W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, (London: Macmillan & Co, 1964) pp. 349 and 358
2. Followers of Confucius 552-479 BCE.
3. Carvaka also known as Indian Materialism did not believe in God, soul and life after death.
4. *Dīgha Nikāya*, III. 58
5. *yajñenayajñamayajañta devas tānidharmaniprathamany*, *R V* 10.90
6. Swami Bodhananda, *The Seven Hindu Spiritual Laws of Success*, (New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2004) p.53.
7. S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of life*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947) p. 122.
8. John Mckenzie, *Hindu Ethics*, (New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, 1971) p. 64.
John M. Koller, "Dharma: An Expression of Universal Order," *Philosophy East and West*, 22 (1972) p. 134.
9. Michael Witzel, "Vedas and Upaniṣads, in Gavin Flood (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p.70.
10. *Yāḥ sa dhamrḥ brāhmṇādyai varṇibhiḥ āśramibhiḥ śreyo'arthibhiḥ anuṣṭīyamānaḥ dharma*). Śaṅkaracharya, *Srīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, trans. by A. G. Krishna Warriar, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1983) p.1-2.
12. *jagataḥ sthitikāraṇam prāṇinām sāksāt abhodayaniśreyashetuh* *Ibid*.
13. *saṅgacadhvam saṁvadadhvam saṁvomanāmsijanathām*, *Rig Veda* 10:191-2
14. *śreyān svadharṁo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭitāt/ svabhāvanīyataṁ karma kurvann'apnoti kilbiṣaṁ*, *B G* 18:47.
15. Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004) p.92.
16. John Mckenzie, *Hindu Ethics*, (New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, 1971) p. 39
17. Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004) p. 48; also refer Kane P. V., *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol IV, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1953) p.156.
18. *Rig Veda* I. 113. 15-17, as quoted by Roderick Hindery, in *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004) p.49.
19. Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004) p.52.

20. Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004) p.63.
21. Michael Witzel, "Vedas and Upanisads," in Gavin Flood (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) p.71.
22. *satyamevayajate na'anṛutaṁ satyena panthā vitatha devayānaḥ, Muṇḍ. Up* 3:1.5
23. Samuel Rayan, "The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation," in *Asian Christian Spirituality*, Virginia Fabella (et al, editors), New York: Orbis Books, 1992. P. 21-22.
24. Cf. Samuel Rayan, "The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation," in *Asian Christian Spirituality*, Virginia Fabella (et al, editors), New York: Orbis Books, 1992. P. 22-26.
25. Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979) p. 17
26. Gordon S. Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, (London: SCM Press, 1983)
27. Samuel Rayan, "The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation," in *Asian Christian Spirituality*, Virginia Fabella (et al, editors), New York: Orbis Books, 1992. P. 18
28. *Mīmāṃsā* is one of the schools of Indian philosophy which advocated actions (*karma*) as the main focus of the Vedas and the only means of liberation.
29. Cf. Stephen Chundamthadam, "Transformative Spirituality," in Samuel Rayan's *Theological Contributions*, ed. by Kurien Kunnumpuram, (yet to be published).
30. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* no. 2
31. Śaṅkara, *Atma-Bodha*, 47
32. Patañjali. *Yogasūtras* 4.33
33. *Chittavṛttinirodhah yogah, Yogasūtras* 1.2
34. *Tatrapratyayaiakatanatadhyanam, Yogasūtras* 3.2
35. *Tadevarthamatranirbhāsam svarūpasūnyamiva samādhiḥ, Yogasūtras* 3.3
36. Ibid, p. 117; *Collected Writings*, p.6-7
37. Ibid, p. 119; *Collected Writings*, p. 9
38. Ibid, p. 121; *Collected Writings*, p. 9-10.
39. Samuel Rayan, "A Spirituality for Our Times," in Kurien Kunnumpuram (ed.), *Life in Abundance: Indian Christian Reflections on Spirituality*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2010 p. 234; also in Kurien Kunnumpuram (ed.), *Selected Writings of Samuel Rayan*, Vol. II, 2012 P. 32.
40. The Wise Lord Ahura Mazda created both the Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit but the Holy Spirit chose to be good and the evil spirit chose to be wicked. *Yasna* 47. 2-4. Though Mazda is the supreme Lord; He is not the cause of evil in this world. According to this

understanding the origin of evil can be traced back to the freedom of choice both in the case of the primeval spirits and in the case of human beings. In Christian theology angels and the first parents sinned by exercising the freedom given to them which gave rise to evil in this world.

41. "Hear ye then with your ears; see ye the bright flames with the (eye) better mind. It is for a decision as to religions, man and man, each individually for himself. Before the great effort of the cause, awake ye (all) to our teaching." Y. 30.2
42. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas* Vol I (London: University of Chicago Press, 1978) P. 310
43. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1964) PP. 198, 199.
44. The book of Esther in the Old Testament acknowledges the high moral standards of the Medes and Persians. *Esther* 1.19
45. Mensching Gustav, *Structures and Patterns of Religion*, trans by Hans F. Klimkeit, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1976) p. 24.

**Unmasking the False Dichotomy
in the Abortion Debate
In Defense of the Empowerment of Women and the
Entitlement of the Preborn**

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to provide clarity on the moral issue of abortion from three important inter-related perspectives: science, philosophy and law. From each of these perspectives, this paper tries to articulate the moral concerns both of mother and the preborn without prematurely dismissing other opinions that lay emphasis almost exclusively either on the rights of women or of the preborn. Careful analysis of diverse opinions and arguments is made to make a singular and significant point: the abortion debate has been trapped within the either-or dichotomy which forces us to choose between the rights of women and those of the preborn. This approach has dominated the abortion debate for decades without proper scrutiny of this very dichotomy. An attempt is made in this paper to show that this dichotomy is false and there is a need to inscribe the abortion debate within the paradigm of 'both...and.' Thus this paper argues that choosing not to interrupt pregnancy voluntarily is a choice made in favour *both* of women *and* the preborn. It is a moral choice that one makes *both* for the empowerment of women *and* the entitlement of the preborn.

Keywords

abortion, preborn, fetus, personhood, rights, empowerment, dichotomy.

Introduction

Among the many important issues of bioethics, abortion¹ is certainly one of the oldest and most universal issues where even traditional approaches show strong divergences. The ethical debate on abortion cuts across three important academic disciplines: Science, Philosophy and Law. Usually debates about abortion focus on politics and law: should abortion be outlawed and treated like the murder of a human person, or remain a legal choice available to all women? Behind the debates are more fundamental ethical questions which aren't always given the specific attention they deserve. Some believe that the law should not enforce morality, but all good law is based upon moral values. A failure to openly discuss those values can obscure important discussions. In this essay on the ethics of abortion, we shall first deal with the questions from the field of biological science related to abortion, then move on to philosophical and legal questions. While discussing the legal aspects of arguments, we shall pay special attention to the Indian scenario.

1. Arguing from Science

Abortion is an emotionally complex issue, stacked with distressing circumstances that elicit our sympathy and compassion, but abortion is not morally complex: If the preborn are not human beings equally worthy of our compassion and support, no justification for abortion is required. However, if the preborn has human life, no justification for abortion is morally adequate, if such a reason cannot justify ending the life of a toddler or any born human in similar circumstances. Hence we need to turn to the facts provided by biological science to see if the preborn is a living human being. In this section, we shall first briefly look at what science has to say about the fetus, whether it is a living organism or not and then discuss how with the knowledge of biological science we can unmistakably deduce that the fetus is a human being.

1.1 Fetus as a Living Organism

Biological science is not in any way unclear about the beginning of human life - it starts at the moment of conception. The moment a human sperm penetrates a human ovum, or egg, generally in the

upper portion of the Fallopian Tube, a new entity comes into existence. “Fertilization is an important landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is thereby formed...”²

“[The zygote], formed by the union of an oocyte and a sperm, is the beginning of a new human being.”³ Zygote is the name of the first cell formed at conception, the earliest developmental stage of the human embryo, followed by the “Morula” and “Blastocyst” stages.⁴ A zygote is the beginning of a new human being. “Human development begins at fertilization when a sperm fuses with the oocyte to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.”⁵ The zygote is composed of human DNA and other human molecules, so its nature is undeniably human and not some other species.

The new human zygote has a genetic composition that is absolutely unique by itself, different from any other human that has ever existed. It has its own unique genetic human signature that is different from that of either of its parents. This shows that it is clearly not additional tissue mass belonging to the mother. The genetic material in each cell of the developing embryo has a unique identity separate from the mother’s. This disproves the claim that what is involved in abortion is merely “a woman and her body.”

This DNA includes a complete “design,” guiding not only early development but even hereditary attributes that will appear in childhood and adulthood, from hair and eye color to personality traits.⁶ As well as being separate and unique, a fertilized embryo is ontologically no different than a human toddler, adolescent, or adult. Nothing is added to or taken away from the embryo except food and waste products (which is no different from any human being). At no point does the embryo undergo any fundamental, ontological change after conception; it simply grows and develops just like a toddler grows and develops.

It is also quite clear that the earliest human embryo is biologically alive and is a living organism. “The property or quality that

distinguishes living organisms from dead organisms and inanimate matter, manifested in functions such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, and response to stimuli or adaptation to the environment originating from within the organism.”⁷ The human embryo fulfills the four criteria needed to establish biological life: metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction.⁸ Is the human zygote merely a new kind of cell or is it a human organism; that is, a human being? Scientists define an organism as a complex structure of interdependent elements constituted to carry on the activities of life by separately-functioning but mutually dependant organs. The human zygote meets this definition with ease. Once formed, it initiates a complex sequence of events to ready it for continued development and growth. The zygote acts immediately and decisively to initiate a program of development that will, if uninterrupted by accident, disease, or external intervention, proceed seamlessly through formation of the definitive body, birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and aging, ending with death. This coordinated behavior is the very hallmark of an organism. By contrast, while a mere collection of human cells may carry on the activities of cellular life, it will not exhibit coordinated interactions directed towards a higher level of organization.⁹

1.2 Not Just Fetus but Human Fetus

Milestones of human development begin early. For example, the human heart begins to form 18 days after conception and exhibits a measurable heart beat at 21-24 days.¹⁰ The brain begins to form at this time and produces measurable brain waves at day 40.¹¹ Contrary to some daring claims of pro-abortion advocates, the fetus at the point of abortion is not just a “blob of tissue” to be described in terms of small size or weight. Even in early abortions, the fetus has all the parts of a human being. Contrary to what many believe, human beings are not constructed in the womb - they develop. In fact, all the major organ systems are initiated within the first three weeks after conception. The process of embryonic development is a continuous process, with no

obvious point at which the fetus magically becomes a “person.” In fact, the development process continues well after birth, including many characteristics that determine our personality or personhood.

Thus, it is an error to claim, “It’s not a human, it’s a fetus.” That would be like saying, “It’s not a human, it’s an infant,” or, “It’s not a human, it’s an adolescent.” These are category fallacies. The proper answer to these assertions would be, “Sure it’s a fetus, sure it’s an infant, and sure it’s an adolescent. It’s a human fetus, a human infant, and a human adolescent.” These are simply stages of development in the human life cycle. A human starts as an embryo, becomes a fetus, is born an infant, develops into a child, grows into an adolescent, matures into adulthood, and eventually dies. Scientifically, there is no good reason to believe a human being is created at birth, because nothing is created at birth. At birth, a fetus simply changes location and changes its mode of acquiring food and dispensing waste, but at no point does it become something entirely new or different. Life begins at conception and proceeds through its stages until death. From the moment of conception, the preborn are human beings.

Scientific evidence is quite plain: the moment the fusion of the human sperm and egg takes place, a new entity comes into existence which is distinctly human, alive, and an individual organism – a living, and fully human, being.¹² Thus from medical science, we can conclude that human life begins at conception and proceeds rapidly thereafter. Even the advocates of abortion concede this simple fact. Faye Wattleton, the longest reigning president of the largest abortion provider in the United States – Planned Parenthood – said the following in an interview with *Ms. Magazine*: “I think we have deluded ourselves into believing that people don’t know that abortion is killing. So any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus.”¹³ Ann Furedi, the chief executive of the largest independent abortion provider in the UK, said this in a 2008 debate: “We can accept that the embryo is a living thing in the fact that it has a beating heart, that it has its own genetic system within it. It’s clearly human in the sense that it’s not a gerbil, and we can recognize that it is human.

Naomi Wolf, a prominent feminist author and abortion supporter, makes a similar point when she states that “we need to contextualize the fight to defend abortion rights within a moral framework that admits that the death of a fetus is a real death.”¹⁵ Peter Singer, contemporary philosopher and public abortion advocate, makes this startling admission when he writes that “there is no doubt that from the first moments of its existence an embryo conceived from human sperm and eggs is a human being.”¹⁶

Bernard Nathanson co-founded one of the most influential abortion advocacy groups in the world (NARAL) and once served as medical director for the largest abortion clinic in America. In 1974, he wrote an article for the *New England Journal of Medicine* in which he states, “There is no longer serious doubt in my mind that human life exists within the womb from the very onset of pregnancy...”¹⁷ Some years later, he would reiterate: “There is simply no doubt that even the early embryo is a human being. All its genetic coding and all its features are indisputably human. As to being, there is no doubt that it exists, is alive, is self-directed, and is not the same being as the mother – and is therefore a unified whole.”¹⁸

Science concludes that abortion kills, but is it murder? Prominent defenders of abortion rights publicly admit that abortion kills human beings. They are not saying that abortion is morally defensible because it doesn’t kill a distinct human entity. They are admitting that abortion does kill a distinct human entity, but argue it is morally defensible anyway. They base their arguments either on the philosophical notion of personhood or on the right of a woman over her body. We shall then discuss these two arguments from a philosophical point of view.

2. Philosophical Perspectives

In this section we shall focus on two important philosophical notions person and right. The question of personhood leaves the realm of science for that of philosophy and ethics. Science defines what the preborn is; it cannot define our obligations toward her. After all, the preborn is a very different human entity

than those we see around us. Should a smaller, less developed, differently located and dependent being be entitled to rights of personhood and life? Or should the right of the mother over her body gain priority over the rights of the preborn.

2.1 Debate on Personhood

Much of the debate in regard to abortion has centered on whether the fetus is a person or not. If the fetus is a person, then it has the rights that belong to persons, including the right to life. The concept of personhood, in other words, is the bridge that connects the fetus with the right to life.

Susan Sherwin attempts to define personhood on the basis of interactions of individuals in relation to others, thus suggesting that the preborn is not a person. “Persons . . . are members of a social community that shapes and values them, and personhood must be defined in terms of interactions and relationships with others.”¹⁹ However, this would make the fetus a human non-person. Does such a creature really exist? Who should be in charge of determining which characteristics of personality constitute personhood? In the past, numerous human beings including slaves and women have been defined as non-persons. Should we begin a new list of human beings who aren’t really persons?

The lack of certain personality traits used to define personhood would remove many humans who are currently considered to be persons from the status of personhood. This kind of definition of personhood would make into non-persons those who are in a coma, the elderly with degenerative disorders and those who are mentally deficient. Is it then justified to consider these human beings as non-persons? If one defines personhood on the basis of those who consciously perform personal acts, those who are asleep would be classified as non-persons and could be killed during a nap. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a present capacity to perform personal acts, those who are in a coma could be killed at any point during their coma. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a history of

performing personal acts, those who have been in a coma from birth would be classified as non-persons and could be killed at any point after birth. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a future capacity to perform personal acts, those who are dying would be classified as non-persons and could be killed at any point. Human newborns are among the least capable mammals in their ability to perform physically and mentally. Personhood based upon the ability to perform certain personal functions could be used to define newborns as non-persons, rendering them susceptible to possible infanticide.

Different sides of the abortion debate define the beginning of personhood at different points in development. Abortion proponents claim that a fertilized egg is just a single cell - like any other cell of the human body and is only "potential life". However, this single cell is alive by any biological definition of life and defines the beginning of each new human being. This single cell is unique from both the father's and mother's cells, so it cannot be defined as just part of the woman's body.

Abortion proponents claim that prior to 20 weeks of gestation, the cerebral cortex is not developed enough so that the fetus can possess an individual human personality, and therefore, the fetus is not a person. Defining personhood on the basis of personality results in several problems. It is impossible to know when a fetus goes from non-person to person status. Of course, personality is a function of the body, and is programmed at least partially by the DNA. Trying to distinguish a separate existence of mind from the brain results in a kind of mind/body dualism, that is unacceptable to scientists and untenable for philosophers. Brain development occurs in a continuous progression of virtually indistinguishable events. There is no point at which the brain suddenly becomes functional. In fact, many aspects of brain development occur after birth. Most aspects of the newborn personality do not emerge until weeks to months after birth. Therefore, a definition of personhood on the basis of brain development would allow for infanticide - at least through the first month. Most people will be unwilling to accept such a definition of personhood, since they are able to see exactly what is being killed when the individual is a newborn. What most people don't know is that the fetus looks markedly like a newborn, only smaller, after the first three months of gestation.

Defining personhood on the basis of fetal viability outside the womb also has several problems. By this definition, the age of viability is subject to human technology. In the United Kingdom, this definition led to the lowering of the age of viability from 28 weeks to 24 weeks in 1990. An article published in 2002 in the medical journal *Nature*, indicated that an artificial womb might lower the age of viability. The author of the study commented on the possible implications of such technology on the availability of abortion, since the current legal definition of abortion “rights” is based upon “fetal viability.”²⁰

Defining personhood on the basis of self-consciousness and an interest in one’s own continued existence allows for infanticide. In “Defense of Abortion and Infanticide,” Michael Tooley claims that individuals have a right to life only at the point of self-consciousness and an interest in their own continued existence. Tooley concludes, therefore, that infanticide is morally acceptable. If the individual will, in the future develop such interest, is it permissible to kill the individual before such interests develop? Kristine Kruszelnicki argues that “consciousness and self-awareness, often proposed as fair markers for personhood, merely identify stages in human development. Consciousness doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It exists only as part of the greater whole of a living entity. To say that an entity does not yet have consciousness is to nonetheless speak of that entity within which lies the inherent capacity for consciousness, and without which consciousness could never develop.”²¹ Again Nat Hentoff points out, “It misses a crucial point to say that the extermination can take place because the brain has not yet functioned or because that thing is not yet a ‘person’. Whether the life is cut off in the fourth week or the fourteenth, the victim is one of our species, and has been from the start.”²²

2.2 Philosophers’ Arguments from Women Rights

Proponents of abortion say that a woman should have the right to control her own body. This sounds reasonable. However, the fetus is not actually part of a woman’s body. The fetus is a separate individual, which has its own circulatory system and is composed of a unique DNA sequence compared to the mother. Regarding the

claim that the fetus is part of the mother, Professor Peter Kreeft made the rather comical observation, “But in that case, every pregnant woman has four eyes and four feet, and half of all pregnant women have penises! Clearly, the absurd conclusion came from the false premise that the fetus is only part of the mother.”²³

Some philosophers—beginning with Judith Jarvis Thomson and Jane English—have argued that, even if the fetus is a person, abortion may be morally justified. In other words, they dispute the truth of the premise, “It is wrong to end the life of an innocent person.” Thomson offers an analogy: imagine that you were knocked unconscious, hooked up to a famous violinist who must depend on you for life support for the coming nine months. Thomson maintains that you would be morally justified in unhooking yourself, even if it resulted in the death of the violinist. By analogy, a pregnant woman is justified in “unhooking” herself from the fetus, even if doing so results in the death of the fetus and even if the fetus is a person. Thompson’s “Unplugging the Violinist” (a fictional scenario in which one is kidnapped by friends of a dying violinist in need of a kidney, and forced to remain plugged into him for nine months in order to save his life) illustrates the dilemma of bodily autonomy, while suggesting grounds for abortion in cases of rape.²⁴

Thomson’s analogy has several limitations; it is applied only to cases of rape. The philosopher Jane English amended Thomson’s example. Imagine that you go out at night, knowing that you might be rendered unconscious and hooked up to the violinist. You would still, according to English, be entitled to unhook yourself. This case is more closely analogous to conventional cases of unwanted pregnancies.

Both these philosophers fail to recognize that the relationship between a preborn and her mother is unlike an artificial union of one stranger to another. The fetus is not an intruder. She is in the rightful home of a human being at her age and stage of development. Unlike the kidneys, which exist for the woman’s body, the uterus exists and each month prepares to welcome someone else’s body. A woman has a right to her body, but so too a fetus has a right to the uterus that is her biologically given home.

Furthermore, recognizing the biological responsibilities with which we have evolved as a species, we understand that while one is not always morally obliged to help a stranger, one is duty-bound to provide basic sustenance and protection to one's biological offspring. A breast-feeding mother can't claim 'bodily autonomy' and abandon her infant in the basement while she travels; neither can a pregnant mother abandon her responsibility to a dependent human child. If a wayward child were to find his way onto a stranger's yacht only to be discovered a day later at sea, he would be temporarily dependent on that sailor's resources alone. Would the sailor be justified in tossing the child overboard into shark-infested waters? While the rape victim did not choose and is unfairly put into this position, her basic obligation to her dependent human offspring is no less real than that of the sailor with an unwanted stowaway.

Moreover, is it truly the mark of a civilized people that the more vulnerable and dependent a human is, the more we can justify his or her death? Is "might-makes-right" the best we can do as a modern and sophisticated people faced with a vulnerable being and a woman in crisis? Abortion does not merely "unplug a dying stranger," abortion actively dismembers and kills an otherwise healthy human being who is in an age-appropriate, naturally dependent union with his or her mother. Abortion neither 'unrapes' a woman nor helps her heal.

Abortion proponents claim that every child should be wanted. They also claim that wanted children are less likely to be abused than those who are "unwanted." However, child abuse statistics show that since abortion was legalized in 1973 in the US, child abuse has risen dramatically, although over one million unwanted children are aborted every year.²⁵ Is it likely that the callous attitude fostered by the prevalence of abortion has contributed to the child abuse problem? A study made in 2007 shows that those mothers who have a prior history of abortion, in fact, abuse their children more than those who do not have a history of abortion.²⁶ Moreover, being wanted is not a condition of the child, but of the adult. Is it fair to kill a child because of the attitude of an adult?

3. The Legality/Criminality of Abortion

Human Rights are those rights, which should be available to every individual without any discrimination of any kind. Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom. The most important right of a human is the right to life. It is the supreme human right from which no derogation is permitted. It is inalienable. The Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibit the arbitrary deprivation of life. There are differences in the legalization or criminalization of abortion among the World Nations. Abortion is illegal in many countries of the South American Continent, many of the Sub-Saharan African countries, most countries in the Middle-East and North Africa, and quite many countries in Asia. Only two countries in Western Europe consider abortion illegal. Most countries that have legalized abortions have given restricted right for abortion namely to save the life of the mother. A few countries, however, have extended the idea of the right of women to make an informed choice to go for abortion. To discuss the nuances of the laws in different countries of the world would be beyond the scope of the paper. We shall only focus on a few developed countries in the West in the first part and then discuss the legal aspects of abortion in India.

3.1 The Legal position in Some Developed Countries of the West

The preamble from the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child UNCRC of 1989 states, “Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, *before as well as after birth.*” But the actual legal practice in many countries that have signed in UNCRC does not seem to adhere strictly to the spirit of this preamble. Until recently in France, abortion was legal up to 12 weeks of gestation, but only if the woman was judged by her doctor to be in a “state of distress” because of her pregnancy. The new legislation passed in 2004 allows women to get abortions during the first 12 weeks of

pregnancy with no questions asked, lifting previous restriction, namely a woman could only get an abortion if her condition put “her in a situation of distress.” After 12 weeks, an abortion can only be carried out if the continuation of the pregnancy poses a serious risk to the health of the woman, or if there is a strong possibility that the child in the womb will suffer from an incurable disease.

In Germany, the abortion procedure is also legal up to 12 week gestation but with restrictions. The regulations state that abortion is allowed in the first trimester if the woman is declared to be in a state of stress. It is interesting to note that this determination is made only after a mandatory counseling appointment and a compulsory 3 day waiting period. Abortion is also available without counseling to women whose pregnancy has resulted from a sexual crime committed against them. Post 12 weeks gestation, German law allows for abortions only to avert the danger of a grave impairment of the physical or emotional state of health of the pregnant woman.

Both countries demonstrate in law an understanding that abortion should not be something that can be accessed without restriction. They seem to recognize the rights of children in the womb by having laws that protect those rights, but sadly only after 12 weeks of gestation. This goes against the scientific fact that human life begins at the moment of conception. The latter part of the law to permit abortion only in case of serious danger to the life of woman seems morally acceptable as it inculcates the spirit of the moral principle of double effect. The latter part of the law meets the four conditions required by the principle of double effect: (1) the action itself must be either morally good or at least morally neutral; (2) the bad consequences must not be intended; (3) the good consequences cannot be the direct causal result of the bad consequences; and (4) the good consequences must be proportionate to the bad consequences.

The 1973 verdict often referred to as “Roe vs. Wade,” which legalized abortion in the United States is actually built on the claim that there’s no way to say for certain whether or not abortion kills because no one can say for certain when life begins. Justice Harry Blackmun, who authored the majority opinion wrote: “The judiciary, at this point in the development of man’s

knowledge, is not in a position to... resolve the difficult question of when life begins... since those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus.”²⁷ This is clearly contrary to the well established scientific fact that the preborn right from the moment of conception is a human life. Dr. Nathanson had this to say about the ruling: “Our final victory had been propped up on a misreading of obstetrics, gynecology, and embryology, and that’s a dangerous way to win.”²⁸ The 1973 verdict of US Supreme Court, because of the “misreading of obstetrics, gynecology and embryology” goes against the declaration of the Independence of the United States which guarantees “certain unalienable Rights, among those are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The legal arguments against abortion in the United States should be examined from the perspective of the rights afforded to all persons by laws of the Nation. The US Supreme Court, however, invented additional rights that were said to surpass the right to life. Unfortunately hundreds of women in the United States have died from abortion since Roe v. Wade according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and this is likely only a fraction of the actual number in light of the fact that several states have failed to report abortion data for many years.²⁹

3.2 Women Disempowerment through Abortions in India

According to Ministry of Health official statistics, the abortion rate remained unchanged in India between 1996 and 2001 (three per 1,000), even though the absolute number of abortions increased dramatically during that time. Abortion is legal under broad grounds in India, but regulations require that they be performed by registered physicians in certified facilities, and official statistics include only procedures that meet these regulations. Because of the difficulties in meeting all official requirements, a large number of abortions by qualified physicians are not reported. It is also likely that some physicians who are certified to perform abortions do not report or underreport the number of procedures they perform. According to estimates using findings from a facility-based survey conducted in six states, about 2.4 million abortions are performed annually in India by formally trained providers in approved facilities, and the

abortion rate in such approved facilities is 10 per 1,000 women.³⁰ However, the survey also estimated that nearly two-thirds of abortions are not performed at approved facilities, indicating that the overall abortion rate is about three times more than the reported abortion rate.

In India, the situation was quite different. There was hardly a fight when the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act legalized abortion in 1971. The law passed quietly, without any significant opposition. The Act was quite an unprecedented piece of legislation, stipulating that abortions (up to twenty weeks of gestation) could be performed by registered medical practitioners. To a close observer, this should not come as a surprise. In the political climate of that time, concern for women's reproductive health was not a major factor in the passage of this law. In fact, it was expedited largely due to pressure from the population lobby. Notwithstanding the few people involved in the drafting process who were genuinely concerned with improving conditions for women, the main impetus behind the Act was the belief that legalizing abortion would help curb the population growth rate. Curbing the population growth seemed to be a necessity based on a faulty assumption that population is a liability rather than human resource.³¹

In the Indian context, legalization of abortion as a positive right granted to women as part of their empowerment is callous. In fact it disempowers women due to many additional problems among which the first is the wrongful interpretation and implementation of this legislation. Even though the Act's criteria outlining eligibility were fairly liberal, the documents used to process requests for abortion were worded in such a way as to disempower women. Medical professionals, instead of women themselves, became the primary gatekeepers of abortion. Lack of accountability kept the power in the hands of doctors with many of them interpreting the conditions of the Act in their own idiosyncratic ways. No systems were in place to follow up on what doctors were saying or doing.

Many of the so-called benefits of abortion are based upon a distortion of the 'facts' and exaggerated claims of hardship incurred by a lack of the availability of legalized abortion. Proponents of legalized abortion claim that the criminalization of

abortion would result in the deaths of thousands of woman yearly as they will be forced to perform unsafe back alley abortions. It has now been almost 44 years since the passage of the MTP Act. Only a token number of abortions – a very tiny proportion of India's millions of abortions that have been performed since then – were carried out safely in accordance with the Act's provisions. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that out of the estimated 5.3 million induced abortions in India in 1989, 4.7 million were unsafe leading to the needless injury and death of many women. The experience of other countries shows that restricting abortion does not cause a rise in maternal deaths. Despite its tight abortion restrictions, Ireland has the lowest maternal mortality rate in the world, according to a study by several agencies at the United Nations.³² Malta also has substantial abortion limitations and yet has among the lowest maternal death rate world-wide, lower than the United States.³³ Data compiled by Polish government agencies shows a marked decrease in maternal deaths once abortion was made illegal.³⁴

Another major concern in India is that abortion coupled with techniques for determining whether the fetus is male or female could be used for sex selection, which would probably result in fewer female babies, depriving the right of girl child to be born. Despite the ban on pre-natal sex tests and gender-based abortions in India, both have seen a steady rise in the country since ultrasound technology was first introduced in the 1960s. It is estimated that nearly half a million girls are aborted every year. In his recent ebook, *India Dishonoured: Behind a Nation's War on Women* British blogger Sunny Hundal argues that there are '60 million missing women' in India, leaving the country's demography so skewed that males outnumber females by 37 million (a figure, he notes, bigger than the total male population of the UK). India is not just a country in which women are afforded inferior status, he argues: it is one engaged in outright 'gendercide' or more precisely 'femicide' on its female population through sex-selective abortion, infanticide and dowry deaths.³⁵

To Western eyes, the term 'family planning' may have connotations of furthering women's choices over the make-up of

their families; in India, the imposition of such policies actually reduces choice. The case of India's shortfall in women was first highlighted by economist Amartya Sen in his 1990 essay for the *New York Review of Books*, where he claimed that over 100 million women were 'missing' as a result of gender bias across the developing world. Citing India and China as prime culprits, Sen explained the startling figure by invoking 'neglect' of Third World women in healthcare, nutrition and education. The existence of social problems for women is not justification for another, even worse, evil. The social problems should be fixed, instead of killing the preborn.

Conclusion

The better one understands what is at stake in abortion, the more one realizes it is anti-human, anti-life, and anti-woman. Abortion-rights movements are desperate to protect the image of abortion as positive and pro-woman. Ironically, their biggest threat is from those they claim to champion: women. Abortion-rights proponents are devastated by the women of the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, for example, who stand with their placards "I regret my abortion"¹ and by the powerful of Feminists for Life make the compelling argument that "women deserve better than abortion."³⁷

We need to destroy the old "baby vs. woman" dichotomy which dominated the abortion debate for decades as though women and children are not natural enemies. It was a pseudo-feminism which brought about such a dichotomy in the first place. Abortion is not an act of empowerment but the result of abandonment, betrayal, and desperation, and it negatively affects women's lives. The website www.afterabortion.com established by a woman who had 5 abortions provides a place for women to help each other cope with the aftermath of their abortions. There are nearly 2.5 million posts. They tell stories of how they were coerced into aborting their children by boyfriends, husbands, friends, and family. They describe how abortion was far from being a choice. They speak of overwhelming guilt, nightmares, excessive drinking, drug abuse, promiscuity, inability to form or maintain relationships, difficulty bonding with later children, and other

ways in which they are suffering. No compassionate person wants a woman to suffer through the personal tragedy of abortion, whether legal or illegal. As Feminists for Life says, “women deserve better than abortion” and if I may add “the preborn babies deserve to be born.”

Notes

1. Though the term abortion can mean miscarriages and induced termination of pregnancy, in the essay we employ this term only in the latter sense.
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THE MORAL VALUE OF THE PREBORN IN CLASSICAL HINDUISM

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Abstract

According to classical Hinduism, the preborn is a human individual person possessing consciousness from the moment of conception, which is the very first stage of rebirth in the journey of attaining salvation while carrying the karma of the previous birth. Therefore, the preborn are not to be deprived of their rebirths until they attain salvation. A high moral standard of classical Hinduism on the value of the preborn and inviolability of human life has valuable contributions to the discussions on ethics of abortion, female foeticide, gender discrimination, embryo research and embryonic stem cell research. Following the ethics of classical Hinduism, it would be immoral to eliminate a human life including the life of the preborn or unborn for any reason whatsoever.

Keywords

Preborn/Unborn/Embryo, Moral Value/Status, Classical Hinduism, Abortion/Bhrūṇahatya

Introduction

The term preborn in the title refers to every human being from the moment of fertilization to the birth. The term preborn includes humans at all prenatal stages prior to birth. According to classical Hinduism, the preborn is a human individual person possessing consciousness from the moment of conception, which is the very first stage of rebirth in the journey of attaining salvation while carrying the karma of the previous birth. Therefore, the preborn are not to be deprived of their rebirths until they attain salvation.

1. Embryology in Classical Hinduism

1.1 The Terminologies for the Embryo

The Sanskrit term used for embryo is *bhrūṇa* and for the womb *garbha*. The *Vedas* mention that *retas* (sperms) and *sonita* (egg) ¹ undergo different stages in the development of the human embryo. Vedic embryologists identified four stages of the embryo from conception to birth: *patayan* (conception), *nisatsnu* (development of the organs), *sarisrpa* (movement in the foetus), and *jata* (birth of the infant) ² The embryo was also described in several terms according to the stages of development: *kalala* - the first stage after conception when *retas* mix with *sonata* after a night; *budbuda* - a bubble after five nights; *pesi* - after seven nights; *arbuda* – a round mass after the second week; *Ghana* - solid form after twenty five nights; and *kathina* – firm foetus after a month. ³

1.2. The Golden Egg: the Symbol and Beginning of Life

The term egg occupies a sacred place in Hindu life. It was the 'Primeval Egg' from which the plural world has emerged. *Rgveda* has a hymn explaining the origin of the world out of the activity of a Golden Egg or Golden Embryo (*Hiranya-Garbha*). ⁴ The world is created from this Golden Egg. Thus, human procreation is considered as a continuation of creation from the First Egg. The egg which is considered to be the symbol and beginning of life should never be destroyed. This is why, there are antenatal *saṃskāras* ⁵ in order to enable conception and protect the fertilized eggs in the womb.

1.3. The Conception of the Human Embryo

A human being is not constituted merely by the union of the semen of the father and blood of the mother. A new human being comes to exist in the womb, only when “the *ātman* with its ‘subtle body’, constituted of air, fire, water and earth, and *manas* (or mind) becomes connected with it by means of its *karma*.”⁶ Coupled with the law of karma and reincarnation, the soul is on a relentless journey with the hope of being merged with the Supreme. The soul identifies a new body at *conception* in which to continue its journey. Hence,

[P]arents are nothing but the principal channels through which these germs of life, or the subtle bodies find proper conditions of manufacturing human being by obeying the laws of nature. Parents do not create the soul. In fact parents cannot give birth to a child according to their will. It would be an absolute impossibility. Unless the soul comes to them and nourishes the germ, it would be an absolute impossibility.⁷

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Conception is a divine and sacred act, as the soul enters the new body at conception. The continuation of the universe and of human life “depended upon the birth of a son (*rṇacyuta*).”⁸ Bringing forth of son (children) is a sacred duty. The antenatal rituals are thus performed in order to ensure that the sacred act of conception occurs successfully. *Garbhādhāna* is the “womb-placing rite” and *Garbhalambhana* is the “securing of conception rite.” These rites signify “a well-established home, a regular marriage, a desire of possessing children, and a religious idea that beneficent gods helped men in begetting children.”⁹ The *Pumsavana* is generally performed at the end of the first quarter of pregnancy aiming at sex determination with a very strong bias of

desiring a male child.¹⁰ *Garbharakṣana* means “protection of the foetus” and *Sīmantonnayana* means “hair-parting ceremony.” While *Garbharakṣana* was performed in the fourth month for the protection of the foetus, *Sīmantonnayana* was carried out anytime between the fourth and eighth month in preparation for parturition. The primary intent of these *saṃskāras* was to get rid of and to destroy demonic powers that could endanger the life of the mother and the embryo. It was an evil act to harm or cause any danger to the embryo at the time of conception (“the sinking germ”), of implantation (“the settled germ”), and of quickening (“the moving germ”). *Abortion was unacceptable and contrary to the canonical teachings of the R̥gveda and the god Agni was invoked to protect the embryo against the flesh eaters.*¹¹ The *Jātakarma* or birth-making ceremony takes place at the time of delivery and after the cutting of the umbilical cord.¹²

1.4. The Formation of the Embryo

An embryo is formed by a composition of *father, mother, self, suitability and nutrition*. These five factors are extremely essential in the formation of the embryo. Based on the study on *Caraka Saṃhitā*, Sharma writes: “If parents were capable of producing the embryo, the majority of men and women who have longing for sons should produce sons only by cohabiting with the desire therefore or those desiring daughters should produce the same. Moreover, none of the men and women should be childless, nor should such persons be aggrieved.”¹³ Sharma says that the embryo is formed only when, “the conscious self-impelled by mind descends into the zygote situated in the uterus.”¹⁴ In the strictest sense, the real person is the self, who reproduces (together with its subtle body that brings the memories of past life-accounts) himself or herself in the form of the embryo. Therefore, the embryo itself can be called “the self,”¹⁵ possessing consciousness already at conception.

Apart from physical parents and the spiritual self, stability and nutrition are the other vital factors in the formation of the embryo. Like sterility which can make the conception impossible, unsuitable conditions can make the formation either impossible or abnormal. Therefore, freedom from illness and healthy suitable conditions are essential in the complex formation of the embryo.

The ancient Hindu scholars were not unaware of deformities or disturbances in the embryo. The *Gr̥hyasūtras* of Āśvalāyana and Hiraṇyakeśin described ceremonies for the “prevention of disturbances which could endanger the embryo,” and prayers for the child to be “born without deficiency, with all its limbs, not blind, not lame, not sucked out by Piśācas.”¹⁶ Though these deformities were attributed to defects of the germs, there was never any reference to the removal of such embryos.

1.5. The Development of Human Embryo

The *Garbha Upaniṣad* provides a description of prenatal development:

...From the pairing at the time of the season there originates after one night a nodule, after seven nights a bubble, within a fortnight a lump, within a month it becomes hard, after two months originates the head, after three months originate the parts of foot, in the fourth month ankles, belly and hips, in the fifth the vertebral column, in the sixth month, the nose, the eyes, the ears, in the seventh the embryo is equipped with the soul (*jīva*), in the eighth it is complete in all parts...¹⁷

Similar elementary accounts of embryonic development are portrayed in the earlier *Caraka Saṃhitā*¹⁸ and in *Suśruta Saṃhitā*.¹⁹ Most of the Vedic writings have only similar rudimentary understandings of embryology most likely based on their observations of aborted fetuses. A number of *Mahapurāṇas*, for example, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, the *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Umāsaṃhitā*, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, and the *Agni Purāṇas*, all give elementary accounts of the month-to-month progressive development of the human embryo. The *Nārada Purāṇa* narrates the development of the embryo as follows:

10...Within *half a month* it becomes a fleshy mess. Within *a month* it attains the size of a *pradeśa* (the span measured with the forefinger and the thumb). 11. From that time onwards it begins to move within the belly of the mother, thanks to the action of the wind. Although it has no consciousness, it is unable to stay in one single place within the belly of the mother, due to the unbearable heat and pain.

12. When the *second* month is complete it takes human shape; when *three* months are over, the hands, legs and other limbs are formed; when *four* months elapse, the knots and joints of all limbs are clearly developed; when *five* months pass away, the nails appear; when *six* months pass off, the nails-joints become distinct...²⁰

Any harm done to the preborn would eventually and severely affect the mother, as Laale notes: “The Vedic embryologists held that the developing embryo, united to the woman, comes into individual self-becoming (*ātmabhūya*) with the woman, “...*just as a limb of her own...*”.²¹ There are two distinct beings present in one, and any danger to either of them would affect both the mother and the child. The two distinctive beings are not understood in the sense of giving an absolute right to the mother over the embryo, for the rights of the preborn goes beyond the mother or the family.

2. The Sanctity of Human Life

When the ovum and the sperm join, the sacred act of conception has taken place. Conception is thus a deeply spiritual occurrence of divine act, and so many gods are invoked to facilitate the formation and different developmental stages of the embryo in the womb. God will be the protector of the embryo from conception to birth. Thus, the Hindu view towards human life is very positive and the embryo is sacrosanct. The sanctity of life is an essential element in Hindu worldview that considers the embryo as sacred and as a living creature with a moral value. Every human life is essentially sacred because all creatures are manifestations of *Brahman*, the Supreme Being.

The affirmation of the fundamental divinity of the human being makes it the object of special reverence and respect. All forms of violence towards human beings, therefore, go against the true spirit of Hinduism. More than a temple, mosques and churches, the human being is the living temple of God. To desecrate this temple by thought, word or deed is indeed to commit sacrilege against the one true God known by different names.²²

The *Nine Beliefs of Hinduism*, a tract published by the Himalayan Academy of San Francisco states, “Hindus believe that all life is

sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice *ahimsā*, or nonviolence.”²³

3. The Protection of the Embryo and the Pregnant Woman

3.1. The Protection of the Embryo

Śruti texts attest that the embryo in the womb specially deserves protection and hold abortion a morally condemnable act. The need for the protection of the embryo stems from the fact of its moral inviolability and physical vulnerability. The divine protection of *Viṣṇu*, the god of life and order, and the guardian of *Śiśus* is specially invoked to protect the embryo. This we find in the *Ṛgveda*.²⁴ The *Atharvaveda* considered that abortion is the most heinous crime²⁵ and those who perform abortion are, according to the later *Śruti* texts of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of Yajurveda, called the worst criminals are compared to the beef eaters, which is one of the greatest offences for a Hindu.²⁶ The *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* listed the slayer of the embryo among the vilest and the most contaminating outcasts. Such sinners had violated *dharma* – the socio-religious order in a very serious way.²⁷ Other *Upaniṣads*, too, have similar references to the killer of one’s mother or father or the embryo, and the slaying of the embryo was the most reprehensible form of killing. All these *śruti* references show that the embryo enjoyed a special moral status and deserved extraordinary protection and respect because of its moral inviolability and physical vulnerability.²⁸ As Katherine Young notes, “This idea [*ahimsā*], along with the importance of human life provides the opportunity to work out karma. *Hindus should protect a fetus, because sheer living allows bad karmas to come to fruition, thereby improving destiny. The moral and spiritual dimensions of human life, of course, improve destiny even more.*”²⁹

3.2. The Protection of Pregnant Women

The protection of pregnant women is equally given supreme importance, in view of protecting the embryo in the womb. The killing of a pregnant woman and the killing of an embryo is equated with the killing of a Brahmin, which is the greatest crime

in the classical times.³⁰ Therefore, both the pregnant woman and embryo enjoyed the status of a Brahman resulting in uncompromised protection.³¹ A pregnant woman (unlike non-pregnant woman) was exempted from any fine or was let off with a reprimand for dropping litter. Even unintentional killing of a pregnant woman was punishable; similarly, it was against the law to collect any tax from her. All these suggest that the pregnant woman was given great freedom, high respect and social protection, all in view of the preborn in her womb.³²

The great epic *Mahābhārata* (Mbh. 400 B.C.E. – 400 C.E.) mentions that “one must give way to the Brahmin, to cows, to kings, to the old, to one burdened by a load, to a pregnant woman and to the infirm.”³³ The great physician of ancient India and the father of Indian (*Āyurvedic*) medicine, Caraka, emphasized that the pregnant woman in her delicate situation should be treated like a vessel brimful of oil and should never be agitated, even if any mishap took place.³⁴ Even the ancient Sati system, that is, the con-cremation (*anvārohaṇa*, i.e. *suttee*) of the wife with the husband which was considered a righteous action, exempted the pregnant woman and women who had children to look after.³⁵ Even an untouchable pregnant woman enjoyed this exemption. The thinking behind it would have been that the preborn child irrespective of any caste should be given the highest protection. This suggests that even though they accepted a caste-based stratification of the society, such unequal social division did not bring down the moral standards. Morality was given the first priority.

4. Condemnation of Destroying Preborn

Any attempt to abort a preborn child was subject to severe moral condemnation and social disapproval in Vedic literatures. It was considered to be a sin of an unwed mother to abandon her secretly born child in some distant place.³⁶ There were a series of punishments and penalties for crimes against pregnant women and the preborn. The significant point to be noted here is that even in the case of a slave woman, abortion was regarded as punishable and morally unacceptable.

Loss of Caste: The immediate penalty for committing an abortion

was expulsion from the caste community. Expulsion from the community was considered a severe punishment. The woman who commits abortion loses her caste, especially in the cases of anuloma (a permissible marriage between a brāhmaṇa and the daughter of a kṣatriya) and pratiloma (marriage between a kṣatriya and the daughter of a brāhmaṇa, which is not generally allowed). Gautama's Institutes mention that "a woman becomes an outcast by procuring abortion, by connection with a (man of) lower (caste) and (the like heinous crimes)."³⁶ Loss of caste, though revocable in exceptional cases, was one of the ultimate socio-religious penalties of the social dharma.

Non-transferability of Guilt: All who were involved in the sinful act of procuring an abortion were punished; however the sin of the abortionist (bhrūṇahan) was the greatest.³⁸ Guilt of other greater offences was transferable, but not that of the sin of killing the preborn. For example, the guilt for an offensive act (non-payment of the loan) by a father can be transferred to the son as a collective responsibility within a family or to a stranger outside the family. This is not the case so, when abortion is the crime. The abortionist has to make efforts to wipe off his or her guilt by himself or herself.³⁹ The stringent observance in this regard shows how serious and heinous is the sin of abortion. The punishment for the crime of abortion is severe.

Repeat of Karmic Cycle: The termination of pregnancy is "a criminal violation of child's expectancy of life, and thus the sanctity of life principle," and carries "serious consequences not only for the present life, but also for the afterlife, and lives to come."⁴⁰ According to the theory of karma and rebirth, any harm done to the preborn child destroys not only its new life, but also the expectancy of that life,⁴¹ thus denying the chance of liberation during this birth and the entire life cycle. For it is believed that the soul is able to effectively seek liberation only in human birth.⁴² The *ātman* of the person who involves in abortion is, "doomed to live a tragic and meaningless *samsāric* existence, ever wandering and struggling to attain spiritual release (*mokṣa*) from *karmic* consequences and from the repetitive cycle of life and death (*samsāra*)."⁴³ When the slayers of the preborn die, they are sent to one of the many "hells" and on their rebirth they are wretched and miserable.⁴⁴

Exclusion from Common Practices or Privileges: One of the common practices in Hinduism is the offering of a handful of water to the dead. This practice of ancestral libation of water was called *udakaḥriyā*, and seen as a bridge between the the dead and the living. The Law of Manu forbids that the *udakaḥriyā* shall not be offered, “to the women who were reprobates, sexually promiscuous, who harmed the embryo or its mother, and who took to liquor.”⁴⁵ Punishments of exclusions from common functions, celebrations and privileges are considered to be severe in Hinduism.

Liabale to Monetary Fine and the Highest Punishment: The *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (II. 236) prescribed a substantial fine of 100 *paṇas* (mentioned also in *Mitākṣarā*’s commentary on *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, to “the destroyer of the embryo of a female slave.”⁴⁶ The *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* also mentions in II.277 that “the highest punishment is due for injury with a weapon and for abortion.”⁴⁷ There were separate injunctions depending on the social background of the victim and the circumstances. The degree of punishment differed depending on social importance, however, this did not mean a value assessment on a moral scale.

5. The *Mahābhārata* on Moral Value of Embryos

The killing of the preborn equaled the killing of an adult person. The *Mahābhārata* in XII.86.26 says: “If a king is intent upon the code of the battlefield but slays an envoy who speaks as he has been commanded – his ancestors incur (the crime of) abortion.”⁴⁸ The context here is that the king is expected, by his obligation of regulations (agreement between kingdoms) to give security to the ambassador of the enemy. The killing of an envoy was a severe breach of code of conduct, as it is also the destruction of a preborn. For the *Mahābhārata*, abortion was a serious and morally unacceptable act.⁴⁹

The sanctity of the embryo can be understood from a story in the *Mahābhārata*. The powerful yogic sage Vyāsa granted Gāndhārī (the wife of the king Dhṛtarāṣṭra) a boon.⁵⁰ She chose to have a hundred sons. She was pregnant by the king and remained in the same state for two years. In despair, she aborted her womb eventually without the knowledge of her husband. While aborting

she *fainted with grief* and a *fleshy lump fell out of her* (*pātayāmāsa* – caused [the foetus] to fall) as a compact ball of flesh. At that very moment Vyāsa saw what had happened and rushed to the rescue of Gāndhārī. Initially he warned her for her act and ordered that a hundred *kuṇḍas* (pots – symbolizing the womb) be immediately filled with *ghee* (clarified butter) and that the ball of flesh be sprinkled with cool water. The narrative continues that the doused ball then separated into a hundred parts, each an embryo no larger than a thumb-joint in size. Each embryo was then stored in one of the pots. Vyāsa instructed her when to break open the pots for delivery. In course of time, Gāndhārī had her hundred sons.⁵¹ There are a number of moral points in this ancient story. First of all, procreation was welcomed, but abortion was condemned. Secondly, the text “fainting with grief” in the story shows that Gāndhārī was aware that she was breaking a code of law, thus there is desperation. Thirdly, by taking recourse to abortion, on the one hand, Gāndhārī broke the promise and on the other hand, she was to receive the punishment for the crime. However, the sage Vyāsa rescued her from committing the crime and its consequences. Fourthly, the sage Vyāsa redeemed fetuses signifying that their sanctity was upheld and their lives were protected from the impending destruction.⁵²

6. The Morality of Abortion in Classical Hindu Ethics

Abortion is called *bhrūṇa-hatyā*, *garbha-hatyā*, *bhrūṇavadha*, etc. These terms differ substantially from miscarriage, for which words like *sraṃsana* (a falling or dropping) in *Gautamadharmasutra* (II.5.15),⁵³ *Garbhasrāva* in *Manusmṛiti* and *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti* (1st–3rd C.E.), etc. are used.⁵⁴ There are also several “descent” terms for miscarriage based on the time of the embryo in the womb: “Till the fourth (month of pregnancy, miscarriage) would be an emission (*srāva*), and a ‘fall’ (*pāta*) for the fifth and sixth (months); after that it would be an ‘issue’ (*prasūti*), while in the tenth month it would be a ‘generation’ (*sūtaka*, i.e. tantamount to a stillbirth?).”⁵⁵

6.1. Bhrūṇahatyā: A Cardinal Sin

In the Vedic tradition one finds five cardinal sins (*Pañca-mahā-pātaka* – 5 great falling down): *Stree hatyā* (killing of women);

Go-hatyā (killing of cows); *Bhrūṇa-hatyā* (killing of embryos); *Brahma-hatyā* (killing of *brāhmaṇa*)⁵⁶; *Śiśu-hatyā* or *bālā-hatyā* (killing of babies). *Bhrūṇahatyā* literally means killing of an embryo.⁵⁷

6.2. Contraception as *Bhrūṇahatyā*

The Vedic tradition considered the intentional interference (contraception) with the procreative act as an abortion or killing of a presumptive child. It held that the preborn had a high moral status. A husband who approaches his wife out of season is considered to be polluting the marital relationship and committing the sin of abortion since his semen “was scattered in vain.”⁵⁸ On the other hand, when a husband in good health refuses to approach his wife for the purpose of progeny he is said to be committing abortion. Similarly, when the wife in good health refuses to sleep with her husband she is also causing an abortion, and she is abandoned and becomes devoid of glory.⁵⁹ The father who does not give away a marriageable daughter is said to be preventing the birth of presumptive progeny and is committing the sin of abortion.⁶⁰ However, the modern Indian thinkers justify the practice of contraception in the context of increased abortion and high rate of population growth.

7. *Bhrūṇahatyā*: A Moral Evil As Well As A Social Concern

Bhrūṇahatyā (abortion) was a moral evil and not merely a sociological injunction. Abortion was condemnable, not just because it disrupted the stability and preservation of the Hindu social *dharma*, but primarily because it violated the moral worth of the embryo. The embryo enjoyed an inviolable intrinsic moral status and an inviolable social value. In Hindu social *dharma*, “social and moral values were inextricably intertwined.”⁶¹ Classical Hinduism did not see the termination of the pregnancy and any harm done to the pregnant woman merely as a disruption of the social order; on the contrary, the Vedic texts imply that it was (primarily) because of the moral worth of the embryo (and therefore, the supreme protection was given to pregnant women and the preborn). The classical Hindu texts listed abortion not only among social transgressions, such as, drunkenness, incest

and illicit marriages between castes, but also among moral transgressions, such as, unchastity, thieving and killing of one's father or mother.⁶² The latter transgressions would definitely incur a moral condemnation, too. Though slaves and servants were not exalted members of the Hindu society,⁶³ the abortion even of or by a slave woman was unacceptable and strongly condemned. This would imply that abortion was considered to be a moral evil more than a mere social transgression. Every human life was to be protected.

Vijñāneśvara in his commentary of *Mitākṣarā* on *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* has mentioned that all wives, except those who are pregnant or those who have young children to care for, including the worst untouchable (*ā caṇḍālam*), were subjected to con-cremation (*anvārohaṇa*, i.e. *suttee*).⁶⁴ The *Mitākṣarā* does not argue for *suttee* for pregnant women, even if they had already brought forth the desired number and/or kind (males) of children. Rather, the text forbids *suttee* for all pregnant women. An act of *suttee* is refused to pregnant women, primarily because of the underlying importance of the preborn in the womb. The moral status of the preborn was held high and equal irrespective of their origin. The children of *pratiloma* unions were regarded as ritually unclean and socially untouchable; they were the most disadvantaged members of the society and there was a great aversion⁶⁵ towards miscegenation and as the most despised of the society, they were subjected to intolerable socio-religious strictures.⁶⁶ Classical Hinduism has never advocated either (honour) killing of the couple of *pratiloma* union or abortion to get rid of such socially despised children. It is appropriate to substantiate this with the words of a scholar on classical Hinduism:

Yet nowhere in texts, so far as I know, is it formally recommended that abortion be resorted to as an acceptable way out, either to avert an insufferable life for the *pratiloma* child-to-be or to safeguard the parents from ignominy. On the contrary, elaborate provision was made in the law texts concerning the avocations and rules of life of *pratiloma* persons. Clearly their right to life in the face of adverse social consequences both for themselves and for their parents was recognized and safeguarded.⁶⁷

8. Termination of Pregnancy: A Rare Exception in Irredeemable Situations

Suśruta, the surgeon of the early centuries of the common era, also known as “Father of Surgery” recognized that a spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) was understandably unavoidable, but induced abortions were severely punishable. However, there was a rare exception in permitting to cause a miscarriage of the foetus (*pātanam* – causing the fall of the foetus). The *Suśruta Saṃhitā* is an authoritative classical text probably from the 3rd to 4th century of the Common Era dealing with medical issues, but with references to another original text from the 2nd or 3rd century B.C.E. This seminal medical document has a section called “The Foetus Astray” (*mūḍhgarbha*) under which there is a chapter titled “Cikitsāsthāna” which deals with the eventuality of aborting the foetus. The chapter begins with the text that “there is nothing as difficult as the delivery of a foetus astray in the womb, for here....the job must be done ‘by feel’... by one hand, without injury to mother or foetus (if possible).”⁶⁸ It continues, “if the foetus is alive, one should attempt to remove it from the womb of the mother (alive).”⁶⁹ However, the safety of the mother and the preborn must be kept in mind while performing the act. The physician was advised to save both live child and mother with great care and with the chanting of mantras. If the foetus is already dead (*mṛte garbhe*), then it may be removed by cutting (and dismembering, if necessary; *sūtra* 9),⁷⁰ but surgery is forbidden when the foetus cannot be safely delivered, “For if (the foetus) be cut one would harm both mother and her offspring. In an irredeemable situation, it is best to cause the miscarriage of the foetus, for no means must be neglected which can prevent the loss of the mother.”⁷¹

Only in extreme cases of a medical problem where the mothers' life was in danger and the life of the mother had to be weighed against that of the preborn, an induced abortion or removal of the preborn was permitted.⁷² For this reason, the King had to be informed to avoid subsequent charges of homicide.⁷³ Abortion was thus permissible only as a last resort to save the life of the mother. Suśruta tolerated the destruction of dead or poorly positioned foetuses for the sake of saving the endangered

mothers. He performed caesarean operations to save the preborn in cases of difficult labour. He removed surgically the preborn from the womb of a dead mother.⁷⁴ Throughout his work, the lives of both mother and the preborn in the womb are highly respected and are given supreme protection. This rare exception in extreme cases gives more weight to the argument of the equal moral worth of the preborn. Careful deliberations such as these by an authority like Suśruta should be treated with due consideration.

Conclusion

Though India has adopted a permissible attitude towards abortion for socio-political reasons through the promulgation of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, the statistics prove the contrary: about 80 percent of Hindu women disapproved abortion and 56 percent of them considered it a heinous crime.⁷⁵ Further, the popular magazine *Hinduism Today* mentions Hindu position against abortion in no uncertain terms, “Across the board, Hindu religious leaders perceive abortion at any stage of fetal development as killing (some say murder)... and as an act that has serious karmic repercussions.”⁷⁶

It is a common phenomenon today that people are moving away from moral precepts enshrined in their sacred texts. Constantin-Iulian Damian attributes the acceptance of abortion to secularization: “[T]he rate of abortions and the easy acceptance of abortion by a society is directly proportional with the secularization degree of that society, because the secularized individuals live only for now and here and only to achieve their economic or social objectives, and they are willing to sacrifice not only their religious beliefs and principles, but also the life of an unborn human being.”⁷⁷ On an academic note, Veena Das wrote, “Without a discussion of the responsibility of society (either through the State or other agencies) towards the embryo, the foetus, and the infant as also towards those who are charged with caring for them, a discussion of the morality of abortion is incomplete.”⁷⁸ There will be a considerable rethinking among the followers of Hinduism on abortion and female foeticide, should they revisit the ethical credentials of classical Hinduism. The ethical challenges through modern medical-technologies such as

in vitro fertilization, embryonic stem cell research and surrogacy must be reflected upon in the light of moral value of the preborn.⁷⁹

The preborn are not objects for research but individual human persons to be loved, to be respected and to be protected against all life-destroying technologies and human forces. The preborn have the right to live beyond the will of humans, interests of technologies and freedom of women. The value of the preborn is intrinsic and independent of any attribution by the society. A high moral standard of classical Hinduism on the value of the preborn and inviolability of human life has valuable contributions to the discussions on ethics of abortion, female foeticide, gender discrimination, embryo research and embryonic stem cell research. Following the ethics of classical Hinduism, it would be immoral to eliminate a human life including the life of the preborn or unborn for any reason whatsoever.

Ancient Scriptures have their spiritual, ethical and moral credentials for right and harmonious living of people in solidarity. They can help us not only to eradicate the evil practices of all times but also to respond to the challenges of our time. The ancient wisdom of classical Hinduism has much to contribute in protection of the right to life of the preborn.

Notes

1. B. B. Chaubey in his book, *References to Embryology in Vedic Texts: A Study*, makes a study of the processes that are involved in the formation of semen, ovum and embryo, see pp: 73-74.
2. Ibid. See Tsutomu Yamashita, "Some Notes on the Bheda (Ia) Samhita," in *Mathematics and Medicine in Sanskrit*, edited by Dominik Wujastyk (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2009), 199-200.
3. Ibid. 77. Modern findings may differ from these.
4. *Rgveda*, 10.121.1-10 in: R. T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rgveda* 2 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Series 35, 1971), 566-7. Cited in: Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 241.
5. The *Samskāras* are Vedic rites of passage finding varied acceptance among religious adherents of Hinduism, Jainism and some schools of Buddhism. The term *samskāra* means accomplishment, embellishment, or consecration. *Samskāras* can be compared to the Christian sacraments.

6. Quoted in: Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 238. *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.330 and *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 30.36. See S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1952), 302-312.
7. Abhedananda, *Life Beyond Death*, 6th ed. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math., 1978), 100.
8. Ibid. 233. In footnote 6, Laale cites Rao: "A son is called *ṛṇacyuta*, one who removes debts" (*Rgveda* 6.61.1). "He delivers his father from the hell called *Put*" (*Manu* 9.138. This appears to be a linguistic joke, and does not refer to any so-called 'hell'). Through a son, one conquers the worlds, and through a son's son, he attains immortality" (*Manu* 9.137). See K. L. Seshagiri Rao, *Population Ethics: Religious Traditions: Hindu Perspectives*, in: W.T. Reich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* 3 (New York: Free Press Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 1270.
9. Quoted in: Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 234. See R. B. Pandey., *Hindu Samskāras. Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banaridass, 1969), 48. The mantra occurs in several other places such as *Atharvaveda*, 5.25; 6.9.1-2; and 14.2.2. Verses 1 and 2 are incorporated slightly modified in *Atharvaveda*, 5.25. See D. Whitney, *Atharvaveda Samhitā* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banaridass, 1971), 265-67; Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 248, footnote 11.
10. Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 235.
11. W. D. O'Flaherty, *The Rg Veda*, no. 2 (Penguin Books, 1983): 292. Italics mine
12. Ibid. 236-37; 249 (footnotes nos. 21-26); *Caraka Samhitā Śārira* 7.46. This text recognizes that the umbilical cord serves a nutritive function prior to birth. The texts of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 4.5.2.4 and 9.5.1.63 mention about non-survivability of foetuses if born prematurely prior to six months of normal birth; *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 11.7-9 and 16; *Pañcavimsa Brāhmaṇa*, 6.1.3. and 6.8.9; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.3 and 11.10. These texts mention about the position of the foetus in the womb until birth.
13. P. Sharma, *Caraka Samhita*, Vol.1-3 (India: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1981), 419.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. *Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra*, 1.13.1., in: *SBE*, 29.1.179; *Hiranyakeśin Grhyasūtra*, 1.7.25.1g, in: *SBE*, 30.2.200. Cited in: Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 241.
17. Quoted in: Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 239. *Garbha Upaniṣad* 3 and 4, in: N. S. Subramanian, *Encyclopaedia of the Upaniṣads* (New Delhi: Sterling Publication, 1985), 148-51.
18. R. Priyaranjan and H. N. Gupta, *Caraka SaChitā* (New Delhi: National Institute of Sciences, India Publication, 1985): 9-10.
19. K. K. Bhishagratna (trans.), *The Suśruta Samhitā* 2, The Chowkhamba

Sanskrit Series 30 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963): 137-41.

20. *Nārada Purāṇa*, 15.1.413-414. Quoted in: Laale, 240.
21. Ibid. 241; *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, 2.5.1.2-7 in: *SBE*, 1.1.243-244; see also N. S. Subrahmanian, *Encyclopaedia of the Upaniṣads*, (London: Oriental University Press, 1986), 49. Similarly the Greek traditions understand embryos as *Pars viscerum matris*. The preborn child is a part of the woman. *Digests*, 25.4.1.
22. Quoted in: Varghese, India: History, Religion, Vision, 245-46.
23. Available at
[<http://www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/nineb/>]. Retrieved on 21.02.2011. They cite a number of classical texts: For example, *Mahabharata* XVIII:116.37-41: Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching. They indicate the fundamental Hippocratic Oath of “Do no harm.”
24. *Rgveda (Rg Saṃhitā)* VII.36.9, in *Rig Veda*, (trans.) Ralph T. H. Griffith, in *SBE* (1896). See also G. Pandeya (ed.), *The Caraka Saṃhitā of Agniveśa (revised by Caraka and Drdhaba)*, (Varanasi: Kashi Sanskrit Series 194, 1969), pt.1.11.p.818. (section: *jātisūtrīya* of the *śārīrasthāna*)
25. *Atharvaveda*, 6.113.2; 6.112.3. in *Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, (trans.) Ralph T.H. Griffith, *SBE* (1895), a 253.
26. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.1.2, v.21, in A. Chinnaśwami and Pattabhirama Sastry (ed.), *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (of the White Yajurveda in the Mādhyandina Recension)*, (Banares: Kashi Sanskrit Series 127, 1937), 200; see Lipner, “The Classical Hindu View,” 63, footnote, 16.
27. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.22, in: *SBE*, 15.2.169.
28. See S. Radhakrishnan and A. Charles Moore (eds.), *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 12th Princeton Paperback ed. (Princeton University Press, 1957), 3. For a fuller study, see M. Bloomfield, *The Atharvaveda and the Gopatha-Brahmana*, (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie 39. A similar but severe punishment can be seen in the teaching of John Calvin (1509-1564 AD), who declared that abortion is an inexpressible crime for which there could be no atonement or scapegoat to remove guilt. See J. Calvin, “Commentaries on Genesis 38:10,” in: T.W. Hilgers and D. Mall (eds.), *New perspectives on human abortion* (Maryland: Aletheia Books, University Publication of America, 1981), 384, n.56.
40. Laale, “Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity,” 242: *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.1.6 and 2.2.7; *Maitri Upaniṣad*, 1.4; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.4-6
41. See Laale, “Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity,” 242-247.
42. There was possibility of the soul to be reborn in different forms according to its past *karma*. And the expositions of Śankara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva on ethics and destiny of human person implied that there exists a distinction between human and animal and vegetative life. Such

implications were taken for granted and not given a philosophical analysis. Thus such arguments were neither used to show the differences in the status of the soul, nor did it affect their defense of protection of the unborn with soul in human form. See Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 69, footnote no. 67.

43. Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 242.
44. Ibid, 243; also *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.49-56, 80-82 in J.L. Shastri, (ed.), *The Hymns of the R̥gveda*. 13.2. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 730-736. The understanding of transmigration of souls was also found in Greek traditions. The Greek historian Herodotus (485-425 B.C.) wrote about the misery of transfiguration that the soul (*ātman*) of such miserable persons, when the body dies, "...enters into the form of an animal into another, until it has circled through the forms of all creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame, and is born anew. The period of the transmigration is, they say, three thousand years." Herodotus, *History*, 2, in G. Rawlinson (trans.), *The History of Herodotus* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1944), 124. Cited in: Willer Laale, footnote no. 69, p.254.
45. Quoted in: Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 46 from G. Sastri Nene, *The Manusmṛiti (with the Manvartha Muktāvali Commentary by Kullūka Bhaṭṭa)* vol. 90 (Banars: Kashi Sanskrit Series 114, 1935), 168.
46. U. Chandra Pandey (ed.), *Yājñavalkyasmṛti of Yogīśhwara Yājñavalkya with the Mitākṣarā Commentary of Vijñāneshwar* (Varanasi: Kashi Sanskrit Series 178, 1967)., 254.
47. U. Chandra Pandey (ed.), *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, 267-68.
48. Quoted in: Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 46.
49. The knowledge of Vedas (*Mahābhārata* was also called the Veda of Kṛṣṇa) was considered an act of expiation.
50. One may say it in German as *Gutschein*.
51. *Mahābhārata* I. 107.19; The story is paraphrased here. See Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 47-48.
52. Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 48-49, for his interpretations. Since it was only an apparent abortion, the text uses the term "*pātayāmāsa*" which means "caused to fall." Though the act of Gāndhārī was deliberate, she recourse to it in despair. There the harsh expression of *bhrūṇahatyā* is avoided.
53. Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 43; see also G. Bühler (trans.), *SBE* (1879), xiv.17.
54. Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 43. See also Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol.1. pt. 1. 2nd ed. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), 22f. 306f. 421f. 443.
55. Quoted by Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 43. See U. Chandra Pandey (ed.), *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, 411.
56. We have seen earlier that one of the *śruti* texts, namely, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in v. 4.3.22 while describing a mystical experience, where bad as well as good effects cease to exist, listed the

slayer of the Brahmin and the embryo as one of the worst crimes. The Sanskrit terms are *bhrūṇahatyā* and *bhrūṇahān* are used to refer to the killing and killer of the both embryo as well as a Brahmin. Lipner ("The Classical Hindu View," 63, footnote no.18) quotes from W. Gampert says in his book *Die Sühnezeremonien in der altindischen Rechtsliteratur* (Prag: Orientalisches Institut, 1939), 62-63: "Diese Sünde (i.e. Embryotötung) wurde ursprünglich nur mit *bhrūṇahatyā* bezeichnet; im Laufe der Zeit erfuhr dieser Ausdruck jedoch eine Erweiterung seiner Bedeutung, indem er auch die Tötung eines Brahmanen insbesondere eines gelehrten, umfasste. Die Folge davon war, dass eine vollständige Vermischung der beiden Sünden Embryotötung und Brahmanentötung eintrat und es von da an oft ganz unklar ist, ob *bhrūṇahatyā* (bzw. *bhrūṇahān* zur Bezeichnung des Täters) nur die Embryotötung und Brahmanentötung bezeichnet." Such use may have been deliberate to give supreme importance to the embryo as given to Brahmins.

57. Jayapaul Azariah, Hilda Azariah, & Darryl R.J. Macer (eds.), *Bioethics in India: Proceedings of the International Bioethics Workshop in Madras*. Biomanagement of Biogeoresources, 16-19 Jan. 1997, University of Madras (Eubios Ethics Institute, 1997). Available at [<http://www.eubios.info/india/BII8.HTM>]. Retrieved on 24.02.2011.
58. Vīramitrodaya-Saṁskāra Prakāśa, 1, in: R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Saṁskāras. Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banaridass, 1969), 52.
59. *Parāśara-Smṛti*, 4.14-15; *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 6.4.7, in: S. Radhakrishnan (trans.), *The Pincipal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953), 323; See H. Willer Laale, 245, 256-57. Scholars in modern times refer to natural, herbal and dietary birth-control measures described in Vedic literatures. For detailed references see M. Roy, "Methods of Sterilization and Sex-determination in the Atharva-Veda and in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 1 (1966): 91-97; B. Dash and R.N. Basu, "Methods for Sterilization and Contraception in Ancient and Medieval India," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 3 (1968): 9-24.
60. Baudhāyana Dharmaśāstra, 4.1.12-13, in *Sacred Books of the Eāst*, 14.2.314.
61. Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 48.
62. Ibid. 48-49. Killing a human person is called *puruṣavadha* in Sanksrit.
63. They were outside the system of four *varṇas*, thus, the outsiders or untouchables.
64. The text goes like this: "āyam ca sakala eva sarvāsām strīṇam agarbhiṇīpatyānām ā caṇḍālam sādharmaṇo dharmah," in *Mitākṣarā*, (ed.) U. Chandra Pandey, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (I.86.), 37.
65. An example is cited by Lipner ("The Classical Hindu View," 50-51) from *Bhagavadgītā*, VI.23.40-44. The text speaks about the fate of clan-destroyers eventually causing miscegenation.
66. See Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 50-51. The most despised of

them were the *Cārḍālas* (children born of a Brahmin mother and a Śūdra father) and *Paulkasa* (normally the children of a Kṣatriya mother and a Śūdra father).

67. Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 51. See e.g. *Manusmṛiti* X. For a fuller discussion see Kane, *Dharmaśāstra*, vol.2.pt.2, 2d. ed. ch.2, pp.50-104. The same protection was given to the preborn and children of an adulterous union. See U. Chandra Pandey, *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* I.72, p.28. As Lipner says, "The juxtaposition of adultery and abortion above does not exclude condemnation of the latter when it was the consequence of the former." Ibid. 66. footnote no. 50 and 51.
68. Quoted in: Lipner, "The Classical Hindu View," 49.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Quoted in: Lipner, 50, *sūtra* 10-11..
72. Suśruta, *The Suśruta Saṃhitā*, 2.8.9, in K.K. Bhishagratna (trans.), Op.cit., 2, 58-60. See Laale, 246, 257.
73. Katherine K. Young, "Medical Ethics through the Life Cycle in Hindu India," in: Robert B. Baker and Laurence B. McCullough, (eds.) *The Cambridge World History of Medical Ethics* (Cambridge, New York, et. al: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 101-112, 103.
74. Ibid. Laale, "Embryology and Abortion in Indian Antiquity," 246, 257. See also P. Ray, H. Gupta and M. Roy, *Suśruta Saṃhitā: A Scientific Synopsis*, (New Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1980), 22.
75. Werner Menski, "Hinduism," in: Peggy Morgan and C. Lawton, (eds.), *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, 1-54 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 5.
76. Cited in: Young, "Medical Ethics...in Hindu India," 104. See *Hinduism Today*, March 1986.
77. Constantin-Julian Damian, "Abortion from the Perspective of Eastern Religions: Hinduism and Buddhism," *Romanian Journal of Bioethics* 8/1 (January – March 2010): 124-136, 135.
78. Cited in Lipner, "On Abortion and the Moral Status of the Unborn," 69, note 74; also in Katherine K. Young, "Medical Ethics through the Life Cycle in Hindu India," 104. See for original: Veena Das, "The Debate on Abortion," *Seminar* (Nov. 1983): 31-35.
79. Based on the moral status of the preborn from interdisciplinary perspectives, the author has argued against the human embryonic stem cell research whereby the preborn are destroyed in order to extract embryonic stem cells to be used in the research. See J. Charles Davis, *The Ethics of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Proposals for a Legal Framework for India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd. 2014)

“Baby Donors” in India: Ethical Analysis on Commercial Gestational Surrogacy

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse surrogacy ethically and see how far this technology is helpful to the ‘good of the human beings’ in general and Indians to the particular. It is divided into three parts. The first part explains the meaning of surrogacy, types and historical development of surrogacy. The second part pictures how India becomes a leading country in surrogacy. The final part analyses the ethical issues of surrogacy. Surrogacy has attracted foreigners and non-resident Indians. Indian government encourages the medical tourism in order to get affluent income through medical technologies. Money plays a vital role in surrogacy and there is possibility for exploitation and malpractices. Surrogacy affects the relationship between the mother and child. It violates the sanctity of marriage and the dignity and rights of the child. A human life should not be an object for monetary transaction and bargaining.

Keywords

Surrogacy, gestational, reproductive technology, tourism, market, dignity, child, motherhood, exploitation, commercial.

Introduction

Human life has a priceless worth, and science and technology play a great role in promoting and enhancing human life. Technological revolution in industry, information technology, and medical has brought giant strikes and significant changes in the life-style among the inhabitants of this world. Human beings use varieties of technology for the qualitative living and for the protection of the earth. Although the improper ways of using technology results in ecological crises, yet the proper ways of using of technology really enhances the life of the people. The reproductive technologies in the medical field are widely used in different parts of the world in order to bring forth offspring. Surrogacy is one the reproductive technologies used to bring out a child. Even though this reproductive technology is much expensive, at times unsuccessful it is not only used by infertile couples but also same sex couples. Infertile couples are also looking for a place where this technology is available for cheaper price.

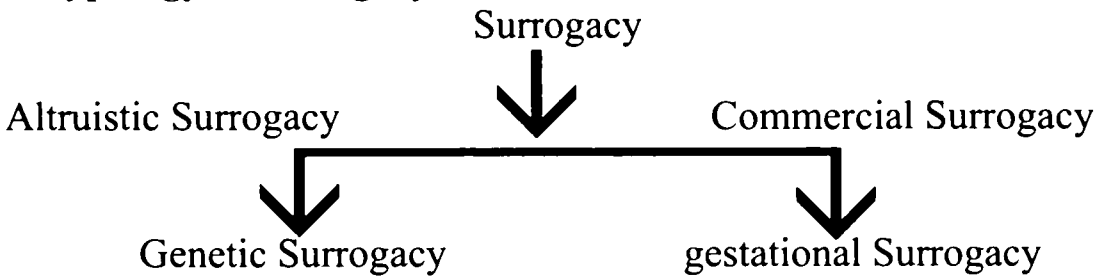
In this context, the man power and medical resources of India offer to the couples who are longing to have a child for a cheaper rate. Thus, India seems to become a leading country in surrogacy. Surrogacy has attracted foreigners and non-resident Indians travelling to India to utilize surrogacy technology to get a child. Indian government also encourages the medical tourism in order to get affluent income through medical technologies. Although this technology seems to be very attractive and may fulfil their desire of having a child for an infertile couple, many Indian scholars, writers and ethicists question the practice of surrogacy considering its ethical

1. Meaning and Elucidation of the term 'Surrogacy'

The term surrogacy originated from the Latin verb '*surrogare*' which connotes 'substitute' or 'instead of someone' or 'place someone as substitute'. According to the etymology of the term, surrogacy means substituting someone. Since 1978, the term surrogacy is being used to refer to a process of begetting a child by a pregnant woman with the fertilized egg of another woman.

Surrogacy is a circumstance in which a woman agrees or becomes a surrogate to bring forth a child for the infertile contracted couple. Surrogacy is defined as arrangement or contract or agreement to deliver a child for another couple using reproductive technologies.¹ Surrogacy could be seen at two levels: Partial and Full. According to the former, the sperm of the intended father is fertilized with the egg of the surrogate mother through intrauterine insemination or in vitro fertilization. And thus, the surrogate has genetic link with the delivered child. This is known as traditional surrogacy.² The Full Surrogacy suggests that the sperm and egg of the couples are fertilized through the reproductive technologies and implanted in the womb of the surrogate mother. The surrogate mother becomes an instrument to bring forth the child for the intended couple. This is also known as gestational surrogacy.

a. Typology of Surrogacy



Altruistic surrogacy means that a woman becomes a surrogate mother to complete infertile parents or partial infertile parents without any payment. This is often done within close relatives. In commercial surrogacy, the surrogate mother is paid according to the contract to bring forth a child for the commissioning couples.

In genetic surrogacy, the surrogate mother also contributes her egg to bring forth a child for complete infertile or partial infertile couples. As a result, she becomes the genetic mother of the child. In gestational surrogacy, the surrogate mother who carries the child for a period of time in her womb does not provide egg. These two methods of surrogacy could be either altruistic or commercial surrogacy.

b. A Short Historical Profile of Surrogacy

Surrogacy is very old as human beings. K. Svitnev observes that the traces of surrogacy could be seen almost in all ancient

cultures. Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah was the first surrogate mother who brought forth a child in about 1910 BC. In the Mesopotamian culture, surrogacy had been arranged on legal grounds. The ancient Babylonian code called Hammurabi code, an ancient (1760 BC) is the first legal code which presents rules and regulation for the surrogacy to bring forth a male child. Accordingly, the servant girl was offered to the husband to give birth a child for the family and the child becomes the heirs of the family. This practice of surrogacy was very common in Egyptian culture where the concubines of Pharaohs were used to bring forth male child to pharaohs. This practice was also common in ancient Greek and Roman culture.³ As well, Indian Mythology which presents that Rohini bore a child for Vasudev and Devaki in Mahabharatha is also quoted an example for surrogacy in India.⁴

Although matter of surrogacy is very ancient, the modern surrogacy with reproductive technologies began only in 1790 in Western countries. According to the available sources, USA carried out first sperm insemination by J. Marion Sims in 1886. This practice was kept secret for a longer period due to the social stigma, i.e., insemination of the sperm of someone into the womb of another woman was a shameful act. However, due to education, awareness and usefulness of this reproductive technology, now, surrogacy has become well accepted. In addition, in 1953, scientists invented and demonstrated that the human sperm could be frozen and used for insemination to bring forth normal child. As a result of the constant research in artificial reproductive technology, in 1953, Louise Brown was the first test tube baby born in England. The doctors were proud to claim that this child was the product of the first successful in-vitro fertilization. As a mile stone in the history of assisted reproductive technologies, in 1985, the first gestational surrogate pregnancy took place. Now practice of surrogacy has become very common all over the world. However, next to USA, India is the leading country in commercial surrogacy for various reasons. Thus, it is also noteworthy to look at the surrogacy in India.

2. Surrogacy in India – Bird Eye View Scenario

India has swiftly grown in Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART) and it has become an attractive country in the world to use

ART by Westerners as well as Indians settled in Western countries. As a result, the first gestational surrogacy baby was born in Chennai in 1994. The clinics who offer the service of surrogacy are committed to the service by the constant supervision and medical check-up of the surrogates with strict rules and so on. Amrita Pande, in her research, she narrates the life of a surrogate in India. According to her observation, in the surrogacy clinics in India, surrogate mothers have to remain a few months on the bed for gynaecological test.

The husbands of the surrogates can come and visit their wives but they are not allowed to stay with them. And the surrogate and her husband should not have sex for a few months. The surrogates must follow the daily timetable of the clinics.⁵ In her research, she eventually concludes that ‘hiring womb’ is a blooming business in India. Since 2002 India has become a blossoming country in gestational surrogacy. According to the literature, there are approximately 500 surrogacy centres across India. New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Kolkata are the leading cities for surrogacy clinics. However, among the Indian States Gujarath becomes an attractive state for surrogacy due to the number of surrogacy clinics in the cities like Anand, Surat and Samnagar.

As many observe, the surrogacy industry is blooming in India because of high-class super speciality hospital, English speaking doctors, healthy young poor women of child-bearing, and government regulations;⁶ in addition, many also identify some factors which contribute to the growth of the surrogacy industry in India. They are: liberal medical tourism, economic compulsion from the poor and the medical market with profit motives.⁷ Albeit there are various reasons for the growth and development of surrogacy in India, the focus is given in this article only to the contributing factors to surrogacy in India.

a. Medical Tourism

Latin American countries and some of the Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are known for medical tourism. Despite, India becomes one of the leading countries in

medical tourism by introducing 'medical visa' which allows the foreigners to stay in India for a year with their family members. In addition, Indian Government grants also concession to the hospitals by providing loan with meagre interest and very meagre import duties on hi-tech medical instruments. It is because of these, the medical tourists have increased from 150,000 to 450,000 between the years 2005-2008.⁸ In addition, as many observe the reproductive tourism has steadily increased.⁹ As Amrita Pande observes "cheap costs, large number of well-qualified and English speaking doctors with degrees of training from prestigious medical schools in India and abroad, well-equipped private clinics"¹⁰ play pivotal role in increasing the reproductive tourism. In addition, when the procedure for surrogate mother is done in USA, the total cost of this is between USD 100000 to USD 120000; whereas in India, this procedure costs one third of above mentioned amount. In addition, the absence of effective regulation to control the procedure of surrogacy could be also an attracting factor of surrogacy in India.¹¹

b. Economic Compulsion

India is the fourth largest economy of the world. However, In the Indian context, surrogacy is found as economic security for some women, especially the women of lower rang of economic background.¹² According to the sources, one third of Indian women are victims of poverty, labour market, and patrifocal social and family system of India. For such women, surrogacy becomes a financial lucrative gain. Thus due to the family pressure, the poor women are at times forced to be surrogate mother. Although some would argue that surrogacy is altruistically done, pecuniary motive becomes primary cause for it.¹³ These women agree to be a surrogate mother for money in order to alleviate the poverty and to provide sound education to their children they like to be a surrogate mother. In addition, women become surrogate mother to supplement the meagre income of their husbands.¹⁴ At times, it happens with the consultation of their husbands who supports for the economic reasons. Gujarat, one of the North Indian States of India, based survey depicts that women become surrogates because of abject poverty.¹⁵

c. Medical Market Profit

It is estimated that the reproductive tourism and commercial surrogacy generates approximately 2.3 billion American dollars annually (2012). According to the World Bank's report, in 2020 this amount would steadily increase. In America, the expenses for surrogacy which range from \$20,000, to 120,000 (this estimation differs among the authors) covers the In-vitro Fertilization test, payment to the surrogate mother, medical bill and fee of legal and agents of surrogacy.¹⁶ Modhumita Roy observes that the total cost of surrogacy contract is very much low in India. According to her analysis, surrogacy contracts are done with the maximum cost of \$25000 which includes medical and travel allowances, hotel accommodation, payment to the surrogate mother, legal agent and broker, and sight-seeing in India.¹⁷ Unlike the American surrogate women (payment ranges from \$10000 to 15000), Indian surrogate women are paid from \$2000 to \$5000. It is because of these facilities many infertile couples travel to India from different parts of the world and the overseas income of the Indian government also steadily grows every year.

d. Absence of Legal Objection

In India, surrogacy is legal but it is not regulated. In India, infertility is one of the major problems for the family relationship and Indian social structure depends on the offspring. Although hiring a surrogate to bring forth a child as a solution to the problem, the social stigma is always attached with surrogate mothers who are not well accepted among their community members. Considering the peak of the business malpractices in surrogacy, The Law Commission of India presents "It seems that wombs in India are not rent which translates into babies for foreigners and dollars for Indian surrogate mothers".¹⁸

The Commission requested the Indian Parliament intervening surrogacy clinics and to present "Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Regulation) Bill and Rules 2008 in the future. However, all the surrogacy clinics must adhere the Professional Guidelines of Indian Council of Medical Research. These guidelines protect only the intended couple than the surrogate mothers. Yet, they are not legally enforceable. According to the

guideline, the clinics must obtain the informed consent of the surrogate mother who must be well informed about the contract and payment. However, many suspect that these regulations are really kept in surrogacy. This is also a favourable condition for the growth of surrogacy business in India.

3. Ethical Analysis on Surrogacy

Surrogacy is a debatable theme among the secular as well as the Catholic ethicists. This issue becomes very vital as the rate of infertility is very high among the couples of western countries as well as the developing countries. Being a vital issue, it has been under discussion among the scholars since its origin. Most of the research scholars look at this reality from two different perspectives. Some look at surrogacy from the humanitarian perspective while others look at from the rights of an unborn child and biological/genetic perspective. Ruth Macklin, a scholar in surrogacy, accepts that if the surrogacy is done without any monetary dealings it is ethically permissible.¹⁹ Both perspectives substantiate their views with valid and sound arguments.

Literature on surrogacy presents two views. The first, the proponents of surrogacy views surrogacy in terms of “freedom, autonomy, self-determination and privacy”.²⁰ According to them, family does not depend only upon the biological elements. The concept of family must not be limited with the traditional understanding for different types of families are emerging such as single mother family, cohabiting family and family of adopting in the modern world. In addition, Russell Blackford, a proponent of surrogacy, presents that surrogacy brings happiness to the infertile couples. They argue it positively that in surrogacy two women (rich and poor) are benefitted. Surrogate mothers, often in India, reported that the income which

is obtained from surrogacy is utilized for the education, medical and other purposes of their children. According to some studies, surrogacy also alleviates poverty and wretched conditions of Indian surrogate mothers to certain extent.²¹ Russell also addsthat it could be used to create more non-traditional families,

such as single mother and other forms of couples.²² The proponents endorse the practice of surrogacy arguing from free choice and autonomy of the person. . According to them, as long as the commissioned couples and surrogate mother do not harm anyone in surrogacy, they can do it.

The second, the opponents of surrogacy argue that the genetic or biological foundation of a child is needed not only for parenthood but also the family and marriage. As stated by, the self-determination should not affect the basic biological realities of marriage which are commented in sexuality and natural parenthood.²³ A person like Charlesworth opposes the practice of surrogacy which uses surrogate mothers as means to an end. In addition, surrogacy brings harm to the surrogate mother, child, and society as a whole.²⁴ Some feminists also oppose commercial form of surrogacy. For example, Debra Satz, a feminist critic of surrogacy, presents that women are counselled or at times coerced to sign the contract of surrogacy. She continues that commercial surrogacy reinforces the stereotype role of a woman in reproductive labour. She adds that motherhood would be understood as genetic relationship rather than gestational contribution.²⁵ The opponents of surrogacy, very strongly argue against surrogacy for, in reproductive technology, embryo transfer is not always successful and there is a possibility to waste human embryos.

It is very vivid that surrogacy on the one hand it is well supported by many scholars and it is also categorically rejected on the other hand. Some also are of the opinion to reject the third party who is involving in commercial surrogacy for it will not only destroy the traditional family system but also it will cause for unwed mother's family and family of same sex couples. It is not the aim of the article to present agreements and disagreements on surrogacy but the aim of the article is to pinpoint certain ethical issues which lie in the practice of surrogacy.

3.1. From the Perspective of Child

The focal concern of surrogacy is bringing forth child. Surrogacy has a great impact on the newly born child and the surrogate

mother. As far as the child concern, there is a possibility for physical harm due to the genetic defect of the surrogate mother.

a. Child – Procreation or Production?

The entire discussion of surrogacy is based on the birth of the child, and thus, birth of a child is the starting point of the ethical analysis. It has been in the human thinking in the history of human beings whether or not religious and secular, a child is the gift of the conjugal or intimate love of the couple. As William E. May states, “The Marital act, in other words, must be the “principal cause” for the conception of the child”.²⁶ As well, the Second Vatican Council reiterated that “marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really supreme gift of marriage” (GS, 50). Ravideranath Tagore, famous Indian poet, states “Each child that is born comes with a message that God is not yet all dissatisfied with the humanity”. Richard A. McCormick emphasises that the child must be the result of couple’s mutual self-giving. The couples become parents of a child only through their rights of mutual respect and fidelity to life and love. McCormick believes in the conjugal exclusivity and genetic components for parenthood.²⁷

Thus, the mutual self-giving in the conjugal intimacy often results in the birth of a child. In surrogacy, especially in commercial surrogacy, a third party is commissioned to beget a child; for some couples consider the reproductive technology as a substitute for sexual intimacy. In other words it could be technically called a ‘production’ of human being. We should also remember that *Donum Vitae* never advocated any reproductive technology which could be used as substitute for sexual intimacy. However, this document also states that if the certain artificial technics are used to “facilitate the conjugal act or helps it to reach its natural objectives, or ensuring the natural act normally performed achieves its proper end it can be morally acceptable” (DV, 2B, 6). But, any relaxation in marital exclusivity by using of donor’s semen or ovum, genetic asymmetry exists in the relationship between the couple and child. Based on these arguments one can conclude that a child must be a result of procreation and it should not be a production in the context of surrogacy.

Although many catholic ethicists explain child as a gift of God, as some propose, what must be done in the case of infertility of the married couple and inability to get pregnant? When the couple genuinely desire for having their genetic child what must be done? To these questions, Donum Vitae responds that “even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value. Physical sterility in fact can be for spouses the occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children” (DV, 2B, 8). However, these questions need further ethical discussion and deliberations.

b. Child – An Object of Money

In commercial surrogacy, the birth of the child becomes an object for money transaction. In this business, employee (surrogate woman), agent (broker of surrogacy) and factory (hospitals) involve and all of them earn money. Bargaining and negotiation on payment to the surrogate mother and the commission to the agent take place. If the payment is agreeable the parties sign the contract. In the Indian context, in surrogacy mostly the agents and the hospitals earn a lot than the women. At times, the brokers or agents minimize the cost and maximize the profit. Can a child, a gift of God, could be an object to monetary bargaining? In addition, as per the contract, the surrogate mother must hand over the child to the commissioning couple via the agents. Thus, as Purdy M. Lara rightly pointed out surrogacy is a ‘baby selling’ business.²⁸

c. Disrespecting the Dignity and Right of the Child

Surrogacy is regarded by many as a gross violation of right of the child. For, the maternal bond between the surrogate and the child is at stake. The child is treated as a contract rather than gift of their mutual conjugal love.²⁹ In other words, the surrogate mother cannot have right over the baby as the contract is over she has to submit the baby to the commissioning couple. The baby has to live without knowing the biological mother. In addition, the baby’s right is forbidden to have breast feeding for at least six months to develop the immunity in the body. It is precisely

because of this, Catholic teachings states “Surrogate motherhood represents an objective failure to meet the obligation of maternal love ...it offends the dignity and right of the child to be conceived in the womb, to be brought into the world and to be brought up by his offer won parents” (DV A3). To put it more clearly, as we analyse the proponents’ view, although it is freedom and autonomy of the couple to decide going for surrogacy, how far it is justifiable the involvement of the third party which is unknown to the couple and what about the rights of the unborn child who is completely deprived of maternal care such as breast feeding etc. Cahill also rejects the participation of third party who does not provide genetic components for reproduction.³⁰ McCormick also observes that it is a violation of the mutual commitment of the couples and essential property of marriage (unity).³¹

3.2. From the Perspective of Surrogate Mother

It is natural in all living beings, during the time of pregnancy an emotional bond is created between mother and baby. It is all the more very obvious the natural emotional bond is very strong among the human beings. When this emotional bond all on a sudden collapses as the surrogate mother gives the baby to the intended couple, it brings an emotional wound in her. Many surrogates reported that they would no longer be surrogate mothers as they suffer from emotional pain of surrendering the baby. However, there are some women who do not experience any psychological harm in surrogacy contract. Thus, we analyse surrogacy from the perspective of women who are the principal persons in the process of surrogacy.

a. Degrading the Dignity of Motherhood

Surrogacy contract often curtails the freedom and mobility of the surrogate mother. She needs to be available for all the tests and she is asked to stay in the hospital until the entire medical and technical procedures are completed. During this time, she is not allowed to take care of her own children. They are deprived of motherly love and care. Thus, the natural bond between mother and children is at stake in surrogacy. Not only the children already born but also the child is going to be born are severely affected. Thus, surrogacy distorts the natural relationship between the

mother and child. Therefore, there is a possibility of detachment of a surrogate mother from the unborn child in her womb itself. Since a surrogate mother knows very well that she is going to surrender the child to the couple, she may not be at times interested in the growth of the child. As William E. May states “Motherhood entails an irrevocable covenant between mother and child; the woman who gestates an embryo becomes its mother and enters into an irrevocable covenant with the embryo”.³² When this irrevocable covenant between the mother and child is broken the dignity of motherhood is affected. Since motherhood is God given gift and divine, can anyone sell for money? Therefore, gestating the embryo with the intention of giving the child after the birth for adoption is immoral.

b. Exploitation of women

The feminists who are criticizing surrogacy state that when women are used as object to bring baby in the reproductive factories, it goes against human dignity. This will surely result in exploitation of women. Poor women produce baby for rich women.³³ The feminist observes the possibility of the exploitation of individual women and class exploitation (poor women). Firstly, in India, the poor or impoverished uneducated and financially poor women mostly involve in commercial surrogacy contract and large sum of money is involved in this contract. In this contract, mostly the women are coercively induced to be surrogate mothers. For, mostly women are not voluntarily coming forward to be surrogate mothers in spite of all difficulties and hard times.³⁴ Secondly, the social goods must be distributed equally to all classes, races and ethnic groups. In the case of surrogacy, mostly poor women in general and Asian women in particular serve as surrogate mothers to the so-called upper class women and women of western countries. It is also low-pay service to higher social class couples. Why not other women involve in the surrogacy?

c. Surrogacy Secret and Social Stigma

Surrogacy basically questions intimacy of the couple, parenthood. The traditional notion of family, father and mother are questioned. The motherhood becomes a negotiable contract

which is contrary to human relationship.³⁵ The parenthood is being reduced to scientific experimentation. Although women accept for surrogacy for various reasons mainly for financial assistance to home in India, they have to face the social stigma; they are forced to say lie that child is dead or given for adoption.³⁶ The secrecy which is kept in surrogacy creates a negative impact on the situation that affects the family relationship in and outside the family. The elder children of the family are also being affected with this act unless they are well informed about this act.³⁷ “Some critics charge that surrogacy exploits women, particularly those from lower economic classes, thus constituting a new form of ‘slavery’”.³⁸ In addition, the part of the human body should not be used as “mere meat”.³⁹ Is it moral to convert the parts of the human body an object in the commercial reproductive market?

Conclusion

Infertility is a growing phenomenon in the world in general and in India in particular due to the food habits, working styles, polluted circumstance and use of plastic materials, etc. It is natural that the infertile couples long for a child and to satiate their parental desire. Surrogacy technology can be considered a great help for them. In this context, some would agree that the infertile couple could use this technology to bring forth a child, unless it does harm or affects the intended couples and surrogate mothers. One must be also aware that only a few rich infertile couples afford to go for surrogacy. As well, these couples are also looking for the place in which they could get child for the cheaper rate. If the money plays a vital role in surrogacy, there is possibility of exploitation and malpractices which question the sacredness of life. However, the proponents of surrogacy unfortunately fail to look at serious ethical problems. Surrogacy would have an adverse impact on marriage and family, the relationship between the mother and child, the dignity and rights of the child and motherhood.

In the Indian context, if a woman becomes a surrogate mother without the knowledge of the husband and in-laws her marital life will be at stake or even broken. She is not well accepted by the community and society. In addition, surrogacy violates the

sanctity of marriage. For, there is a danger that anyone who desires a child can pay and get the child in the surrogacy market. Just to give away the child immediately after the birth could also mean a human play in the life of the child. Surrogacy has created havoc in the life of the child. The right of the child when the child comes to know the origin of his/her birth she/he is psychologically harmed. In addition, the women who involve in surrogacy are also reduced to machines of reproductive technology. Since poor women are involving in surrogacy they are exploited by the surrogacy clinics and the agents. If any genetic defect takes place in the child, a surrogate mother has to put up with the child and it becomes additional burden to her. She is not able to concentrate on her own children during the time of surrogacy period. In spite of these ethical problems, in India, surrogacy is encouraged only for the sake of money and business. It is precisely because of that, there is no appropriate legislation to control surrogacy. Therefore, one has a right to play with the future of the child. The dignity of the child and rights must be respected. A human life should not be an object for monetary transaction and bargaining. This would bring a great ethical chaos in the society. Anything brings to the good of the human person the ethics would support, if anything brings ethical chaos and crisis all have common responsibility to protect the human life from those technologies, i.e., industrial production of children.

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Suicide in India

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Abstract

Suicide is often seen as a permanent solution to a temporary problem. 601 farmers in Maharashtra committed suicide in the first three months of 2015. Although psychiatric disorders are often associated with suicide in the West, in developing countries social, economic and cultural factors must be considered when attempting to explain the high rates of the impulsive and stress-related suicides. Although suicide is a deeply personal act, suicidal behaviour is determined by a number of individual and social factors. Suicide is a multifaceted problem and hence suicide prevention programmes should also be multidimensional. Since life is a gift from God, we should treat all human life including their own with love and respect.

Keywords:

Farmer suicide, psychiatric disorders, suicide rates, suicidal behavior, attempted suicide, sanctity of human life, right to life

Introduction

601 farmers in Maharashtra committed suicide in the first three months of 2015. This works out to a chilling statistic of almost seven farmer suicides every day, according to the state government's own figures. Out of these 319 were from Vidarbha and 215 from Marathwada regions. These regions are the worst hit by drought and unseasonal rains. Vidarbha region consists of 97321 Sq. KMs which constitute 31.6% of the total area of Maharashtra. Since there are 90 Lac farmers in the state, the state's Rs. 4000 crore drought relief package amounts to Rs 1875 per acre. This amount is too little compared to the loss the farmers have suffered due to drought. The low price of farm products is one of the major reasons for their sad predicament. According to one of the farmers, Mr. Tiwari: "It costs Rs. 6800 to grow a quintal of cotton. The sale price fixed by the government is Rs. 4000. Even without a drought, farmers were in debt." In 2014 the total number of farmer suicides in the state was 1981. In spite of the state government giving top priority to prevention of farmer suicides this year, the figure has already reached in three months about 30% of last year's figure. The unseasonal rains in the recent past are going to make things worse for the farmers.¹

Definition of suicide by Merriam-Webster dictionary is, "the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind." A more elaborate definition of suicide is given by Fairbairn: "Suicide is an act, whether of commission or omission, and whether performed by himself or other, by means of which an individual autonomously intends and wishes to bring about his death because he wants to be dead or wants to die the death he enacts."²

According to sources from World health Organization, in 1999, China had the highest number of suicides with 195,000 and the second comes India with 87,000.³ The average global suicide rate is 14.5 deaths per 100,000 people, with suicide being the 4th leading cause of death in the 15-19 age group.. Suicide has become an important issue in India in the recent past. More than one hundred thousand people commit suicide every year in our

country. Lithuania has the highest rate of suicide (38.4). In the last two decades, the suicide rate in India has increased from 7.9 to 10.3 per 100,000. It is estimated that one in 60 persons in our country are affected by suicide. It includes both those who have attempted suicide and those who have been affected by the suicide of a close family member or friend. Thus, suicide is a major mental health problem, which demands urgent action.⁴

There is a wide variation in the suicide rates within the country. According to sources from World health Organization, in 1999 the suicide rate in Pondicherry (UT) is 58.3, Kerala 30.5, Karnataka 24.2, Tamil Nadu 18.6, Punjab 4.2, Uttar Pradesh 3.3, Bihar 1.8, Jammu & Kashmir 1, etc.⁵ The southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have a suicide rate of more than 15 while in the Northern States of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jammu and Kashmir, the suicide rate is less than 3 per 100,000. This variable pattern has been stable for the last twenty years. Higher literacy, a better reporting system, lower external aggression, higher socio-economic status and higher expectations could be some of the possible explanations for the higher suicide rates in the southern states. 71% of suicides in India are committed by persons below the age of 44 years. Poisoning (36.6%), hanging (32.1%) and self-immolation (7.9%) are the common methods used to commit suicide.⁶ Suicide by self-immolation is found to be more common in India than in other countries and more among females than males. In general the suicide ratio among males and females is 2:1.

After someone commits suicide, people who are close to him/her feel that they have failed their brother, sister, friend, child or partner. They are shocked and paralyzed. It is the family members who suffer the long trauma a suicide causes. Some family members feel so embarrassed and ashamed that they no longer want to meet their friends or even go out and socialize.⁷

If at a particular moment person see no other option but suicide, their vision and perception have already become flawed and distorted. At that moment they are not able to think clearly or calculate the consequences of their action. They only want to put an end to the immediate problem that they are facing. They feel

that nothing can be done to redeem the situation. The words of Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27: 46), tells us the deep anguish and despair that Jesus went through before his death on the cross. But Jesus was able to think of entrusting his mother to John, asking God to forgive his tormentors and promising paradise to one of the thieves who was crucified with him. This kind of thinking is quite different from the thinking that goes on in the minds of those who are contemplating suicide. Their minds are preoccupied with the thought of death in order to escape from a greater calamity.⁸

Causes for Suicide

Although psychiatric disorders are often associated with suicide in the West, in developing countries social, economic and cultural factors must be considered when attempting to explain the high rates of the impulsive and stress-related suicides. Apparently there is a widespread ‘acceptability’ of suicide in our society. Many people seem to accept suicide as an option when faced with extreme mental distress.⁹ Taking away one’s life had religious acceptability in Buddhism and Hinduism. In fact the practice of “Sati” was accepted and is still accepted in some circles of Hindu society.

Most of the studies note that around 90% of those who die by suicide have a mental disorder. According to a government report, only 4.74% of suicides in the country are due to mental disorders. This discrepancy is due to the fact that only 10% of those who committed suicide had ever seen a mental health professional. Government report will take into consideration only those who are certified by a mental health professional. Countless experts have found that affective disorders are the most important causes related to suicide. Majority of people committed suicide during their very first episode of depression, and more than 60% of the depressive suicides had only mild to moderate depression. About 8% of suicides in India are committed by persons suffering from schizophrenia. Studies show that the male to female ratio for schizophrenic suicides is more or less equal.

Unfortunately mental health services are inadequate to meet the needs of our country. For a population of over a billion, there are only about 3,500 psychiatrists.¹⁰ This is due mainly to two factors. One is the lack of financial resources to offer mental health facilities to mental patients. Secondly many patients or their relatives don't want to admit that they need psychiatric help. Therefore they don't make use of the available facilities in the country.

Although suicide is a deeply personal act, suicidal behaviour is determined by a number of individual and social factors. According to the official data, the reason for 43% of suicides is unknown while illness and family problems are believed to be the reason for about 44% of suicides. Divorce, dowry, love affairs, cancellation of marriage or the inability to get married (according to the system of arranged marriages in India), illegitimate pregnancy, extra-marital affairs and such conflicts relating to the issue of marriage play a crucial role, particularly in the suicide of women, in India. Poverty, unemployment, debts and educational problems are also contributing to suicide. The recent spate of farmers' suicides in India has raised societal and governmental concern to address this growing tragedy. Alcohol dependence and abuse were found in 35% of suicides. Around 30-50% of male suicides were under the influence of alcohol and many wives have been driven to suicide by their alcoholic husbands.¹¹

The media sometimes gives undue importance and publicity to a suicide committed for a particular cause or to the death of a celebrity. When a popular film star or politician dies someone commits suicide and it creates a chain reaction of many more suicides in different parts of the state or country. When the Mandal Commission recommended 27% reservation for OBCs (other backward castes) and Scheduled Tribes in government jobs, it created unrest in the student community and a student committed self-immolation in front of a group of people protesting against such a reservation. This was sensationalized, glamorized and widely publicized by the media. This led to many more self-immolations in different parts of the country.¹ The sad part is that media does not take up the broader issues of suicide or deal with the importance of suicide prevention.

“In India, the high rate of suicide among young adults can be associated with greater socio-economic stressors that have followed rapid urbanization, industrialization, liberalization of the economy and privatization leading to the loss of job security, huge disparities in incomes and the inability to meet role obligations in the present society.”¹³ The breakdown of the joint family system, mainly due to migration to cities for job opportunities, that had previously provided emotional support and stability is also seen as an important causal factor in suicides in India.

Suicide Prevention

Some believe that suicide cannot be prevented because its major determinants are social and environmental factors such as discrimination against women, caste discrimination, unemployment, floods, droughts, etc. over which people don't have much control. Due to the breakdown of joint family system, the individuals don't get family support in times of stress.

Hence, there is an emerging need for external emotional support. The enormity of the problem combined with the paucity of mental health service has led to the emergence of NGOs in the field of suicide prevention. Some Catholic institutions are also actively involved in this field in recent years. These NGOs provide support to suicidal individuals by befriending them and encouraging them to seek professional help if needed.¹⁴

In India, attempted suicide was a punishable offence under section 309 of the Indian Penal Code which states: “whoever attempts to commit suicide and does any act towards the commission of such an offense shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with a fine or with both”. However, the aim of the law to prevent suicide by legal means has proved to be counter-productive. Emergency care to those who have attempted suicide was denied as many hospitals and practitioners hesitated to provide the needed treatment fearful of legal hassles. The actual data on attempted suicides was difficult to obtain as many cases were reported as accidents in order to avoid police case and court procedures.¹⁵ In 2014 Government of India decided to repeal the law and now attempted suicide is not punishable according to the Indian penal

code. The reason for repealing the law could be that human beings love their life so much that only some very exceptional individuals will opt to end their life because of very difficult situations. Love of life is implanted in each one of us and it is a characteristic of every human being. Therefore suicide cannot become very dangerous to society like normal crimes.¹⁶ Any establishment of relationship presupposes that we love ourselves before we start loving others for their sake.

Suicide is a multifaceted problem and hence suicide prevention programmes should also be multidimensional. Collaboration, coordination, cooperation and commitment are needed to develop and implement a national plan, which is cost-effective, appropriate and relevant to the needs of the community. In India, suicide prevention should take into consideration economic and social factors along with mental disorders.¹⁷ Parents, close relatives and friends need to affirm and nourish emotional well-being of those who are very close to them. If parents don't welcome their children after they are found committing some blunders or facing failures, they would feel that they have no other place to go or no one else to turn to. When people say that they don't want to live, they are actually looking for love, acceptance, appreciation and affirmation. That is why we all should seriously take our responsibility to affirm our love and concern for those who are close to us. This needs to be done not just once, but on a regular basis, if we want our loved ones to feel secure and wanted. Priests and sisters who want to help close relatives of the one who committed suicide must be compassionate, gentle, non-judgmental and understanding. In spite of the fact of someone in the family committing suicide, they must be able to project a God who is compassionate and non-judgmental and must provide hope for the grievers. Family members could be invited to be part of the planning for the funeral liturgy that can address their loss and their grief.¹⁸

Sanctity of Life

If suicide is morally wrong in some cases, is it morally wrong in all cases? There are people who sacrifice their life for a noble cause, a principle or their faith. There are also spies who kill

themselves after being caught by the enemies, so that they don't give out the secrets of their nation under torture. High-risk jobs, such as bomb-disposal, are considered borderline cases. There are also volunteers who risk their lives in times of calamities like floods, earthquakes, epidemics, etc. Their actions seem morally right because of the selflessness of the act. In high-risk activities one may argue that death is a highly possible consequence but not really intended. These noble deaths are often admired by society while other types of suicides are often looked down upon. Can we separate the morality of these two types of suicides? Hume says that if one's life is not one's own it is just as "criminal...to put it in danger, as well as to dispose of it". Both have the intention of self-termination. The spy kills himself because of his love for his motherland but the teenager kills himself because he cannot endure the tensions of his life. Suicide is often seen as the act of a desperate or mentally unstable person. The purpose of suicide seems to make a difference.¹⁹

All human beings, especially Christians, believe in the sanctity of human life. Christians believe that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). St. Paul reminds us that God's Spirit dwells in us. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's Temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 2:16). This means that people are in some way reflections of God. Christians believe that God creates every human life with love and care. Therefore everyone's life is valuable and important, whether they are in the womb, new-born, handicapped, sick, elderly, mentally or physically challenged, mentally disturbed, unemployed, debt-ridden farmers, sinners, etc. So Christians should treat all human life including their own with love and respect. Our belief in the sanctity of life should influence our decisions on euthanasia, suicide and life support. The respect for life should extend to all other forms of life because we are related to everything in this universe. "Our current lack of respect for the Earth constitutes an injustice perpetrated against generations to come. They will be condemned to live within a damaged world, depleted of many natural resources."²⁰ The growing ecological awareness among the people should motivate us to commit ourselves to protect the earth with all that it contains.

This could alleviate some of the problems faced by the farmers in India and they may not be forced into suicide.

The UN General Assembly adopted the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ on 10 December 1948, in which we see that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services” (Art 25). Many millions of people in the world today are still far from enjoying these rights in practice. That could be changed, if governments in both rich and poor countries lived up to their commitments. If human rights are respected, more and more people will be happy and the tendency to end their life will be drastically reduced. Some government agencies suggest that the controlled supply of pesticides and alcohol will be a deterrent for committing suicide. I am of the opinion that unless the causes of suicide are treated at a deeper level, the number of suicides will remain the same. Vatican II very clearly states that every life from the moment of conception needs to be protected with great care. “God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to humans the noble mission of safeguarding life, and humans must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception.” (GS 51) This clearly shows that human beings have no right to take anyone’s life including their own.

The Right to Life

Life is a gift from God and out of His love He has created the whole universe. God is a lover of life whose imperishable spirit is in all (Wis 11:26). He takes care of everything and promotes life in all living creatures. God is the source of life (Ps 36:9) and he protects it and does not want anyone to destroy it. Everyone has the right to life in its totality and no one is allowed to take his/her life or the life of someone else. In the Old Testament human life is of great importance. In order to preserve one’s life, everyone has a right to get the basic necessities of life. . The laws in the Torah are particularly designed to protect the widow, the orphan and the poor who are held especially dear to Yahweh. “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner,

giving him food and clothing” (Deut 10:17-19). The *Torah* insists that the Hebrews pay special attention to widows and orphans. It forbids affliction of widows and orphans. God is compassionate and he will hear the cry of widow and orphan and will take action on the oppressors. “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless” (Ex 22:22-24). Though society considers them insignificant, God cares for them and defends their cause. “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight” (Ps 72:12-14).

The destitutes have a right to a share in the harvest: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border; neither shall you gather the gleanings after the harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner; I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:9-10). In the Old Testament we find specific laws which are meant to look after the interests of the poor and the weak. It is very much concerned about the protection of the poor and the weak. Exodus 23:10-11 prescribes the practice of a Sabbatical year of leaving the land fallow, so that it would be at the disposal of the poor. In sabbatical year debts were to be remitted. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed” (Deut 15:1-2). One is not to hesitate to lend to a poor person because the sabbatical year is approaching (vv. 7-11). If the government, banks and moneylenders were to practise the custom of writing off the debts, many lives of farmers could have been saved. They find no way out of their debts and are forced to end their life.

In the Old Testament human dignity is considered the basis of human rights. According to the Jewish understanding, human rights come from the absolute worth of human life. This was in contrast to the Babylonian, Assyrian or Hittite law, which

evaluated human life in economic terms. The prophets look at the world from a divine point of view. Their main task is to bring the world into divine focus. Hence, they do not judge the people with worldly standards, but with the divine norm. Their mission is to invite the people to perceive reality from the divine point of view and to help them to act justly and righteously. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). The prophets were very much concerned about the injustices that were prevalent in society. We may look at injustices as typical ingredients of social dynamics, but the prophets considered them great disasters. We are faced with acts of injustice, manifestations of hypocrisy, falsehood, and misery in our day-to-day lives and have become insensitive to them. So we fail to understand the prophets' extreme impatience with injustice. Jews failed to understand why the glorious city of Jerusalem had to be destroyed because of the injustices and oppression committed by some (Micah 3:9-12).

The things that horrified the prophets are now daily occurrences all over the world. Amos condemns the rich for trampling upon the needy, oppressing and cheating the helpless poor, and buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 8:4-6). Slaves and property meant wealth at the time of the prophet. The properties of the poor were taken away by the rich when they could not pay their debts. Amos condemns such cruel practices. He says that the land shall tremble on this account (8:8). This could mean a prediction of an earthquake which brings grief and misery upon all the inhabitants, especially the rich, and is considered an expression of Yahweh's wrath since the people are totally helpless when faced with an earthquake.²¹ The words of Amos would apply to many modern societies. The prophets were sensitive to the cries of the poor and the needy.

We cannot please God without fulfilling the demands of justice. In Micah 6:6-8, the prophet discusses the nature of worship. He says that God cannot be pleased with 'burnt offerings of calves and rams' or with 'ten thousands of rivers of oil'. Even if a man 'offers his first-born to the Lord for his transgression', it is not enough. What God requires is 'to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God'. The prophet is convinced that one can

establish right relationship with God only when one establishes right relationship with one's neighbours. The vertical and the horizontal relationships are complementary to each other. The prophets insist on the interiorisation of the law which will sustain and promote life.

In Sirach 34:21-27 we notice that the sacrifice of an unjust person will not be acceptable to God. A poor person survives with what he gets as his/her daily wage. When the employers do not pay just wages, they are like murderers. "To take away a neighbor's living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood" (34:22). Food is the most basic of all needs. Every labourer has the right to satisfy his/her hunger. If anyone deprives the labourer of the means of his/her daily bread that rightfully belongs to him, he is a thief. He is committing a sin against the commandment of God, "You shall not steal." In this case, paying an inadequate wage to a labourer is equivalent to killing him because he has no other means of livelihood. So it is a sin also against the commandment of God, "You shall not kill." Therefore, when an employer does not pay his/her workers a living wage, s/he commits crimes of stealing and killing. James also criticizes very strongly those who do not pay their workers properly and adequately. "Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (Jam 5:4).

Totality of life was the clear-cut criterion of the prophets' words and course of action. They visualized a harmonious and peaceful world. Life, in all its fullness, including its materiality, is the primary concern of all prophets. The bread of life and the earthly bread are not opposed to each other. Denying bread to the needy is one of the greatest crimes.

In the Old Testament, Yahweh is seen intervening in history to end slavery, and set the oppressed free. God takes an active role in the liberation of his people. Liberation is a power struggle not only between humans and their oppressors, but also between God and the powers opposed to God. The call of Moses and his mission to liberate the Israelites from Egypt comes from God (Ex 3: 2-12). Hence, liberation is fundamentally an act of God.

Jesus: The Promoter of Life

The teaching of Jesus on Sabbath is that it is created for the sake of rest (Dt 5:14) in order to sustain life. “The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27). The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. The Sabbath was created so that they may get at least one day of rest after six days of hard labour. “Sabbath is the analogue to God’s resting after the process of creation. It is a recurring day in a seven-day week, in which there is an opportunity to stand back, reflect, and achieve a taste of the messianic fulfilment at the end of time, to catch a glimpse of a world at peace.”¹ In today’s fast-moving world, people have no time to relax, reflect or take rest. This in turn leads to lots of disturbance, tension, unhappiness and restlessness. All these are causes leading to many suicides in India.

Jesus came to give life in its fullness. Hence, bearing witness to Jesus means to bear witness to life. Witness on behalf of life should be the primary concern of the Church today. We see that life is being systematically threatened and annihilated by structural injustice and institutional violence. It would be illusory, useless and blasphemous to claim to bear witness to Jesus without engaging in a continual fight against structural injustice and institutional violence. In Lk 4:18-19, the mission of Jesus seems to be rather earthly and materialistic. Proclaiming release to the captives, giving sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, etc. do not seem to have much spiritual connotation. Through this seemingly materialistic mission of Jesus, he is proclaiming that any genuine help given to our brothers and sisters is at once spiritual because loving and promoting life are spiritual activities (Mt 25: 31-46).

Conclusion

Suicide is often seen as a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Every problem is temporary. Every valley has its low point. After reaching it there is only one way to go from that point, and that is upward. The sunrise always overtakes the night. Every problem can be perceived as either solvable, manageable or exploitable. If we can’t solve it, at least we can manage it by controlling its negative impact on us. Any captain can be successful on smooth seas. If a captain can control his ship in a rough sea, then his abilities are tested. I can allow the problem to

manage me or I can try to manage the problem. So long as I choose not to surrender to discouragement, depression and despair, I will have proven myself to be bigger than my problem.

In fact there are no problems outside of us. The way we look at the problem is the problem. Debt due to crop failure may appear to be an unsolvable problem for someone and he may want to solve the problem by suicide. But to another it may be an opportunity to seek help from NGOs or friends and find an amicable solution. So it is not the problem but the way we handle the problem is what really matters. We cannot change some situations. But we can change our attitude towards them which will keep us calm, hopeful and cheerful. Problems are often chosen by us. If we are farmers we will have problems connected with farming, weather, loans, etc. If we are doing business, we will meet with problems connected with business. There is no one who doesn't have any problem at all. Therefore, it is natural to have problems in life. So suicide should not be considered a permanent solution to the daily problems of life.

Being a minority group, the Church in India is often busy securing its own rights, and the rights of the oppressed and poor in general are often neglected in the process. This is all the more true after the BJP government has come to power at the centre. There is an increasing number of attacks on Church personnel and institutions. The Church is afraid whether it would be able to survive at all in India, if it takes up social justice issues at the national level. Should the Church in India organize its activities in such a way that it can continue to survive or should its mission be prophetic even if it means persecution and ultimate extinction in India? This is a very difficult situation. On the one hand, unless the Church exists, it cannot do any good work, but on the other hand simply to exist without fulfilling its mission of serving the poor and the oppressed does not make any sense for its existence. The Church needs to find a proper balance between the two.

At present the Church is very cautious and prudent in criticizing human rights violations as she fears her total extinction from India. The function of the Church is to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

A candle is lit in order to give light to those who are around it and not to set fire to everything that is nearby. In the same way, salt is used in order to make the food tasty and not to make the whole food taste like salt. . We can compare the function of the leaven and the salt with the ecclesial community. In one parable Jesus explains how the kingdom is like a small bit of leaven buried in the dough. It produces a change, turning the whole mixture into something else; not into leaven, but into a loaf of bread. The seasoning work of salt is the same. The flavour of a pinch of salt permeates the whole dish of food, not turning it into salt but making it tasty. Thus the primary function of the ecclesial community is not to bring more people into this community but to improve the quality of their lives. Thus the main purpose of evangelization is to improve the quality of life in the world at large rather than to enlarge the number of Christians.

The right to life is not something that is freely given but is procured and sustained through a continuous struggle. Many have suffered and have even sacrificed their lives for the sake of acquiring legitimate rights for themselves and for others. We, the followers of Christ, are called to follow the same path and help those who are depressed and hopeless to look at the positive side of life and make sense out of their life rather than give it up.

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Euthanasia: A Humane Approach to Life

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Abstract

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, euthanasia or mercy killing usually refers to voluntary death in cases of painful and incurable disease. We Christians understand that God is in control of the issues that affect human beings and so God allows only what ultimately benefits us human beings. We need to play an active role which leads to - we becoming the salt and the light of the world. It means that we stand for compassionate care of the dying while standing against any form of killing. We are all called to seize opportunities to minister God's love to those who are needy and suffering.

Keywords

Aruna Shanbaug, Voluntary euthanasia, involuntary euthanasia, non-voluntary euthanasia, principle of double effect, palliative care.

Introduction

I remember reading a short story by T.F. Powys, "Lie Thee Down, Oddity". The story in brief is like this: Mr. Cronch went down a dingy court. Clothes were hung from house to house, and barefooted children played in the gutter. The air was heavy with human odours and factory stench. Then Mr. Cronch came upon something worse than misery. A man sat leaning against a wall, with half his face eaten away. His eyes were gone; he cried out to everyone whose footstep he heard, to lead him to the river. When Mr. Cronch came by, he cried out the more. Mr. Cronch stopped. "Lie thee down. Oddity!" he said angrily. "Lead me to the river," the man begged. "Come," said Mr. Cronch, and led the man to the river. A policeman, who knew the man's wish, followed them. At the brink of the river the man said, "I am afraid; only give me one little push, and I shall die." "Certainly," said Mr. Cronch, and pushed him into the river. The man sank like a stone. The police officer came up to demand Mr. Cronch's name and address; he had made a note of what had happened. "You will appear at court, charged with murder," he said. "But now you may go!"¹ This story may evoke in us different perspectives or attitudes related to life and death. Our attempt in this article is to discuss some of these views.

Kinds of Euthanasia

Meaning: According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, euthanasia or mercy killing usually refers to voluntary death in cases of painful and incurable disease. Since there is no provision for it in the Anglo-Saxon law, it is accounted either suicide (if performed by the patient himself) or murder (if performed by another).² BBC News stated in its July 1, 1999 special report titled "A Euthanasia Glossary": "Euthanasia has many definitions. The Pro-Life Alliance defines it as: 'Any action or omission intended to end the life of a patient on the grounds that his or her life is not worth living.' The Voluntary Euthanasia Society looks to the word's Greek origins - 'eu' and 'thanatos,' which together mean 'a good death' - and a modern definition is: 'A good death brought about by a doctor providing drugs or an injection to bring a peaceful end to the dying process.'

Three classes of euthanasia can be identified, passive euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide and active euthanasia, although not all groups would acknowledge them as valid terms. If we say more loosely it may be said as mercy killing, and it means to take a deliberate action with the express intention of ending a life to relieve intractable (persistent, unstoppable) suffering. We may say that it is the ending of life in a painless manner. Many people may not agree with this interpretation, but it has some supporting ideas that appeal to some people.³

The types of euthanasia may be classified in two main categories: the degree of consent on the part of the patient and the way in which the procedure is carried out. Euthanasia can be voluntary in some cases. Campaigners for relaxation, non-voluntary or involuntary, and it can be an active or passive procedure. Many legal systems in the world treat all forms as criminal homicide. There are, however, some places where the legality depends on its type.⁴

Voluntary Euthanasia: When a patient requests euthanasia, it is referred to as voluntary euthanasia. A few governments have rendered this form legal or, if not completely legal, it has been decriminalized. In some countries like US and UK, voluntary euthanasia is classified as homicide. However in some countries if a doctor can satisfy certain legal requirements, it is not considered criminal homicide, and he or she will not be prosecuted. In other places, physician-assisted suicide is not classified as euthanasia, and doctors are not prosecuted if the procedure is carried out as stipulated.⁵

Non-voluntary Euthanasia: When a person is unable to give consent to the procedure as he/she is unconscious or in similar conditions like legal incompetence, non-voluntary euthanasia is possible. It may be also possible when a person has previously expressed his/her wish to die under specific circumstances but cannot at that moment speak for himself/herself. Children generally are perceived as legally incompetent — for example, children cannot sign legal contracts — and this may apply in the case of euthanasia as well. In most of the cases of child euthanasia

it is internationally held to be illegal although some places might specify particular circumstances in which it is permitted.⁶

Involuntary Euthanasia: We know that non-voluntary euthanasia and involuntary euthanasia are quite different. From the terms themselves it is quite clear that non-voluntary signifies that the act is carried out without the consent of the patient, and involuntary means that it is done against the patient's expressed will. We need to admit that many people are not sure why they are against euthanasia or assisted suicide. Although many of us know that taking the life of another human being is innately wrong it does not make much sense to many people because we do not analyse the consequences sufficiently. In the modern world we are not accustomed to suffering and therefore the view that someone at the end of life should go through extreme pain sounds barbaric to the modern mind.⁷

Story of Aruna Shanbaugh

At this juncture let us try to understand the case of Aruna Shanbaugh who is familiar to, I think, all the Indians. I am referring to this case as there was a debate about her life as to whether she had to remain in the vegetative state or to end her life by euthanasia. It is to be mentioned here that she is no more. For the story of Aruna, I have referred to: Pinki Virani, *Aruna's Story: The true account of a rape and its aftermath*, (New Delhi: Panguin Books, 1998).

Aruna Shanbaugh is a former nurse from Haldipur, Uttar Kannada, Karnataka in India. The incident occurred in 1973. She was a junior nurse at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Parel, Mumbai. Aruna was planning to get married to a medic in the same hospital, KEM, where she also worked. Before returning home after work she was sexually assaulted by a ward boy, Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki, on 27th November 1973. Sohanlal attacked her while she was changing clothes in the hospital basement. He choked her with a dog chain and sodomized her. The asphyxiation cut off oxygen supply to her brain, resulting in brain stem contusion injury and cervical cord injury apart from leaving her cortically blind. Ever since she has been in a vegetative state.

The police case was registered as a case of robbery and attempted murder and the real case, anal rape, was concealed under the instruction of the Dean of KEM, Dr. Deshpande. It was believed that he wanted to avoid the social rejection of the victim and her impending marriage. As the case was filed Sohanlal was caught and convicted, and served two concurrent seven-year sentences for assault and robbery. He was neither accused of rape or sexual molestation, nor for the “unnatural sexual offence”. If he were accused of the unnatural sexual offence he could have got a ten-year sentence by itself.

Responses to Aruna’s case

Pinki Virani, the activist-journalist submitted the plea to end the life of Aruna to the Supreme Court and on December 17, 2010, the Supreme Court sought a report on Shanbaug’s medical condition from the hospital in Mumbai and the government of Maharashtra. On 24 January 2011, the Supreme Court of India responded to the plea for euthanasia filed by Aruna’s friend journalist Pinki Virani, by setting up a medical panel to examine her. The three-member medical committee subsequently set up under the Supreme Court’s directive, checked upon Aruna and concluded that she met “most of the criteria of being in a permanent vegetative state”. However, it turned down the mercy killing petition on 7 March 2011. However, the court, in its landmark judgement, allowed passive euthanasia in India. While rejecting Pinki Virani’s plea for Aruna Shanbaug’s euthanasia, the court laid out guidelines for passive euthanasia. According to these guidelines, passive euthanasia involves the withdrawing of treatment or food that would allow the patient to live. Pinki Virani’s lawyer, Shubhangi Tulli ruled out filing an appeal stating “the two-judge ruling was final till the SC decided to constitute a larger bench to re-examine the issue”. Pinki Virani herself stated, “Because of this woman who has never received justice, no other person in a similar position will have to suffer for more than three and a half-decades.”⁸

Following the Supreme Court judgment rejecting the plea, her colleagues, the nursing staff at the hospital, who had opposed the petition, and who had been looking after her since she had lapsed into coma, distributed sweets and cut a cake to celebrate what they termed her “rebirth”. A senior nurse at the hospital later said,

“We have to tend to her just like a small child at home. She only keeps aging like any of us, does not create any problems for us. We take turns looking after her and we love to care for her. How can anybody think of taking her life?”⁹

Ethical aspects of Euthanasia

There are several ethical aspects involved in euthanasia though the world has become more secular than before. Some aspects may be mentioned here.

Right to die: One of the biggest concerns of some people is, if euthanasia is legalised, the ‘right to die’ will soon become a ‘duty to die’. Many disabled are not ready to die, they enjoy life and wish to continue to do so but if assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia were available they might feel it was the responsible thing to do. There is a fear that caregivers might consciously or unconsciously pressurize to help them arrive at that decision of ending their life. Those who feel obligated to do away with themselves for the good of others may become depressed in their life. Moreover, with rising healthcare costs many disabled rights organisations worry that, if assisted suicide or euthanasia is legalised, many patients will think that there is an obligation or may feel urged to choose to end their lives. Everyone should know that the first human right is the right to life, and the first duty of the state is to protect that right. Legalising assisted suicide would directly breach this duty and undermine the basis of society.

The ‘Principle of Double Effect’: It was developed in Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of homicidal self-defense, in his work, *Summa Theologica*. According to the principle of double effect, it is morally permissible to perform an act that has both a good effect and a bad effect if all of the following conditions are met: The act to be done must be good in itself or at least indifferent, the good effect must not be obtained by means of the bad effect, the bad effect must not be intended for itself, but only permitted, there must be a proportionately grave reason for permitting the bad effect.¹⁰

Of these four conditions the first two are general rules related to morality. It is taken for granted that a person is never allowed to perform a morally bad action. One person may never positively desire or intend a bad effect of an action, even though the act would otherwise be lawful. The third and fourth conditions listed above apply specifically to the principle of the double effect.¹¹

The legal doctrine of ‘double effect’ justifies giving pain-relief treatment, provided it is given with the primary intention to relieve pain, and excuses any unavoidable, but unwanted, life-shortening effect of doing so. In short, the act of pain relief is justified if it is a right act; its unwanted consequence of shortening life is excused or tolerated in the circumstances.¹² The Roman Catholic teaching is that it is never permissible to ‘intend’ the death of an ‘innocent person’. An innocent person is one who has not forfeited the right to life by the way he or she behaves, that is to say, by threatening on Euthanasia, or taking the lives of others.¹³

Catholic Perspectives on Euthanasia and Suicide

At this juncture we should know what the perspective of the Catholic Church on **Euthanasia** is. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it very clearly states the following: Number 2276 states that those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Number 2277 says whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded. 2278 views that discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be

legitimate; it is the refusal of “over-zealous” treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one’s inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected. 2279 explains that even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.

Suicide: Number 2280 views that everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honour and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. 2281 states that suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbour because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.

According to number 2282 if suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law. Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide. 2283 views that we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.

Euthanasia and Morality

We need to understand that different people have different perspectives about what is morally acceptable in euthanasia. For the last many centuries, philosophers and religious thinkers have discussed the ethics of suicide. These discussions and debates were based on broad principles about duties to self and to society as well as fundamental questions of the value of human life. Jewish and Christian thinkers have consistently opposed suicide as inconsistent with the human good and with responsibilities to God.

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas espoused Catholic teaching about suicide in arguments that would shape Christian thought about suicide for centuries. Aquinas condemned suicide as wrong because it contravenes one's duty to oneself and the natural inclination of self-perpetuation; because it injures other people and the community of which the individual is a part; and because it violates God's authority over life, which is God's gift.¹⁴

John Donne (an English poet and a cleric in the Church of England, 1572 – 1631), asserted that while suicide is morally wrong in many cases, it can be acceptable if performed with the intention of glorifying God, not serving self-interest. Donne acknowledged the merit of laws against suicide that discouraged the practice, but he argued that civil and common laws admit some exceptions in ordinary situations, suggesting that suicide could be morally acceptable in certain cases. David Hume, Scottish philosopher, historian (1711 – 1776) made the first unapologetic defence of the moral permissibility of suicide on grounds of individual autonomy and social benefit. He asserted that even if a person's death would weaken the community, suicide would be morally permissible if the good it afforded the individual outweighed the loss to society. He viewed that suicide would be acceptable if the person's death would benefit the group and the individual. It does not mean that Hume justified all suicides, but argued that when life is most plagued by suffering, suicide is acceptable.¹⁵

Euthanasia and Palliative Care

According to WHO, Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. Palliative care: provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms; affirms life and regards dying as a normal process; intends neither to hasten or postpone death; integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care; offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death; offers a support system to help the family cope during the patients' illness and in their own bereavement; uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling, if indicated; will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness; is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.¹⁶

The challenge of providing good palliative care at home is very important for family doctors, nurses, and all those committed to maintaining the highest possible quality of life for the dying person. The aims of palliative care to give the best quality of life for patients with incurable and life-threatening diseases. It provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms associated with these diseases. Palliative care also aims to provide a support system to aid the family in coping with the patient's illness and their sad situation. The most significant thing in palliative care is the special care that takes place in the last days of life; this special care aims to provide a dignified death for the patient.¹⁷

Palliative care is for protecting the patient from their illness. It is basically to care for the dying. In such situations of pain there is effective control of pain, relief of mental distress and focussing on the patient's quality of life. In fact palliative care has a comprehensive dimension which not only deals with a patient's

medical requirements, but also caring for the spiritual and emotional needs of the patient and their families. The basic purpose of palliative care is to achieve the best quality of life for patients even though we know that their illness cannot be cured. Palliative care has a comprehensive management of the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of patients, as well it remains sensitive to their personal, cultural, and religious values and beliefs. In many hospitals (especially in Europe and America) palliative care services are often provided through an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals including, physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and chaplains.¹⁸

Palliative care is very much overlooked in the euthanasia debate today. The terminally ill people want and long for pain relief; they do not want to end their life. Suffering is something unavoidable but there is tremendous hope for healing and wellbeing. In fact palliative care is meant for the same purpose. If palliative care is well used majority of cases can be relieved of suffering. Many people think that euthanasia for pain relief is unethical and they are of the opinion that palliative care is the solution to the problem. Those who work with dying people know that the overwhelming majority want their pain controlled, but do not want to be killed.¹⁹

If the emphasis is on killing patients instead of caring for them, then naturally palliative care will not be seen as a useful element in the life of sick people. It is said that Holland does not have sufficient palliative care as euthanasia is an accepted medical solution to patient's pain and suffering. Like in Holland, if other countries also accept euthanasia as legal there will be an inevitable lessening of interest in palliative care and the care of the elderly.

If we develop a culture of life then naturally we shall also develop a culture of care which is inevitable because care goes well beyond medical treatment; it includes human love. When we help them in such situations we give them hope, affirm their dignity and reassure them that their lives have meaning, and they have an honoured place in the community, and we let them know that they

are loved. Our obligation is to minimize suffering and maximize kindly treatment. That means we treat human beings as human beings. On the other hand those who advance the culture of death provide a great disservice to humanity by promoting death and by ignoring or interfering with services of care.²⁰ The reason why we need to take palliative care seriously is also because of the scripture which prohibits taking of innocent life. We believe that we are created in the image and likeness of God and so we are stewards of our lives rather than owners. In other words we are created to be like God and our lives have an eternal purpose, set apart for, and owned by God. Our life is sanctified and naturally we have intrinsic and immeasurable value and dignity.

Value in Suffering

According to Christian teaching, suffering especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God's plan; it is in fact a sharing in Christ's passion and a union with the redeeming sacrifice. God's dominion includes all of life, which means that suffering is a part of God's providence. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons (*and daughters*)" (Hebrews 12:7). The purpose of suffering for the Christian is sanctification or "to be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and "it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace" for those trained by it (Hebrews 12:10). "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17). In other words, although we are all made in God's image, all of us are a greater or lesser degree like Him, and God is carrying to completion this great work that He has begun in all believers (Phil. 1:6). If we accept this suffering we associate ourselves in a conscious way with the suffering of Christ crucified (cf. Mt 27:34).²¹

All human beings are aware of the reality that death is part of life. As Ecclesiastes 3:2 tells us, there is a time to be born and a time to die. The Christian can even welcome natural death knowing that "death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Who doesn't look forward to that day when we will see Him "face

to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12)? Therefore, in looking at suffering and impending death, we need to see God’s sovereign hand and purpose. Divine love is the true answer for suffering; love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering which remains a mystery. Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering.²²

On the other hand there are atheists or even humanists who view people as autonomous, biological entities whose life’s purpose is pleasure, and whose end is complete extinction. If we hold this view then the logical result is in a self-centred hedonism that sees life as utilitarian, namely, it is valuable only for what it offers, and sees little value in suffering. According to this perspective, life should be lived as long as it is useful and ended when it is unwanted. Thus suffering becomes a negative reality to be rejected; thus there are some lives not worth living. With contentment or happiness as the standard, some lives are deemed to have such low quality that it is reasonable to prefer death. This is the antithesis of the “sanctity of life” ethic, which maintains that every life, created in the image of God, has intrinsic, God-given value that is not reduced by circumstances. St. Paul teaches us: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (Phil.4:12).²³

Euthanasia debate

We define euthanasia as killing (of course mercy killing) a person rather ending the life of a person who is suffering from some terminal illness which is making his/her life painful as well as miserable or in other words we can say ending a life which is not worth living or has become useless. But who and how one should decide whether the life of some people is anymore worth living or not. In this sense we may say that the term euthanasia is rather too ambiguous. This has been a topic for debate since a long time, namely, whether euthanasia should be allowed or not. In today’s context, the debate is mainly regarding active euthanasia rather than passive euthanasia. The dispute is between the interest of the society and that of the individual. Who should be given priority? Those who support euthanasia the decision of the patients should

be considered. On the other hand the interest of the individual will outweigh the interest of the society. The conflict situation is when the individual who is under unbearable pain is not able to decide for himself/herself. In this conflicting case it will surely be a negation of his/her dignity and human rights. A person has the right to live a life with at least minimum dignity and if that standard is falling below that minimum level then a person should be given a right to end his/her life.²⁴ Supporters of euthanasia also point out to the fact that as passive euthanasia has been allowed, similarly active euthanasia must also be allowed. A patient will wish to end his life only in cases of excessive agony and would prefer to die a painless death rather than living a miserable life with that agony and suffering.

Thus, from a moral point of view it will be better to allow the patient to die painlessly because in any case he/she knows that he/she is going to die because of that terminal illness. We should rather look at the brighter side of it than thinking of it being abused.

There is an intense opposition from the religious groups and people from the legal and medical profession. According to them it is not granting 'right to die' rather it should be called 'right to kill'. According to them it is totally against the medical ethics. According to medical ethics people are supposed to nurse, care and not end the life of the patient. Since medical science is advancing at a great pace today even the most incurable diseases are becoming curable. Thus instead of encouraging a patient to end his life, the medical practitioners should encourage the patients to lead their painful life with strength which should be moral as well as physical. If the patient comes under pressure from the relatives he/she may take such a drastic step of ending his/her life. In such cases there are physical, psychological and economic pressures involved. The patient begins to feel that he/she is a burden to the relatives and finally succumb to it. Opponents also point out that when suicide is not allowed then euthanasia should also not be allowed. According to the opponents of euthanasia, such tendency can be lessened by proper care.²⁵ However, some people argue that euthanasia should be allowed only in the rarest of the rare cases. If this is not done then surely it will lead to its abuse.

What Then Should We Do?

A few things that could be practised by the people concerned about the patients: First and foremost euthanasia must be opposed to and educate others also about this issue. They can support and encourage pro-life doctors, politicians, and activists. They can reach out and help the unwanted and despairing patients with care and compassion. The basic philosophy of palliative care is to achieve the best quality of life for patients even when their illness cannot be cured. It is especially suited to patients with incurable, progressive illnesses and often is centred on the needs of patients and their families at the end of life. Palliative care services also help ensure the autonomy of chronically ill patients. Relief of suffering is one necessary means to achieve the best quality of life. Patients who are suffering from prolonged, incurable illnesses still deserve the best quality of health care hospitals can provide. It is also important that the principle of autonomy asserts the ethical right to make one's own decisions and carry them through.

Conclusion

The Christian perspective of human life accepts the idea that God is in control of the issues that affect human beings. We take it for granted that the author of life to allow only what ultimately benefits us human beings. It does not mean that we have only a passive role to play - we are called to be salt and light of the world. It means that we stand for compassionate care of the dying while standing against any form of killing. We are all called to seize opportunities to minister God's love to those who are needy and suffering. We have to show how love can overcome the pain and fears of dying and thus we can win over the hearts and minds of the very people who are in dire need of comfort. We can become ambassadors of Christ at every deathbed. If we can do this then we can provide the most eloquent answer to the question of euthanasia – a reason to live, through companionship and find meaning in suffering. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Notes

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**Relishing Life and Respecting Death
Individually and Collectively:
Towards and Sustainable and Fulfilling Life Inspired
by *Laudato Si'***

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Abstract

Inspired by *Laudato Si'*, this article takes up the sustainability of human life in today's world. Our basic assumption, which we borrow from Mitch Albom's Tuesdays with Morrie is that if we know we are going to die, we would change our life-style personally and collectively. Ordinarily we try to deny death or delay thinking about it. Instead, if we can look into the face of death directly and fearlessly, we are in a much better position to be in touch with our own true self. This makes personal and societal transformation possible and necessary. In the second part of the article looks into the rise and fall of civilisations, according to Arnold Toynbee, who inspires us to see the moral and spiritual basis of civilisation. Toynbee's study also tells us that unlike individuals, society's do not necessarily have to die. Keeping in mind that if we let our civilisation die, that may be the end of human life, we proceed to understand *Laudato Si'*, which fosters life in its totality.

Keywords

Laudato Si', Mitch Albom, Arnold Toynbee, civilisation, Pope Francis, death, fostering life, spiritual basis of civilisation, meaning of death.

“Everyone knows they’re going to die,’ he said again, ‘but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently.” These words from Mitch Albom’s classic *Tuesdays with Morrie* sum up the basic orientation of this paper (Albom 2007). This tries to help us relish life in its concreteness, by opening ourselves to the real possibility of our own death.

The first part of this article looks at our own personal life and inevitable death, with an invitation to relish life and be open to dying. Basically we believe here that openness to the finitudes of life makes our life more genuine and meaningful. Such a basic openness will change our life-style drastically that we shall contribute to flourishing of life in general. From the study of life and death at a personal level, in the second section, we go to analyse the rise and fall of collective death, through civilizations. For this purpose, we make use of the insights of the British historical Arnold Toynbee, who is convinced that a civilization does not need to die. Even if it dies, it dies from “suicide and not murder,” implying that a civilisation die due to moral and spiritual inabilities of the civilization to respond creatively to the internal and external challenges it faces. Then we show that in the contemporary situation, we cannot afford the luxury of Toynbee to have many different civilizations, since for practical purpose we are one intimately interconnected civilization. If our civilisation fails, the whole humanity fails.

With this background we study the fresh and invigorating insights provided by Pope Francis through his *Laudato Si’* to foster life collectively. With its optimistic outlook and spiritual basis, we try to show that this encyclical is a right step to call humanity back to its senses so that we collectively fight the “culture of death,” and promote a more egalitarian and sustainable life. Thus, the aim of this article is to show that the moral and spiritual resources, which humanity richly possesses and which *Laudato Si’* refers to, can positively help us to cherish life here on this precious planet, which is our home.¹

1. Mitch Albom: The Story of Living and Dying

“*Death* ends a life, not a relationship” (Albom 2007: 174). Keeping this key insight in mind, we attempt to understand the basic vision of Mitch Albom to promote a counter-culture that

genuinely affirms life and accepts death in their totality. To understand Albom's insights on living and dying, we sum up his book, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Albom 2007), with a view to understand living in its dynamic relationship to dying.

a. A Plot of Human Relatedness

The American sports journalist Mitch Albom, the book's author and narrator, recalls his graduation from Brandeis University, Massachusetts, USA, in the spring of 1979. After he has received his diploma, Mitch approaches his favorite sociology professor, Morrie Schwartz, and presents him with a monogrammed briefcase. While at Brandeis, Mitch takes almost all of the sociology courses Morrie had taught. He promises Morrie, who is crying, that he will keep in touch, though he does not fulfill his promise. Years after Mitch's graduation from Brandeis, Morrie is forced to forfeit dancing, his favorite hobby, because he has been diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), which is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. This debilitating disease that leaves his "soul, perfectly awake, imprisoned inside a limp husk" of a body. Morrie's wife, Charlotte, cares for Morrie, though at his insistence, keeps her job as a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.²

Sixteen years after his graduation, Mitch is feeling frustrated with the life he has chosen to live. After his uncle dies of pancreatic cancer, Mitch abandons his failing career as a musician to become a well-paid journalist for a Detroit newspaper. Mitch promises his wife Janine that they will have children eventually, though he spends all of his time at work, away on various sports assignments. One night, Mitch is flipping the channels on his television and recognizes Morrie's voice. Morrie is being featured on the television program "Nightline" in the first of three interviews with Ted Koppel, whom he quickly befriends. Before consenting to be interviewed, Morrie surprises and softens the famed newscaster when he asks Koppel what is "close to his heart." Mitch is truly taken aback to see his former professor on television (Spark Notes 2015).

Following Morrie's television appearance, Mitch contacts his beloved professor and travels from his home in Detroit to

Morrie's home in West Newton, Massachusetts to meet him. When Mitch drives up to Morrie's house, he delays greeting his professor because he is speaking on the phone with his producer, a decision he later regrets.

Shortly after his reunion with Morrie, Mitch works himself nearly to death reporting on the Wimbledon tennis tournament in London. There, he spends much time thinking about Morrie and forfeits reading the tabloids, as he now seeks more meaning in his life and knows that he will not gain this meaning from reading about celebrities and gossip. He is knocked over by a swarm of reporters chasing celebrities Andre Agassi and Brooke Shields, and it is then that Mitch realizes he is chasing the wrong thing (Spark Notes 2015). When he returns to his home in Detroit, Mitch learns that the article he has worked so hard to write will not even be published, as the union he belongs to is striking against the newspaper he works for. Once more, Mitch travels to Boston to visit his old teacher, Morrie.

Following their first Tuesday together, Mitch returns regularly every Tuesday to listen to Morrie's lessons on "The Meaning of Life." Each week, Mitch brings Morrie food to eat, though as Morrie's condition worsens he is no longer able to enjoy solid food. In his first of three interviews with Koppel for "Nightline," The American Broadcasting Company's late-night television's news program for in-depth reporting on the day's major news stories. Morrie admits that the thing he dreads most about his worsening condition is that someday, he will not be able to wipe himself after using the bathroom. Eventually, this fear comes true.

Throughout Mitch's visits to Morrie, we get flashbacks of their days together at Brandeis. Mitch describes himself as a student who had acted tough, but had sought the tenderness he recognized in Morrie. At Brandeis, Mitch and Morrie shared a relationship more like that between father and son than teacher and student (Albom 2007). Soon before Morrie's death, when his condition has deteriorated so much that he can no longer breathe or move on his own, he confides that if he could have another son, he would choose Mitch.

In his childhood, Morrie had been very poor. His father, Charlie had been cold and dispassionate, and had neglected to provide for

Morrie and his younger brother emotionally and financially. At the age of eight, Morrie must read the telegram that brings news of his mother's death, as he is the only one in his family who can read English. Charlie marries Eva, a kind woman who gives Morrie and his brother the love and affection they need. Eva also instills in Morrie his love of books and his desire for education (Spark Notes 2015). However, Charlie insists that Morrie keep his mother's death a secret, as he wants Morrie's younger brother to believe that Eva is his biological mother. This demand to keep his mother's death a secret proves a terrible emotional burden for young Morrie; he keeps the telegram all of his life as proof that his mother had existed. Because he was starved of love and affection during his childhood, Morrie seeks it out in his old age from his family and friends. Now that he is nearing his death, Morrie says that he has reverted to a figurative infancy, and tries in earnest "enjoy being a baby again." He and Mitch often hold hands throughout their sessions together.

In his lessons, Morrie advises Mitch to reject the popular culture in favor of creating his own. The individualistic culture Morrie encourages Mitch to create for himself is a culture founded on love, acceptance, and human goodness, a culture that upholds a set of ethical values unlike the mores that popular culture endorses. Popular culture, Morrie says, is founded on greed, selfishness, and superficiality, which he urges Mitch to overcome (Albom 2007). Morrie also stresses that he and Mitch must accept death and aging, as both are inevitable and necessary part of life. On one Tuesday, Janine travels with Mitch to visit Morrie. Janine is a professional singer, and Morrie asks her to sing for him. Though she does not usually sing upon request, Janine concedes, and her voice moves Morrie to tears. Morrie cries freely and often, and continually encourages Mitch to do so also. As Morrie's condition deteriorates, so does that of the pink hibiscus plant that sits on the window ledge in his study. Mitch becomes increasingly aware of the evil in media, as it drenches the country with stories of murder and hatred. One such story is the murder trial of O.J. Simpson, the verdict of which causes major racial division between whites and blacks.³

Mitch tape records his discussions with Morrie so that he may compile notes with which to write a book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a

project which he and Morrie refer to as their “last thesis together.” Morrie continually tells Mitch that he wants to share his stories with the world, and that this book will allow him to do just that.

Meanwhile, at Morrie’s insistence, Mitch attempts to restore his relationship with his brother Peter who lives in Spain. For many years, Peter has refused his family’s help in battling pancreatic cancer and insists on seeking treatment alone (Albom 2007). Mitch calls Peter and leaves numerous phone messages, though the only reply he receives from his brother is a curt message in which Peter insists he is fine, and reminds Mitch that he does not want to talk about his illness. Morrie prophesizes that Mitch will once more become close to his brother, a prophecy which, after Morrie’s death, is realized. At Morrie’s funeral, Mitch recalls his promise to continue his conversations with his professor and conducts a silent dialogue with Morrie in his head (Spark Notes 2015). Mitch had expected such a dialogue to feel awkward, however this communication feels far more natural than he had ever expected.

b. Talking about Death

On one of the Tuesdays, Morrie talked exclusively on dying and its relation to living and this section deals with that. Morrie tells Mitch that everyone is aware that they will eventually die, though no one actually believes it. Mitch notes that Morrie is in a business-like mood on that day, as he scribbles notes in his now undecipherable handwriting. In Detroit, the newspaper strikes continue, and Mitch remains out of work. Once again, he notes the disgustingly violent news stories he has heard and read about, namely the O.J. Simpson murder trial. In Morrie’s office, however, news events are inconsequential, and they focus on more meaningful subjects (Albom 2007).

Morrie is now somewhat dependent on an oxygen machine to breathe. Mitch asks him how one can be prepared to die. Morrie responds with a Buddhist philosophy that every day, one must ask the bird on his shoulder if that day is the day he will die. Morrie adopts values and parables from many different religions; described by Mitch as a “religious mutt,” Morrie had been born into Judaism, but turned agnostic during his teen years. Morrie

reveals that it is only once a person knows how to die that he can then know how to live. He repeats this idea for reinforcement, and Mitch asks him if he had considered death before contracting ALS. Morrie responds that he had not thought very much about death before his illness; in fact, he had once vowed to a friend that he would be “the healthiest old man” his friend had ever met.

The men talk about why facing the reality of death is so difficult for most people. Morrie says that realizing the imminence of death is realizing what is essential, thus you see your life in an entirely different light. Morrie also tells Mitch that if he accepts death, he may not be as ambitious as he is now, as he will see that he must spend time on what is meaningful to him, and not working to make money. Morrie urges Mitch to consider further “spiritual development,” and concedes that he is not exactly sure what that phrase means, though he is certain that people are too involved in material goods and their own egotism (Albom 2007). Morrie notes that he appreciates what he sees from his window, though he is unable to go outside and enjoy it.

Morrie continues to receive letters from the viewers who had seen his interview with Ted Koppel on “Nightline.” He dictates responses to his friends and family, and one afternoon while he is with his sons, Rob and Jon, responds to a note from a woman named Nancy who had lost her mother to ALS and says she sympathizes with Morrie for his suffering. Morrie dictates a kind reply, saying that he hopes she can find “healing power” in grieving as he has. Another woman, Jane, had written Morrie a letter in which she named him a prophet. He thanks her graciously, though he does not agree that he is of such revered status. In another letter, a man from England asks Morrie for help in contacting his dead mother. There is also a four-page letter from a former graduate student who, after graduating, experienced a murder-suicide and three still-born births. Her mother had died of ALS, and she fears that she will also develop the disease. Morrie is unsure of how to answer her. Rob suggests they simply tell her thank you for having written such a long letter. It is clear that Morrie is happy to have his sons with him.

Mitch thinks it is significant that Morrie is suffering from a disease named after an athlete, Lou Gehrig. Morrie urges Mitch to

do his imitation of Gehrig giving his farewell speech in which he says that he is the “luckiest man in the world.” Morrie, however doesn’t feel quite the same way.

c. Death as Game-Changer

The O.J. Simpson murder trial is an issue which appears repeatedly throughout the book. Mitch uses the trial as a tool to portray the popular, media-saturated culture as a source of meaninglessness, as he does when he sees the murderous potential on the faces of the people at the airport, or reads about murder and other crimes in the newspaper. These crimes that taint the popular culture are used, in large part, to contrast the good of Morrie’s self-created culture against the evil of the mainstream social culture, whose values are entrenched in meaningless and wasteful endeavors, such as watching television and reading tabloid gossip. Why, then, if Morrie loathes the media and the popular culture, does he agree to do multiple interviews with Ted Koppel for “Nightline”? Because only “Nightline” can provide him with the means to reach millions of people, so that he may share his story and influence their lives with his life lessons. It seems that Morrie must use the popular culture he condemns as a vehicle to spread his philosophy of a self-created culture (Albom 2007).

Mitch refers to Morrie as a “religious mutt” because he has created his own religion from a variety of different religious philosophies. The Buddhist philosophy Morrie shares about asking the bird on his shoulder if today is the day he will die serves as a metaphor for his awareness that he may die at any moment (Spark Notes 2015). The bird itself is symbolic of Morrie’s consciousness that his death is fast approaching, and his readiness to accept it when it does arrive. His lesson, however, pertains more to Mitch than to himself. In telling the parable, he wants Mitch to realize that this bird is on everyone’s shoulder at every moment of their lives, despite how young or old they may be. When he tells Mitch that one must know how to die before one can know how to live. By this he means that one must accept the possibility of one’s own death before he can truly appreciate what he has on earth, as the sobering awareness that one day, it will all be out of reach, prompts the urge to appreciate and value what one can have only for a limited period of time, and to use every

moment of that time doing something that one will not regret when the bird sings its last note.

When Morrie tells Mitch that he may not be as professionally ambitious as he is if he were aware and accepting of his own death, he is continuing with his idea of “time as a precious, irreplaceable gift” (Spark Notes 2015). What Morrie means by this is not that Mitch should be lazy, but that he should reassess his priorities. He assumes that if Mitch were “to truly and completely realize that his will someday die, he would surely rearrange his values system and realize that dedicating his time to love, family, and friends is far more important than spending his life at work, earning money that does not fulfill him.” Mitch feels a void in his life which he stuffs with dollar bills, believing that material wealth is really what he wants and needs. But Morrie sees through Mitch’s superficial desire, and knows that the only salve for Mitch’s emotional void is love and friendship (Albom 2007).

The basic message of the story of Tuesdays with Morrie is that we cannot run away from death, which is actually running away from life. Instead, we need to look into death directly. “The truth is, once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.” After having seen the need to affirm and accept death, so as to live life to the fullest, in the next section we want to apply this insight not to our individual life and death, but our collective life and death, that is, of our own civilization. For this purpose we borrow the basic insight of Arnold Toynbee, the British historian, on the rise and fall of civilizations.

2. Arnold Toynbee: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Civilisations

Arnold Toynbee, (1889—1975) is an English historian whose 12-volume *A Study of History* (1934–61) put forward a philosophy of history, based on an analysis of the cyclical development and decline of civilizations, that provoked much debate and discussion (Editors, Encyclopedia Britannica. 2015).

Toynbee was a nephew of the 19th century economist Arnold Toynbee. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford (classics, 1911), and studied briefly at the British School at Athens, an experience that influenced the genesis of his philosophy about the decline of civilizations. In 1912 he became a tutor and fellow in

ancient history at Balliol College, and in 1915 he began working for the intelligence department of the British Foreign Office. After serving as a delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 he was appointed professor of Byzantine and modern Greek studies at the University of London. From 1921 to 1922 he was the *Manchester Guardian* correspondent during the Greco-Turkish War, an experience that resulted in the publication of *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey* (1922). In 1925 he became research professor of international history at the London School of Economics and director of studies at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London (Editors, Encyclopedia Britannica. 2015).

Toynbee began his *Study of History* in 1922, inspired by seeing Bulgarian peasants wearing fox-skin caps like those described by Herodotus as the headgear of Xerxes' troops. This incident reveals the characteristics that give his work its special quality—his sense of the vast continuity of history and his eye for its pattern, his immense erudition, and his acute observation.

In the *Study* Toynbee examined the rise and fall of 26 civilizations in the course of human history, and he concluded that they rose by responding successfully to challenges under the leadership of creative minorities composed of elite leaders. Civilizations declined when their leaders stopped responding creatively, and the civilizations then sank owing to the sins of nationalism, militarism, and the tyranny of a despotic minority. Unlike Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*, Toynbee did not regard the death of a civilization as inevitable, for it may or may not continue to respond to successive challenges. Unlike Karl Marx, he saw history as shaped by spiritual, not economic forces (Editors, Encyclopedia Britannica. 2015).

While the writing of the *Study* was under way, Toynbee produced numerous smaller works and served in many prestigious educational posts. He also retained his position at the London School of Economics until his retirement in 1956. A prolific writer, he continued to produce volumes on world religions, western civilization, classical history, and world travel throughout the 1950s and 1960s. After World War II Toynbee shifted his emphasis from civilization to the primacy of higher

religions as historical protagonists. His other works include *Civilization on Trial* (1948), *East to West: A Journey Round the World* (1958), and *Hellenism: The History of a Civilization* (1959).

Toynbee has been severely criticized by other historians. In general, the critique has been leveled at his use of myths and metaphors as being of comparable value to factual data and at the soundness of his general argument about the rise and fall of civilizations, which relies too much on a view of religion as a regenerative force (Editors, Encyclopedia Britannica. 2015). Many critics complained that the conclusions he reached were those of a Christian moralist rather than of a historian. His work, however, has been praised as a stimulating answer to the specializing tendency of modern historical research.

a. Rise and Fall of Civilization

Human civilization is not a static condition but a dynamic movement. “Civilization is a movement and not a condition, a voyage and not a harbor.” Such a civilization does not need to follow the cycle of birth and rebirth. “I do not believe that civilizations have to die because civilization is not an organism. It is a product of wills.” As a product of the will it is up to us, the collective humanity, to decide if the civilization will die or not. As such, unlike individual human beings, the collective society or civilization does not need to die. “As human beings, we are endowed with freedom of choice and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon the shoulders of God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. It is up to us.”⁴

Thus he is convinced that civilizations decline from internal reasons, lack of enthusiasm and moral apathy. “Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder,” he emphasizes. He adds: “History teaches us that when a barbarian race confronts a sleeping culture, the barbarian always wins.” As such civilizations can continue to adapt themselves to both internal and external threats and flourish. This would need continued and creative responses.

But a civilization in decline is characterized by uniformity and lethargy. “Civilizations in decline are consistently characterized by a tendency towards standardization and uniformity.” He adds:

“The last stage but one of every civilization, is characterized by the forced political unification of its constituent parts, into a single greater whole.” His remedy for the survival of suicide is enthusiasm, imagination and ideal. “Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an ideal, which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice.” This makes the civilization compassionate and viable. “Compassion is the desire that moves the individual self to widen the scope of its self-concern to embrace the whole of the universal self.”

b. Moral and Spiritual Basis as Key to Survival

Toynbee is convinced that the survival of a civilization is based on its moral and spiritual strength. “Material power that is not counterbalanced by adequate spiritual power, that is, by love and wisdom, is a curse.” Such moral and spiritual power gives them the ability to respond successfully to the crises confronting them. “Now civilizations, I believe, come to birth and proceed to grow by successfully responding to successive challenges. They break down and go to pieces if and when a challenge confronts them which they fail to meet.”

He believes that the basic causes for the decline of a civilization are moral and spiritual. At the moral level, he is clear: “The only real struggle in the history of the world ... is between the vested interest and social justice.” At the spiritual level also he is emphatic: “Sooner or later, man has always had to decide whether he worships his own power or the power of God.”

At the same time his prospectus for the survival of our contemporary civilization is not strong. “The human race’s prospects of survival were considerably better when we were defenseless against tigers than they are today when we have become defenceless against ourselves.” So he sums up his view of the decline of a civilization thus: “On this showing, the nature of the breakdowns of civilizations can be summed up in three points: a failure of creative power in the minority, an answering withdrawal of mimesis on the part of the majority, and a consequent loss of social unity in the society as a whole.”

c. Our One and Only Civilisation

As Toynbee studied the rise and fall of 26 civilizations and drew lessons for our own survival, one thing that we need to keep in mind that we do not currently have the luxury of having 26 civilizations. Our current globalisation, free market and networking have made our civilization almost totally dependent on each other. The fall of one causes the fall of all others. The one and universal civilization that we human beings share make it impossible to observe the fall of one civilization in a detached or objective manner. Ours is one world and one civilization and either we sink together or flourish together.⁵

It is in this context of the dependence of each other for our survival that we can listen to the intense plea for social justice, sustainability and care for the earth that the present Pope is making. Like Toynbee he too pleads for a moral and spiritual vision which alone can save us from impending destruction. Recognising the real dangers threatening our civilization, he is optimistic the collectively we can collectively respond creatively and positively.

3. Pope Francis: Fostering Life through *Laudato Si'*

Laudato si' (Medieval Central Italian for “Praise Be to You”) is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. The encyclical has the subtitle “On care for our common home.” In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take “swift and unified global action” to save life in the planet earth. The encyclical, dated 24 May 2015, was officially published at noon on 18 June 2015, accompanied by a news conference.

Pope Francis’ revolutionary new encyclical calls for a “broad cultural revolution” to confront the environmental crisis and thus to sustain and promote life. This encyclical is addressed not only to Christians but to “every person living on this planet” with the hope of entering “into dialogue with all people about our common home.”

In this encyclical Pope Francis affirms unequivocally that everything in the world is connected. His idea of earth as our

common home that all of us have to work to protect life in the precious planet. In it the “preferential option for the poor meets the preferential option for the earth, since climate change most dramatically affects the poor, especially in the Third World where the poor depend so directly on earth, farming and fishing, for their livelihood” (Hagan 2015).

a. Encountering Collective Destruction and Possible Death

In the encyclical the Pope fights against the culture of death. “The place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life” (LS 213). Then he warns us: “If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us. A rise in the sea level, for example, can create extremely serious situations, if we consider that a quarter of the world’s population lives on the coast or nearby, and that the majority of our megacities are situated in coastal areas (LS 24). While acknowledging that much is being done, there are still self-destructive tendencies in our human life-style. “Some countries are gradually making significant progress, developing more effective controls and working to combat corruption. People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more. A simple example is the increasing use and power of air-conditioning. The markets, which immediately benefit from sales, stimulate ever greater demand. An outsider looking at our world would be amazed at such behaviour, which at times appears self-destructive” (LS 55).

So he urges us not to take a superficial or evasive attitude to this serious problem. “At the same time we can note the rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness. As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which require bold decisions, we are tempted to think that what is happening is not entirely clear. Superficially, apart from a few

obvious signs of pollution and deterioration, things do not look that serious, and the planet could continue as it is for some time. Such evasiveness serves as a licence to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen” (LS 59).

He wants us to acknowledge the destructive power of sin. “This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature” (LS 66).

He urges us to develop the spiritual and moral courage to save us from these self-destructive tendencies. “In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God’s transcendence, within which it develops. Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time “she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction”.” (LS 79).

b. Widespread Indifference and Selfishness Worsen Environmental Problems

Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change, and especially its effect on the poor, notes the Jesuit commentator, James Martin (Martin 2015). “Many of those who possess more resources seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms...” (LS 26). Why, he asks, are so many of the wealthy

turning away from the poor? Not only because “some view themselves as more worthy than others,” but because frequently decisions makers are “far removed from the poor,” physically, with no real contact to their brothers and sisters (LS 90, 49). Selfishness also leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good. This affects not simply those in the developing world, but also in the inner cities of our more developed countries, where he calls for what might be termed an “urban ecology.” In the world of *Laudato Si*’ there is no room for selfishness or indifference. One cannot care for the rest of nature “if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (LS 91).

Although science and technology “can produce important means of improving the quality of human life,” they have also “given those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (LS 104) Francis says we are enthralled with a technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth. But this paradigm “is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.” Those supporting this paradigm show “no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough” (109).

This irresponsible attitude coupled with our selfishness has made of our planet look like “more and more like an immense pile of filth.” Pope Francis writes: “Account must also be taken of the pollution produced by residue, including dangerous waste present in different areas. Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish. Industrial waste and chemical products utilized in cities and agricultural areas can lead to bioaccumulation in the organisms of the local population, even when levels of toxins in

those places are low. Frequently no measures are taken until after people's health has been irreversibly affected" (LS 21). That is the result of widespread indifference and selfishness towards the needs of others.

c. Moral and Spiritual Bases

The greatest contribution of *Laudato Si* to the environmental dialogue is its systematic overview of the crisis from moral and spiritual points of view. Until now, the environmental dialogue has been framed mainly with political, scientific and economic language. With this new encyclical, the language of faith enters into the discussion of ecology "clearly, decisively and systematically" (Martin 2015). This does not mean that Pope Francis is imposing his beliefs on those concerned about the environment. "I am well aware," he says, that not all are believers (LS 62). Nonetheless, the encyclical firmly grounds the discussion in a spiritual perspective and invites others to listen to a religious point of view, particularly its understanding of creation as a holy and precious gift from God to be revered by all men and women. But the pope also hopes to offer "ample motivation" to Christians and other believers "to care for nature" (LS 64). This does also not mean that other popes (and other parts of the church) have not spoken about the crisis—Francis highlights the teachings of his predecessors, particularly St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. But in its systematic spiritual approach, this is a groundbreaking document that expands the conversation by inviting believers into the dialogue and providing fresh insights for those already involved (Martin 2015).

4. Conclusion

As responsible human beings, "the poor always have a moral claim upon us" (Winters 2015). Pope Francis, therefore, considers the environmental issues, such as water use and biodiversity, relying on the scientific consensus and urging us to moral vigilance and spiritual depth. His is a plea to foster life on the planet earth in its totality.

While the most important issue in the encyclical is the environment, it is not only our lives or our souls that are at stake. It is the planet. It is future generations. The evidence of the danger is

all around and the cure will require a change in our lifestyle. Pope Francis' encyclical reminds one of the Dutch statesman and journalist, Abraham Kuyper's famous line: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" (Winters 2015). That sense of God's presence permeates the text of *Laudato Si'*, and the Holy Father extends the cry to the whole domain of Creation. He wants us to look at Creation and see the handiwork of the Creator, at all times and in all our decisions. He is brutally frank about the entrenched ways of thought and powerful interests that hope we will do nothing of the sort. Let us hope that Pope Francis can and will change the conversation. At a time when the leadership of the world seems so unequal to the challenges, Pope Francis is a moral and spiritual giant who is not afraid to face our challenges creatively.

This implies that we realise the deep interconnectedness among human being and between humans and the nature. From an optimistic perspective we can learn to accept life and death. This implies that we learn to relish the simple things of life and take life both playfully and seriously, as Mitch Albom has shown. It also implies that we can be agents of the counter culture, just as Mitch Albom, Arnold Toynbee and Pope Francis have shown. Swimming against the current, with a sense of urgency, hope and commitment, we can creatively and collectively respond to the danger facing us: the remote possibility of the extinction of life through human being's reckless greed and exploitation.

Then we can relish life much more intensely. Then we shall be open to the dangers of death, without denying or delaying them. Then we can respond to the urgent call that Life makes to us: to respond to the existential crisis we face with renewed moral and spiritual courage and conviction. That's the urgent invitation Pope Francis gives to us, irrespective of our religious affiliation!

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Notes:

1. In this article, I do not intend to take primarily philosophical approach on death, which I have attempted elsewhere. See Pandikattu 2004, 2005, 2010 and 2013.
2. For this summary, I am heavily Indebted to Spark Notes. See “SparkNotes: Tuesdays with Morrie: Plot Overview.” 2015. Accessed August 16.
<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/morrie/summary.html>.
3. Athlete *O.J. Simpson* is the football star and actor who was accused of the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brow Simpson. Most of the Americans followed the details of the long trial which had also racial connotations, since Simpson is an African-American.
4. All the quotes of Toynbee are from various internet sites. See specially “Arnold J. Toynbee Quotes from QOTD.org (page 1 of 3).” 2015. Accessed August 22.
<http://www.qotd.org/quotes/Arnold.J.Toynbee>.
5. More of it is elaborated in my earlier work, Pandikattu 2002.

Non-violence of Buddhism and Peace of Christ for a better India

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Abstract

What is true of India may be true in other societies that we can really raise from the particular to the general in our reflection. India offers an ideal model to reflect on the problem of generalization, not only because of the presence of all great and small religions, but also because of its efforts to build a secular society according to a democratic constitution that has a positive attitude to all religions. The teachings of Buddha and Christ are the greatest heritage that man has received from the past. Their message of non-violence and peace, love and compassion, tolerance and understanding, truth and wisdom, respect and regard for all life, freedom from selfishness, hatred and violence, delivered 'over two thousand years back, stands good for today and will stand forever in making peace and harmony in society.

Keywords

Pañca-sīlāni, Non-violence, Beatitudes, Peacemakers

The world today is in a state of turmoil; valuable ethics are being upturned. The forces of materialistic skepticism have turned their dissecting blades on the traditional concepts of what are considered human qualities. Yet, whoever has the concern for culture and civilization will concern himself with practical and ethical issues. For ethics has to do with human actions and conduct. It takes place in the society and concerned with our relationship with ourselves and with our fellow men. By nature man is not perfect, he has to train himself to be good. Ethics plays an important role in the life of the man.

Indian Context

Today we live in a world of violence, terrorism, corruption, persecution, oppression, affliction, brokenness, destruction, conflicts, pain, agony, tension and turmoil. In the context of this crisis of the world, peace and harmony is the cry of the modern world. In particular, this is the cry of the people in India especially minorities who undergo religious persecution, oppression and violence at every moment. Diversity is a characteristic of the pluri-religious and multi-cultural fabric of India. Being a secular nation, India treats all religions with equal honour and allows them equal liberty. This attitude is also manifested in her Constitution. The inner pluralism of Indian religiosity is her ability to absorb and assimilate creatively the new elements of other traditions with which India has come into contact down through the centuries. This all-accommodative and assimilative character of India, especially with regard to religion, is her strength, vigour and competence.

This world-renowned Indian composite atmosphere is passing through a new phase with the emergence of fundamentalism and communalism. The harmonious situation of the nation is to a certain extent disturbed. There may be various reasons behind the communal violence. Even though the political and social factors play a prominent role behind all these problems, they are often kept in the background and religious issues are brought to the forefront.¹ If we take the field of religion as an example, one way is to affirm one's own legitimacy to the others, even if those who claim legitimacy may be a minority and may face persecution.

Another way is to order everything in a hierarchy, often placing oneself at the top. For instance, Christianity thinks of itself as the latest and most perfect covenant coming after the cosmic and Judaic covenants. The caste system is an example in the social sphere. Many sects in Hinduism tend to become castes. Still another solution is to acknowledge pluralism at a phenomenal level, but to affirm a basic unity that is either transcendental or eschatological.² In this spectrum, where can we place the contemporary encounter between religions? Is there an ideal situation towards which we should move? What are prospects in the concrete, historical situation? How can we come to terms with it in a creative way so that it helps rather than hinders India's effort to build a better future for all its peoples? In this context the non-violence of Buddhism and the beatitudes of Christ invite to be peacemakers and to promote peace and harmony.

Pañca-sīlāni (The Five Precepts of Buddhism)

Buddhist philosophy can be considered as concrete philosophy because it is quite practical and intelligible. The enlightenment of a person occurs at a stage where the mind is transformed to a stage of purification or perfection that the thoughts and actions are fully devoted with that of the ultimate reality. To live is to act, and our actions can have either harmful or beneficial consequences for oneself and others. Buddhist ethics is concerned with the principles and practices that help one to act in ways that help rather than harm. The core ethical code of Buddhism is known as the five precepts, (properly, the 'five virtues': *Pañca-sīlāni*)³ and these are the distillation of its ethical principles. The precepts are not rules or commandments, but 'principles of training', which are undertaken freely and need to be put into practice with intelligence and sensitivity.

I undertake the training-precept (*sikkha-padam*) to abstain from onslaught on breathing beings.

I undertake the training-precept to abstain from taking what is not given.

I undertake the training-precept to abstain from misconduct concerning sense-pleasures.

I undertake the training-precept to abstain from false speech.

I undertake the training-precept to abstain from alcoholic drink or drugs that are an opportunity for heedlessness.

Not killing or causing harm to other living beings

The well-known five precepts (*Pañca sīlā*) are to be followed by every Buddhist. The first and the fundamental ethical precept for Buddhism corresponds to the Hindu and Jain concept of ahimsa, 'non-injury', and is generally regarded as the most important one: 'Non-injury is the distinguishing mark of *Dhamma*'. It is explained as casting aside of all forms of weapons and being careful not to deprive a living being of life. Every person, who follows Buddhism, is expected to refrain from meat. Buddhist monks and nuns have to follow even stricter code of rules than the lay person and they abstain from practices which would even unintentionally harm living creatures. For instance, they do not travel during rainy season because it is possible to harm worms and insects that come to the surface in wet weather. The same concern for non-violence prevents the monks from digging the ground. There are several instances which we can see in Buddha's life where he strongly opposes any injury to the living being, no matter whether it is deliberate or non-intentional. The term non-violence cannot be just confined to abstaining from injuring just living creatures, but it means cultivation of compassion and sympathy for all living creatures.⁴

In taking this precept a Buddhist recognizes his relationship with all living things, a relationship which is so close that the harming of any living creature is inevitably the harming of himself. The Buddha taught the advisability of comparing one's own life with that of other beings: Everyone fears violence, everyone likes life; comparing oneself with others one would never slay or cause to slay. The precept applies to all creatures irrespective of size. It does not exclude the killing of animals for the Vedic sacrifices (*yajna*) or, as do the commandments of some religions, that of lower animals. A Buddhist does not sacrifice living beings for worship or food, but sacrifices instead his own selfish motives.⁵

There are five things necessary to constitute the crime of taking the life. 1. There must be knowledge that there is life. 2. There must be assurance that a living being is present. 3. There must be the intention to take life. 4. With this intention there must be

something done, as the placing of a bow or spear, or the setting of a snare; and there must be some movement towards it, as walking, running, or jumping. 5. The life must be actually taken.⁶

There are six means of killing: (i) killing with one's own hands (*sahatthika*), (ii) causing another to kill by giving an order (*anattika*), (iii) killing by shooting, pelting stones, sticks, etc. (*nissaggiya*), (iv) killing by digging trenches, etc., and entrapping a being (*thavara*), (v) killing by the powers of *iddhi*, or occult means (*iddhimaya*), (vi) killing by mantras, or occult sciences (*vijjamaya*).⁷ Whatever device may be used, the individual who kills or destroys the psychic life of a sentient being commits the evil deed of *panatipata-kamma-patha*. This kamma may be caused through the door of speech since the act of killing could be performed on receiving an order from another person.

There are eight causes of destruction of life: 1. Evil desire. 2. Anger. 3. Ignorance. 4. Pride. 5. Covetousness. 6. Poverty. 7. Wantonness, as in the sport of children. 8. Law, as by the decree of the ruler.⁸ This crime is committed, not only when life is actually taken, but also when there is the indulgence of hatred and anger; hence also lying, stealing and slander, may be regarded in some sense as including this sin.

Beatitudes

The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin *beatitudo*, meaning "blessedness." The phrase "blessed are" in each of the beatitudes in the bible implies a current state of happiness or well-being. Each beatitude in the Greek text begins with the word "μακάριος" which poses a special problem in translation. Through the centuries, it has gone through various translations. Often found translations of this word are "blessed", "happy", "fortunate", "lucky", "esteemed", "honoured", "well off" and "congratulations". The fact that there are various translations, shows the difficulty of expressing the meaning of the Greek term "μακάριος" in English.⁹ However, the Greek word "μακάριος" should be translated not as "happy" which refers to temporary

condition based on externals, more of a subjective feeling, but as “blessed” because the opposite of “blessed” is not “unhappy” but “cursed (Mt 25:31-46; Lk 6:24-26).¹⁰ The expression held a powerful meaning of "divine joy and perfect happiness" for the people of the day. The classical form of beatitude contains three distinct parts. First there is a declaration of blessing. Second, a virtue is named. Third, an appropriate reward is announced. Thus beatitude is a literary form that begins with the word “blessed” and constitutes a declaration of praise for an individual who can expect an appropriate reward from God. The question has often raised whether these blessings are law or gospel, ethical requirements or eschatological blessings.

Beatitude as the part of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain

The Sermon of the Mount is the central piece to the gospel of Matthew and the Beatitudes are the important teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Betz assumes that the sermon was an epitome of Jesus' teaching centered on living the will of God.¹¹ The Sermon on the Mount regards the thought of kingdom of heaven and greater righteousness as central to the teaching of Jesus. The beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) function as the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Righteousness (Mt 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33) and kingdom of heaven/God (Mt 5:3, 10; 5:19, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21) are the two catch words that permeate the whole sermon and each of these terms appear twice in the beatitudes itself.¹² The Sermon was created from the ethical sayings by Jesus and arranged by Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount which is the longest piece of teaching of Jesus in chapters 5, 6 and 7 emphasizes ethical and eschatological dimensions. The basic content of the Sermon consists in Jesus Messiah as the one whose coming fulfils the Old Testament promise for the coming of the age of salvation, the coming into history of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus who came to fulfil the old law (Mt 5:17-19) gave his commands in the Sermon which transcends the old law. These commands demanded a new starting point in one's relationship with the Father (Mt 6:1-7:12) as well as with one another (5:21-48). These demands function as the principles of Christian living. They are the entrance requirements for the kingdom.¹³

Only those who transcend the righteousness of the Scribes and

Pharisees by the observation of this greater righteousness will enter the kingdom of God (Mt 5:20; 7:21). The Sermon on the Mount expresses also a realized eschatology based on the fulfilment of the law that happened through the coming of Christ (Mt 5:17-18). At the same time it speaks explicitly of a future time when the kingdom of God will be accomplished at the accompanying final judgement. This future orientation is made clear in the following verses 5:19-20, 29-30; 6:6, 10, 17; 7:7, 21-23, 24-27. I think we need to understand the beatitudes in the background of these ethical and eschatological dimensions which focus on the kingdom of heaven in the sermon.

Luke's Sermon has sometimes been called the "Sermon on the Plain" in contrast to Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount". The sermon as recorded by Luke is largely paralleled in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. But much of Matthew's sermon is not in Luke 6 but scattered here and there in Luke's gospel. The sermon on the plain (Luke 6: 27-45) is made up of rules of conduct for the disciples, presented in argumentative form. These rules are divided into two sections, one directed at the outside world (Lk 6: 27-38), and the other at the inside world of the group of the disciples (Lk 6: 39-45). The beatitudes are sayings that pronounce someone "blessed." Thus they are statements of assurance, containing both disclosure and promise. The woes in verses 24-26 are the exact counterparts of the beatitudes. These are addressed to whom the sermon on the Plain is composed. Since the disciples are warned, the woes may not be curses but can be mere threats, although pronounced with solemnity and definiteness.

Beatitudes as Exhortations

There is an ongoing debate and discussion among the scholars, whether Matthew's beatitudes are ethical demands or eschatological blessings or both. Scholars like George Strecker, Herman Hendrickx and Jan Lambrecht regard the beatitudes as ethical commands and promise rewards for those who are deemed virtuous.¹⁴ It is challenged by Robert Guelich and W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison who consider the beatitudes as consoling eschatological blessings.¹⁵ Mark Allen Powell and Warren Carter view the beatitudes as both reversals for the unfortunate and rewards for the virtuous.¹⁶ Matthean beatitudes in contrast to

Lukan beatitudes have clear ethical dimensions. In Matthew's beatitudes, the eschatological blessings do not eliminate or overshadow the ethical thrust. Thus, I think Matthew's beatitudes promise a reward of kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheritance, fulfilment and demands to practice ethics which leads to a unique way of life.

It is true that the beatitudes are formulated in the indicative mood of fact and not in the imperative mood of the moral sermon. Still to those who are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, righteous, and those who have stability in facing persecution for Christ's sake is an indirect exhortation to live accordingly. They are people who trust only God; wait patiently for his intervention without imitating the wicked ones and who have deep desire to fulfil all that God demands. In fact, the Gospel reveals that the virtues presented in the beatitudes were essential characteristics of Jesus himself. Thus, the beatitudes are indirect demands to imitate Jesus. The emphatic use of αὐτοὶ in the beatitudes affirm that only those who live according to the norms presented in the beatitudes, and not others can enjoy the blessings offered in the beatitudes and invites all to keep the ethical demands of the beatitudes.¹⁷

Beatitudes as a true means of Peace

Beatitudes as divine demands exhort the disciples to practice ethics, which leads to a unique way of life, which is the mark of a true Christian. The mark of being a true and authentic Christian is to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Righteousness demands the disciples to be in right relationship with God and others according to the will of God. Mercy which refers to forgiveness of sins by God and God's unconditional mercy invites to pardon our neighbour (Mt 6:12, 14-15) and to love our enemies (Mt 5:43-48). It shows that the followers of Jesus are expected, to be merciful on our fellow brothers and sisters in order to receive mercy from God. Mercy also refers to love and concern for the poor (Mt 12:1-8; 25:31-46) Thus, mercy is not merely an inner attitude, but something that we do concretely. It is not mere compassion or sympathy but solidarity which leads us to efficacious involvement of doing

good works to our neighbour. Pure in heart refers to single-minded devotion to God which stems from the internal cleansing created by following Jesus. Jesus demands of his disciples a life style characterized by pleasing God and his will. Purity of heart demands integrity from the disciples which comes from internalizing the commandments of Jesus set in the Sermon on the Mount.

A true mark of a Christian is peacemaking. Mt 5:9 invites the Christians to be peacemakers. Peacemaking is the responsibility of the followers of Jesus. Peacemaking is linked, to loving our enemies and involves reconciliation (Mt 5:44-48; Lk 6:27-28). The peacemakers must possess certain qualities like love, mercy, non-violence and justice (righteousness).

In the context of persecution and oppression, Jesus exhorts and demands the disciples to live a life of righteousness by doing good works, to be merciful by forgiving neighbours and loving enemies, and to be peacemakers by reconciling and loving enemies. All these ethical demands of the beatitudes, promote to build peace and harmony with God, self and others. The primary task and responsibility of the disciples of Jesus is to practice the ethical demands of the beatitudes, which results in living a peaceful and harmonious life.

μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται

Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God

The Peacemakers will be called sons (children) of God. To understand this we need to ask questions: who is a peacemaker in Hellenistic culture or at the time of Jesus? What is the role of a peacemaker? What are the characteristics of peacemaking? Who can be called sons of God?

Peace in the OT

The Hebrew word for “peace” in the OT is שלום (shālôm).¹⁸ In the reading the OT, we sense a strong desire of the people for peace throughout the Hebrew Bible with different nuances in different books. In Pentateuch, shl ômā is used as a greeting or salutation

(Gen 37:9) or as a leave taking formula (Gen 43:27-28; Ex 4:18). In Deuteronomic literature *shālôm* makes a shift to political realm. But *shālôm* acquires both a theological meaning and a theological character when it is associated with Yahweh. In the book of judges we read “Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is Peace” (Judg 6:24). In the book of Isaiah we come across several references to peace: “Peace will be like a river if one keeps the commandments of Yahweh.” (Is 48:18). Joy is an element of peace (Is 55:12). שלום means freedom from all that causes grief. Yahweh promises to extend *shālôm* like a river (Is 66:12). Is 45:7 “If α m h e l i g h t , a n d c r e a t e d a r k n e s s : I m a k e p e a c e , a n d c r e a t e v i l l e : I t h e L o r d d o a l l t h e s e t h i n g s .”

In Jeremiah 29:7 we see that *shālôm* is complete well-being and Yahweh is giving that complete peace. Jer 33:6 “Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.” Psalmist says “Seek peace and pursue it” (Ps 34:14). 2 Maccabees says “May he open your heart to his law and his commandments, and may he bring peace” (2 Macc 1:4). Pro 10:10 says: “He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace.” All the above texts show that *shālôm* has a wide range of nuances and the source and subject of peace is God. People were praying to God for peace, because they broke *shālôm* by their disobedience to God and his covenant. In this context, God through his prophets promises a Messiah, the Prince of Peace, (Isa 9:6) through whom God would restore all creation to wholeness, rightness (Zech 8:12) and effect peace on earth.¹⁹

Peace in the NT

In the New Testament, the Greek word used for “peace” is εἰρήνη. It translates the Hebrew word שלום (*shālôm*).²⁰ In the NT, especially in the synoptic gospels, kingdom of God ushered in by Jesus the Messiah (Mt 4:17) is the advent of this promised reign of universal and eternal *shālôm* t h e k i n g d o m o f r i g h t e o u s n e s s a n d p e a c e (R o m 14:17). Th e t h e m e o f p e a c e i s s e e n t h r o u g h o u t t h e g o s p e l s . T h e r e a r e s e v e r a l r e f e r e n c e s t o p e a c e f u l a t t i t u d e w i t h i n t h e e n t i r e N T . I t d e s c r i b e s b o t h t h e c o n t e n t a n d g o a l o f

Christian preaching, since the message is called the Gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15).

Peacemaker- ειρηνοποιός

The adjective ειρηνοποιός is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT.²¹ A verbal equivalent is found in Col 1:20. It reads: “And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” In the context of this verse the one who reconciles all things to him is God. The participle ειρηνοποιήσας refers to the Son. He assumes the role of the peacemaker (Rom 5:1). He liberated us from sins (Col 1:14), established peace with God and thus he is the decisive peacemaker. We have many other texts in the NT where Jesus is presented as the bringer of peace: (Luke 2:14; 19:38; Acts 10:36; Eph 2:14-18). Similarly, God is qualified as “God of peace” in several texts (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1Th 5:23; Heb 13:20).

In the Hellenistic culture the adjective ειρηνοποιός is used for the Greek and Roman emperors. It was thought only kings and emperors would bring peace. The peacemaking was considered the responsibility of those who were in authority. So, they established peace, security, and socioeconomic welfare of their peoples by force. For the NT authors peacemaking is clearly different from imposing peace by force. It is an act of love. Peacemaking refers to making of peace between peoples, parties and enemies and bringing them into a relation of unity, and harmony.²² We see a few references to this idea of making peace or living in peace with others. There are four texts in the NT where the verb “live at peace” or “keep peace with” occurs. Mark 9:50 says “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” Rom 12:18 “If possible, on your part, live at peace with all”. 2 Cor 13:11 “Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.” 1 Thess 5:13 “Esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.”

According to Betz, a further reading of the Sermon on the Mount (5:21-48) represents six cases of peacemaking although the term peacemaking is not used.²³ The issues concerning forgiveness (Mt 6:12, 14-15) and judging (7:1-5) are also related to peacemaking. All these texts underscore the importance of peace in Christian life. It should be marked by peace, which is an expression or fruit of genuine love.

Based on all that we have seen so far, we may understand the peacemakers (εἰρηνοποιός) as who actively promote right relationship between people, who demonstrate love and concern for their enemies. They establish peace in the world. In being a peacemaker, one imitates Jesus the prince of peace and the Father in heaven, the God of peace. The peacemaker must have certain characteristics like love and mercy like the Father and the Son. So, this points out that, peacemakers have a role to play in our day today life, in the family, society, and world at large.

Sons of God

The reward promised for the peacemakers is that they will be called sons of God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται). The verb “to be called” (κληθήσονται) in the passive voice denotes a divine act by which one becomes a son of God.²⁴ It means that not everyone will be honoured with the title “sons of God” but only those who work for shālôm (wholeness and harmony rather than strife and discord in all aspects of life) and who reconcile others to God and each other will “be called sons of God.”

In the OT the designation “son of God” generally referred to Israel in reference to the people's special relationship with God who had chosen them and made his covenant with them (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 1:10; Jer 31:9). There are few texts in the OT which give the idea of father-son relationship between God and his people. God asked Nathan to inform David that he will raise up an offspring and in this context God says “I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me.” (2 Sam 7:14). Another beautiful thing is that sonship and peacemaking are brought together in 1Chr 22:9-10.

Matthew uses the expression “sons of God” only twice in his gospel in 5:9 and 5:45. In Mt 5:45 Jesus says: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; (ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς) for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” Here, the characteristic of the Father is presented who is merciful and compassionate to everyone. He takes care of their needs, and does not prevent the natural powers from serving them. He is gracious to all irrespective of their response, because it is his nature. Similarly, since the disciples are children of the Father, and if they want to become his children, they should treat others, including their enemies and persecutors, as their Father would treat them. Here, loving one's enemies becomes a necessary requirement to be the children of the Father in heaven.

In Mt 5:9 peacemaking is the condition for becoming children of God. The virtue of “love for enemy” is implicit in this beatitude. So, in their mission of peacemaking these blessed ones are in fact imitating their Father in heaven. Father becomes their model. Therefore, by exhibiting conduct corresponding to that of the Father (5:9, 45), they show themselves indeed to be sons of God. The ultimate status of sonship declared at the consummation expresses the complete acceptance by God.²⁵ The peacemakers, who are blessed in the seventh beatitude (Mt 5:9), are the people who share the peacemaking nature of the Father, and are thus called to be his children. Peacemaking was the mission of Jesus. He is our peace; he broke the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14) and reconciled people to God. The “peacemakers” who participate in his mission on earth, will also “participate” in his dignity – the divine sonship.

Conclusion

We find an inner affinity between the non-violence of Buddha and the peace making preached by Jesus. To “make peace” or work for peace” means to strive for love and harmony and seek ways to put an end to all sorts of enmity and violence. The teachings of Buddha and Christ strongly oppose the use of violence. When we draw a sharp boundary between self and others leads to the construction of a self-image that sees all that is not of 'me and

mine' (such as those of another country, race, or creed) as alien and threatening. When this strong sense of self is reduced by practicing Buddhist and Christian teachings, such egocentric preoccupations are thought to subside and to be replaced by a greater appreciation of the kinship among beings. When threatened, we are encouraged to practice patience. Anger is seen as a negative emotion that serves only to inflame situations and inevitably rebounds, causing negative karmic consequences. Non-injury has also its positive counterpart. It demands not only abstention but also practice of loving-kindness, *metta*, to all. Peacemaking is the responsibility of all the human being. It involves a pursuit of justice and reconciliation. As long as there is injustice, exploitation of the poor by the rich, corruption, conflicts and war, suppression of the legitimate rights of the poor, there cannot be peace and harmony in the world. So, peacemakers must try to remove all these, and try to establish peace and harmony.

Non-violence dissipates the fear and hostility which engender conflict and so removes one of the main causes of violent disputes. Non-violence and peacemaking as ethical demands, command and challenge, to live a life of righteousness, to be merciful, love and forgive their enemies and to be peacemakers by loving and reconciling with the people, which finally results and leads to live in peace and harmony with God, self and others. The Buddha and Jesus expressed a pattern for the ending of suffering and the way to happiness. Jesus and Buddha saw the same essential truths. The Buddhist goal is the liberation of all sentient beings through full and harmonious development of wisdom and compassion; hence, a Buddhist's spiritual growth is exemplified by activities of wisdom and compassion in life. This may seem too abstract to make sense objectively; however, a Buddhist may experience the peace and empathy resulting from practicing no-attachment and selfless service. The Christian goal is to share the glory of God in the union with God; hence, a Christian's spiritual growth is to be measured by his love of God, his service to God and the sharing of God's love that he has attained with the people. In other words, the goal of Christianity and Buddhism are to be measured by their universal love and compassionate service, which bring peace and harmony in the world.

Notes:

- 1 Matthew Ebenezer, "Persecution and the Church: A Historical Overview," DTJ 6, no. 1 (March 2009): 77-100.
- 2 Somen Das, *Christian Ethics and Indian Ethos* (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1989), 51.
- 3 Nagendra, Singh K.R., *International Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, (Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi, 1997), 257.
- 4 Mathew Chandrankunnel, *Buddhist Ecological Consciousness*, (Journal of Dharma, 39, 1 January-March 2014), 31.
- 5 Muller, M., *Buddha and Buddhism: Studies in Buddhism*, (Calcutta, 1953), 65.
- 6 Saddhatissa H., *Buddhist Ethics, Essence of Buddhism*, (George Allen & Unwin Ltd.: London, 1971), 89.
- 7 Saddhatissa H., *Buddhist Ethics, Essence of Buddhism*, 89.
- 8 Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, 7.
- 9 C.S. Keener, *A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 167.
- 10 M.E. Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (NIB 8; Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995), 177.
- 11 H.D. Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, Translated by L. L. Welborn, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 52.
- 12 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (trans. Wilhelm C. Linss; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 214.
- 13 Luz, Matthew, 217.
- 14 Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 29-30; Hendrickx Herman. *Sermon on the Mount*, (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1979), 19-20; Jan Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation*, (GNS 14; Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1985), 62-64.
- 15 Robert A. Guelich, *The Matthean Beatitudes: Entrance Requirements or Eschatological Blessings?* *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976), 431-34; Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew 1, 1-7. International Critical*

- Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 439-40.
- 16 Mark Allen Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," *CBQ* 58, no. 3 (July 1996), 461-79; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-political and Religious Reading* (Bangalore: TPI, 2007), 131.
 - 17 Gundry H. Robert, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 69.
 - 18 It occurs 237 times in the Hebrew OT. Johannes, Botterweck G. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT), (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapid. Mich., 1977) 15. 13-49.
 - 19 TDOT, 15:14-49, 26.
 - 20 Geoffrey W. Bromiley. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapid. Mich., 1985), 2.400-402, 406-417.
 - 21 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 457.
 - 22 Guilech, Sermon, 91; Betz, Sermon, 138.
 - 23 Betz, Sermon on the Mount, 139.
 - 24 Guilech, Sermon, 92.
 - 25 Guilech, Sermon, 92.

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Book Reviews:

1. *The Ethics of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Proposals for a Legal Framework for India*. Author: J. Charles Davis. Published by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2014. ISBN: 978-81-269-1870-6.

Embryonic stem cell research is still at the center of the controversy which opened up in 1998 with the report by J. Thomson and colleagues on the first successful culturing of human embryonic stem cells. Presented as one of the ultimate conquests of science, and promoted on the promises of future clinical applications in degenerative medicine, this research, however, contained one drawback, of an ethical nature. This due to the necessary destruction of human embryos - which would have otherwise developed into healthy children had no obstacle been placed on their path - in order to obtain human embryonic stem cells (hESCs). In fact, this original problem, intrinsically linked to hESCs research, served also for scientists as a sort of “trojan horse” to pull down an ethical barrier which seemed to limit or oppose the “freedom of scientific research”.

This ideological aspect of the “hESCS research movement”, which went well beyond the scientific and medical aspects of the matter, explained the vivacity of the debate on hESCs research which has agitated parliaments, international organizations, political movements, and religions for decades, regardless of the fact that hESCs research has never reached the goal of clinical applications. A similar ideological pressure on health institutions and government bodies, “in the name of science and for the good of humanity”, can be found in history when the theme of the necessary sterilization of the “unfits” was promoted by medical authorities such as H. H. Laughlin and served as a *Trojan horse* for giving power and authority to the eugenic movement in the United States, Alberta (Canada), Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Nazi Germany where it triumphed. The opposition against the (false) premises of the eugenists had a hard time making her voice heard, because of the great prestige and authority of the eugenists scientists.

As regards the hESCs debate, however, it should have developed by now into a more peaceful and consensual approach. . Indeed, the introduction within the stem cell field of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) by S. Yamanaka and his colleagues in July of 2006, has changed the deal. These iPSCs are indeed identical in every respect to the ESCs, except for their being obtained by reprogramming somatic cells, without any ethical problem. Besides, iPSCs have largely demonstrated their superiority over hESCs in allowing the creation of cellular models of pathologies for pharmaceutical studies, and can be used in patients for regenerative medicine without the problem of immunological rejection that hinder the clinical application of hESCs. The value of this discovery has been rightly recognized through the attribution of the 2012 Nobel Price of Medicine to S. Yamanaka and J. Gurdon - the fathers of the “reprogramming” technique. But, even without taking into consideration these iPSCs, the successes obtained in the applications of non embryonic stem cells - somatic stem cells such as the hematopoietic stem cells from bone marrow or blood, umbilical stem cells, amniotic stem cells - to patients, starting in 1968, should have reoriented the stem cell debate to a more constructive direction, a long time ago.

Father J. Charles Davis, in his book “on the ethics of human embryonic stem cell research: proposals for a legal framework for India”, gives us a very well documented, balanced, serene and useful document, which indeed should serve in India for establishing the necessary ethical basis for appropriated guidelines on stem cell research. He rightly bases his ethical discussion on the solid ground of biology, recalling to mind the reality of this fascinating tiny being which is the embryo, despite his/her delusive appearance of being a simple little ball of cells. In reality, when dealing with the embryo, we have an extremely active and fast-growing, fully fledged organism, which finds in himself/herself the aim of his/her development, the molecular keys for said development, and the biological tools to realize it, in a constant operation of self-correction and preparation for the subsequent steps, each step preparing the next. Today, epigenetics explains in a better way why this biological unit is so special among all other types of organisms, and the way this “teleonomic” character of the embryo affirms itself since the onset - that is since

the formation of the zygote through fertilization of the ovocyte. The selective genomic activation which epigenetics realizes in the early embryo is both the result and the expression of the drive that animates this embryo, from the moment of fertilization.

From this biological base, Father Charles Davis goes on to unfold, in a very enlightened way, the various aspects of hESC's research debate, with the arguments that each part brings to it, especially the "gradualist" view on the construct of personhood which is much present in the minds of scientist, today. He also presents the proper points of view of the different religions on hESC's research, the differences between their appraisal coming from the respective understandings of the biological status of the embryo, and therefore of the moral status that can be granted to him/her. A rich contribution appears in his book within the presentation of the various regulations or guidelines on hESC's research that have been developed, at the national or international level.

The aim of Father Charles Davis' contribution is to propose an adequate legal framework, based on an ethical ground, which could be adopted in India, and would take into account the Indian traditions, and their ethical implications along centuries of history, up to now. Since much of these traditions and implications come from natural morality, that is the call to do good and avoid evil which is basic to all human beings, there can be an agreement between these Indian traditions and ethical principles and the ethical "western" principles - much influenced by Christianity. However, today, "bioethics" has taken its distance from natural morality, giving greater room to the individual's autonomy, and less room to the value of human life and basic human rights, and this is in part due to the influence of the utilitarian current. The present trend in this matter born in the "western" world may complicate the debate; but, above all for India, with all its historical and spiritual heritage, the open question that has to be considered regarding the hESC's debate, financing and promotion, is whether or not this country of great importance can afford shifting the debate from a strictly utilitarian and economy-based point of view, to a more human-based view in which the dignity of our humanity can be taken into account.

His Excellency, Rev. Msgr Ignacio Carrasco de Paula.
President, Pontifical Academy for Life, Vatican City, Rome

2. *The Dynamics of Development: Negations and Negotiations*. Editor: Kieth D'souza. Published by Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) and Asian Trading Corporation (ATC), Bangalore, 2014. ISBN 978-81-7056-713-5

‘Development’, a term debated due to its varied definitions, is often used, abused, misused and even overused due to various vested interests. It is an oft-negated cum negotiated word, which adorns the glossary of only a few in the book of history. Many a question is answered and many an answer is questioned in the history of development. We never call something as development unless it is holistic. Anything that is rapid and instantaneous is considered to be cancerous. A lopsided development, by and for the power centres is always perilous to the future of a nation. Whereas farsighted and people oriented developmental tasks will take the nation to newer heights.

The Dynamics of Development: Negations and Negotiations is a resourceful and thought-provoking book. It is a compilation of the papers presented at the ACPI Annual Research Seminar in St. Charles Seminary, Nagpur on 25-28 October, 2013 by 21 reputed philosophers from all over India. This is a rare collection of thoughts that was pooled and edited together with utmost care; compiled as a single a volume by Kieth D'souza, and published by Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) and Asian Trading Corporation (ATC) in 2014.

This book, though seems to question many of the ‘defined answers’ of the existing so called ‘developmental structures’ of the society, literally provokes the readers not only to find an answer but ‘to be an answer’, by being a pulling force to draft a new history. It echoes a clarion call to *google* our search in the web of our life from the optics of the neglected or negotiated. These articles colour this book with different crayons of thoughts and a diverse textures of reflections. *In his editorial Keith D'Souza writes,*

Some of the papers demonstrate a appreciative assessment of development measures and strategies, while others independently negate these with more critical treatments of both ideologies and practices associated with development processes and projects. Many of the articles attempt to negotiate between these extreme

positions, in order to work out more holistic and realistic mediatory approaches. These attempts at negotiation take into account the pitfalls and collateral damage associated with development, but at the same time do not fight shy of the necessity to project a future that is proactive, productive and sensitive to various factors of development.

The articles are classified under four major headings: (1) The Development Problematic, (2) Eco-Political Development, (3) Socio-Cultural Development and (4) Psycho-Spiritual Development. Swami Sachidananda Bharathi, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal and Victor Ferrao, whose articles are queued first in this book, set the framework to quench our philosophical thirst from the rest of the articles. Martin Sebastian Kallungal, George Rajmohan, Sebastian Thomas Palamoottil and John Peter Vallabadoss analyse the Indian models of development in economics and politics, starting with *Arthasastra*, Gandhi, Nehru and ending with Amartya Sen and contemporary ones. They emphasize that the vision of Indian Economic-Political Development, though remains in nostalgic and utopian realm for many centuries, are still realistic and attainable. Nishant A. Irudayadason analyses the geopolitical systems that have given a new shape to the global economy and studies the relation between geopolitics and development, whereas George Panthanmackel sheds lights on justice for holistic development from the history lane till today.

Vincent Aint, Stephen Jayard and Selvaraj display the perils of the marginalized Indigenous and women sections, and migrated communities in India, who are caught between the devilish notion of 'progress or perish'. Their analysis zoom out the reality what 'development' has done to these communities. Sekar Sebastian bounces upon the term 'development' and criticizes it for exploiting Mother Nature in the name of development. Whereas Robert Pen positively posts the developments in information revolution in India. Francis Arackal takes a panoramic view of development with the cultural magnifier and looks at it accordingly.

"While conquering the outerspace with our developmental tools, we need to conquer our innerspace too," posits Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "And for this we need to formulate alternative

theories of human development from our existential perspective” elaborates Keith D’Souza. Devasia M. Antony elucidates the Gandian concept of ‘Sva’ of Svaraj, focussing on the philosophical assemblage of the hermeneutic contours that constitute the polyvalent canon of Svaraj. The last three articles by Kurian Alumkal, James D. Chellappa and Ashley Miranda dwell in the spectrum of religious affinities focusing on Buddhism and Christianity that cater to human and humane development.

These articles make us take a tour into the cultural, economic, religious, political and societal spectrums of human development, by piercing through the history with a hope of walking into a really developed world in future. They beckon the readers to reflect upon the reality, so as to refract from the unhealthy developments and to resonate with the true human development.

Clement Jesudoss

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune

3. *Deconstructing Tourism: A challenge of Justice for the Church - A Theological Perspective Reading from the Global South.* Editors: Caesar D’Mello, Wati Longchar and Philip Mathew. Published by Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, Taiwan and Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research, Kolkata, 2014. ISBN: 1682-6086.

Tourism is one of the biggest industries on this planet earth and is steadily attempting even to go beyond our planet earth through space tourism. It is one of the fastest growing industries. It often passes off as a non-polluting and green industry. The myths about the environmental as well as communitarian impacts of tourism have been de-mythologized by several scholars across the globe, particularly those belonging to the global south. But unfortunately, tourism is largely thought to be a boon and a tool of liberation for the poor when in reality it puts tremendous pressure on the environment and the marginalized communities. The Book, *Deconstructing Tourism: A challenge of Justice for the*

Church - A Theological Perspective Reading from the Global South, Edited by Caesar D'Mello, Wati Longchar and Philip Mathew is timely and relevant. The views mass tourism from an ethico-theological perspective in an ecumenical spirit. It appears to be a unique as well as maiden venture of the church that attempts to give a theological response to the phenomena of mass tourism. The studies that comprise this book demonstrate that the kind of tourism promoted in our society is not a blessing and fills in the lacunae that remained unaddressed in the Church though its framework of theology, ethics, social analysis and missiological concerns.

This is a fruit of a serious ecumenical theological consultations that include the international consultation on theology of tourism in Chennai and consultation on Church and development: tourism in North East, both organized by Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) in 2001 and academic conference at SCEPTRE, Kolkata, 2013. Scholars from different theological communities have collaborated to evolve a theological response to the profit oriented tourism industry that is riding on the wings of globalization, neo-liberalisation and free-market. One can find a critical understanding and analysis of mass tourism from the preferential option of the marginalized communities and environmentally responsible locus in the theologization attempted in the book. This book qualifies as a tool of theological learning that promises to enable theological communities to comprehend, introspect and critique their response to the rapidly growing mass tourism. The ethico-theological imperative rising in the context of mass tourism challenges our theological institutions, associations and communities to develop a profound gospel response to the objectification of humans and God.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part is primarily expository in nature. Comprising of Seven Chapters that manifest how mass tourism dresses itself as development while it marginalizes, dehumanizes and commodifies the people and divert their resources and use them as raw material to create wealth for a small elitist minority that is preying on the tourism pie. The second part comprises of eight chapters and is profoundly concerned to inspire missiological responses and

authentic praxis for justice in the context of emerging dehumanising conditions as a result of mass tourism. The book as whole offers a substantive theological critic to the footprint of tourism in the global south. The social, moral and environmental costs of tourism challenge the theological communities to evolve contextual theological responses that open up new possibilities for us to influence mass tourism and bring about a transformative people based and people driven tourism. Hence, we can no longer close our eyes to the world of tourism. It is imperative to all theological communities to respond authentically so that we are enabled to incarnate the gospel in our society marked by global tourism.

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4. *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe*. Author: Joseph Mathew. Published by Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 2014. ISBN 978-81-7086-693-0.

The author, Joseph Mathew is a Capuchin priest and a renowned professor of philosophy for the past several years. He teaches philosophy in various seminaries in India and abroad. In 2010 he authored the book *In Search of the Divine: New Essays in Philosophical Theology* which discussed the “God-question” from a philosophical-theological viewpoint. The new book, *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe* is yet another brilliant contribution from him to scientific cosmology and philosophical theology concerning the genesis of the universe. Specifically it is an in-depth study to understand the origin of the universe with its important cosmic structures and events, its evolution over billions of years and finally its meaning and purpose.

Aristotle's description of humans as “beings that by nature desire to know,” portrays the most fundamental characteristic of us. We are essentially seekers. At the highest level we seek answers to the “big questions” like how does this universe with its fascinating

immensity and enormity originate? Does it have a cause like other natural events? Does its physical evolution over billions of years finely tuned with purpose and meaning? The task of this book is “searching answers to such ultimate questions” (Prologue, xiv). These questions are answered from the point of view of religion, philosophy and modern science.

The book is written in the form of a story from prologue to epilogue. “The book develops the plot of the story with many ‘characters’ such as the universe itself, galaxies, stars, the solar system, the Sun, the Earth and Finally man. Hence it can be read as a story from the beginning to the end” (prologue, xiv). The flavour of the story, its simple and clear language and the logical flow of text enable the readers to journey through the marvels and mysteries of ‘The Great Saga of the Universe’ at ease in spite of the complexity of the subjects dealt in this book.

The title of the book under review, *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe*, underlines the three main concerns of the author which also depicts the three fold division of the book respectively: “A History of the Search for the Cosmic Origins”, “The Great Saga of the Universe” and “In Search of Cosmic Foundations”. The first part which is again subdivided into five chapters and many subsections, narrates the ‘searching questions’ about the origins of universe. These questions are answered first by the great religious myths, then by philosophers and cosmologists. This part introduces the readers with ‘Creation Myths’ of world religions and major cultures, the ‘teleological cosmology of Aristotle and other western classical philosophers and various modern and contemporary scientific theories such as Newtonian Mechanical Cosmology, Einstein’s Relativity Cosmology, Quantum Physics, etc. These complex ideas and highly mathematical theories of universe are presented with utter simplicity, and yet without losing their precision and accuracy.

The second part, unlike the ‘search’ questions’ of the first part, narrates the ‘great saga’ of what actually happened in the beginning and in the course of the evolution of our universe. It starts with the creation of the universe in the Big Bang, then enters into the saga of galaxies which “provided the space for cosmic objects such as quasars, black holes, stars, interstellar gas clouds,

planets and finally living beings like the humans” (cf. p. 129). Four chapters, following a logical sequence, describes the formation of intricate cosmological objects and phenomena: i) the saga of origin and fate of the universe, ii) the saga of galaxies, iii) the saga of stars and iv) the saga of solar system leading to the arrival of humans. The narration even goes up to the cosmic fate that awaits us. The complex theories of scientific cosmology are told here in an exciting way as the author unravels up-to-date scientific theories one by one.

The scientific searching of “The Great Saga of the Universe” raises some ultimate questions. If we stop with science, this searching becomes inconclusive and incomplete. Hence in the third part with the title, “In Search of Cosmic Foundations”, the author searches for answers to the ultimate questions of our universe. And his search terminates at the “Cosmic Designer.’ This part is basically a philosophical appropriation of the modern and contemporary cosmological theories of the origin and the evolution of the universe. It has two chapters, the first deals with “proximate foundations” and the second one with “ultimate foundations”. What makes this part most interesting is the fact that the author ventures into some ultimate philosophical speculation of the universe here: “There is apparently a direction to the whole cosmic evolution, namely, humanity. In fact “Man on Earth” was the last section of “The Saga of the Universe”. This does not appear to be a mere accident. For, contemporary physicists and cosmologists have stumbled upon a number of cosmic coincidences which render our universe is 'just right' for human place. It is quite atypical and extraordinary because conditions are just right for the existence of man. Hence, a number of cosmologists have attempted to answer the 'why' question in terms of humanity, and have proposed the 'anthropic principle.’” Thus the author makes a theistic interpretation of the ultimate foundation of the cosmic history in the final part of the book which he believes as valid as the scientific interpretation of the cosmic saga.

I consider *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe* is an outstanding book, combining both scientific depth and metaphysical insights. As a whole it is a saga of the physical creation and evolution of the universe with plots and sub-plots and

with numerous cosmic characters narrated in the form of a logical, simple and unified story. It provides the inquiring readers of cosmology a good resource of knowledge about the various mysteries of the universe. For students and professors of physics, philosophy of science and cosmology this book will be an insightful reading.

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