

*An Alternative Paradigm to Cognize Power:
Spiritual Subscription*

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Abstract

The paper situates power in the hand of spiritualism which guides our daily activities starting with highly intellectual to simple domestic activity. These activities are seamed through this inherent disposition of cognitive power and blossom with the cultivation of insight in all living beings. Insight is nourished by the feeling of wonder for small things around us.

The inconsistency, contradiction and incoherence defy all rules of causation, giving us a strange self-shattered feeling. We either try to side with one option or combat with the other. The art of cracking a problem is concerned with judiciously holding two opposite ideas in tension, which is described as 'middle path'. The paper defines spiritualism as a tool for channelizing this power-flow as the alternative way that can transform human instinct to a different height.

Keywords: Madhyam Panthā, art of cracking a problem, insight, subscribing-power.

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Introduction

The fact cannot be denied that there was a connection between religion and spiritualism. Religion, as understood, is a relationship between human and divine being which again is established with a package of rituals within a systematic framework. It, strictly speaking, hardly allows any modification on the part of the agent. On the other hand 'spiritualism' signifies a kind of mystical state of being, beyond one's comprehension yet within one's apprehension, because one has the powerful insight to acknowledge and use it, though one is not always aware of it. In almost all religions of the world there comes a point when a few protagonist groups raise their voice against such kind of conventional way of following religious dogmas and customs. With the radical brake from religion and with the inception of scientific thinking, the relationship between the religion and spiritualism is gradually weakened and now this religious practice has been called in question by the rationalist thinkers as blind faith and screened prejudices. Thus between these two extremes there emerges a third party who try to explore a new kind of spiritualism in their own way, coming out of this shell of dogmatic circle and also from extreme rationalism. They opt for some explanation, which can be sought through literature, music, painting or social work etc. Their approach to the incomprehensible via music, literature, art etc are the tools which allow them to play with sounds, words and colours etc. They begin to question the conventional notions and ideas to explore their own meaning and significance.

In a word, they have no faith in traditional beliefs and attitude, but they do not hesitate to borrow ideas from the tradition and improvise their own ideas to create something new out of the old ideas. For them, and I agree, that spiritualism is a growth of Self as it evolves out of religion yet it goes beyond its periphery. No doubt the structure was percolated to the generations as a belief system as an unquestionable authority but gradually it takes the shape of as their 'way of life', sheltering their ideas and providing them 'faith' in their own work.

Religion takes man's thought outside the domain of empirical world and asks to take a leap in an unknown world which opens the gate for infinite possibilities. It is like the mathematical concept of number, where counting numbers opens up the gate towards infinite number. Similarly, innovation and improvisation opens up the new vista in the field of music, literature and art with the same passion as one used to have for religious activities.

In this paper, therefore, I have tried to suggest a new meaning to 'spiritualism', the growth of which started building around the so-called rational thinking yet it goes away from that. This reconstruction of 'spiritualism' in our own authentic sense is to be found beyond conventional and arbitrary way of practicing religious rites and rituals as well as radical opposition of it.

Natural tendency of human mind

In this section I would like to draw attention to some of those natural features of human mind which we must agree to share.

Firstly, it is true that human mind has the natural disposition to ask questions whenever one finds any event or incident occurring other than in the regular course of events. For example, fire always burns. But if, by chance, it so happens that in a particular case fire does not burn, one will raise the legitimacy of the fire, since he has a natural tendency to explore the regularity in natural events and search for a uniform order in the world. When he does not find regularity in events he searches the reason for that.

Again, it is also true that all human beings have a natural disposition to look beyond 'what is given to them'. Man has a constant and irresistible desire to look for more and more explanations and various interpretations, sometimes agreeable and at other time disagreeable.

Secondly, one cannot ignore the fact that man has limited and finite power to find out the reasons and causes of every natural events. In our hurried and superficial view of things, many of these things and thoughts appear simple enough because we do not investigate deeply into them unless there is a need for it. We go through life pristine, unless the need arises and we are forced to realize that they are far from being simple. They display such air of complexities that we did not dream of, and so we are naturally surprised. The very simple example, I have found in Russell's book, 'The Problem of Philosophy'. The table, on which one writes, never seems to be a problematic table unless its legs are broken, weak and somehow uncomfortable. It is taken for granted that 'it is a table' and one can work smoothly. It is very much obvious that 'it is a table and nothing else'. But as soon as one asks the question, 'Is it really so, because I do not perceive the 'whole' table as such'? What I perceive is a part of it always and never the whole table having four legs and a plane top over it where things can take rest and so on'. A layman thinks that such a query is an absurd query and there is no need to waste time over this issue. But once one starts thinking over the problem, one gets puzzled and confused. One does not know how to tackle the question. This is the genuine philosophical problem for a philosopher, who is in the habit of facing such so-called 'absurd' questions. Time and again a layman too, now in this case, becomes the victim of such problem. The problem of table may be a theoretical problem but when one finds oneself in a life-problem that may bring disaster to one's life. As we find in the *Bhagavadgita*. Arjuna was at loss whether to fight with his kith and kin or to tolerate the injustice done to them. Lord Krishna, his friend and metaphorically his conscience that advised him to 'go and fight for the justice'. This paper attempts to situate power in the hand of 'spiritualism' vis-à-vis this insight which allows one to handle such diabolical cases. This power of spiritualism, if one goes on realizing it, guides one in every activities starting with highly intellectual to simple domestic activity. These activities are seamed through this inherent disposition of power and blossom with the cultivation of insight in all living beings.

Do we not design new fashionable clothes from the old style, jewellery from the traditional customary designs, reinterpret the same literary piece in hundred of ways, adapt the classics in different styles, cooking in various ways different from the old

ones and so on. The social world that each individual inhabits is called life-world, which can be changed according to one's own choices and demands. One's liberty to do that operates in without reference to any authoritative injunction from the overhead. Just as post-modernist claims that every text can be operated in different ways by different readers; there is no fixed point of reference for the text, so there is no formula, no definite set of mathematical rules for life. The rules are created according to our needs and demands and then again can be broken according to different demands and needs. Thus every time rules are broken and then created. The previous saturated, preconceived notions of structure is dismantled and an individual is exposed to challenge the hitherto suppressed 'otherness' or the other side of the experience. Therefore, search for creation remains an everlasting search and eternal quest for something new other than the given to us.

Assimilation of inconsistency, contradiction and incoherence in life:

As we advance in life we find that life becomes more complex and complicated. There are inconsistency, contradiction and incoherence in our thought and activities. We either try to side with one option and combat with the other, or we try to compromise between them, or accept them as our destiny. Very few among us try to balance them judiciously and accept the fact that life is like that! How much we are sure about our death and we go on repeating the simple statement 'All men are mortal' many times a day in the class-room, but how many of us realize it! There is a story in the Epic *Mahabharata*. Once Yudhisthira, the elder brother among Pandavas, was asked by Yaksha, who was Dharma in disguise, that what is the most surprising truth in man's life? Yudhisthira replies:

*Ahani ahani bhutāni gacchanti yama mandiram /
Śeṣā sthiratvam kiṃ āścaryamataḥ param //*

(Every day so many mortal beings are going to the temple of death yet one does not believe that one will die one day.)

The above inconsistent situation in life is so strange that it defies all rules of normal way of thinking, which demands that one should always think of that ultimate destiny that one is going to receive. But the other side of one pushes one for living a normal life, and thus giving us a strange feeling which we have to cope with. The author of *Pancatantra*, moral fables written by Vishnusharma writes:

*Aho khalubhujaṅgasya viparīto vādhakramaḥ /
Anyasya ḍaśati śrotram anyam pranairviyujyate //*

(Though a wicked man is often compared to a serpent but he functions very differently from the reptile: for, when a serpent bites a person, it is that very person who dies; but when a wicked person bites the ear of A, it is strangely the B that dies as a result.)

This 'law of strangeness' is applicable, on reflection, in all situations of life. Though it is always necessary on one's part to make the phenomena plausible and not arbitrary, yet one does not find any explanation to one's utmost effort and one has no way but to surrender to the destiny. For example, 16 seconds before touching the ground, the Columbia plane was crashed, taking 7 lives at a time, when they were in

their height of glorious career. Why this accident? Why can't it wait for 16 seconds only? Science will answer many questions, how it happened, what were the causes behind it and many more like it, but why? No one finds the answer, because the answer is difficult too. Perhaps science may answer the question raised in a very causal manner that because of certain mistakes or fault, the incident occurred. A psychologist may say it is an impractical question which cannot be answered and one has to accept it what has happened. But that does not satisfy one, because one wants the answer of 'why'?

There is a story heard from Socrates which intends to teach that man's tragedy lies in the fact that he loves, not hates the tethers that bind him to a muddy worldly life. It is a strange thing, but true nevertheless, that if one is given the chance to exchange one's suffering and sorrows from happy and fortunate life, one opt for the same life in which one is and never look for that heavenly life. Perhaps this is also a kind of acceptance and surrender to life situations. We have no rational explanation for such acceptance; perhaps one has realized one's limit of power! When one comes to this point of 'realization of limit' I call it a kind of spiritualism, because I know that I cannot go beyond that. It is like showing my own picture in a mirror to push me to power which I possess and I mentioned as finite capacity earlier. There enters the feeling of 'wonder'. The famous German Philosopher Immanuel Kant's famous saying as found in *Critique of Practical Reason* comes to one's mind – Two things fill the mind with ever-new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily they are reflected; the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

'Wonder' can serve as a powerful tool to understand the environment around us. When I say 'limit of realisation' it means limit of cognitive power. We cannot know anything and everything of this world and once we reach that saturating point one enters into the domain of wonder which opens another channel of mind and should not be ignored by mere rationalist thinkers. Suppose a person, as David Hume would have said, though endowed with the strongest faculties of reason and reflection, be brought on a sudden into this world. He would, indeed, immediately observe a continued succession of objects and one event following another. But he would not be able to discover anything farther. Suppose again that he has acquired more experience, yet he has not acquired any idea of knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other.

Children often ask the question: Why something is called by a particular name, say, table by the word 'table'.

Alice in Wonderland puts beautifully:

"But tell me your name?"

"My name is Alice, but---"

"It is a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty said.

"What does it mean?" Humpty Dumpty interrupted.

"Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

"Of course it must....my name means the shape I am—and a good handsome shape. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost."

Another interesting example—

‘There is a glory for you.’

‘I don’t know what you mean by “glory”,’ Alice said

‘Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant ‘there is a nice knock-down argument for you!’

‘But “glory” does not mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’ Alice objected.

‘When I use a word, it just means what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less’

‘The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things’, Alice said.

‘The question is which is to be Master—that is all’.

Humpty Dumpty continued, ‘they have a temper, some of them –particularly verbs, they are the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability that is what I say!’

‘What that means,’ Alice said.

‘That we had enough of that subject.’

It is also true that in a deep philosophical sense all difficulties encountered by man are intended to help him in some way or other. Certain factors which look very much like obstacles can sometimes be harnessed by a resourceful ephemeral to serve him as accessories to help him. It is an unaccepted way of life that opens new channel in life. Almost every hardship, obstacle or disability can be converted into an advantage by a person of flexible will. I remember Immanuel Kant’s light dove cleaving the air in free flight might imagining that its flight would have been easier in empty space. But lo! It could not take a flight at all in empty space; it will fall down every time it tries to stand, because there is no gravitational force. So, significantly enough, it turns out to be a most convenient stepping stone that leads the dove to fly in the air with gravitational force. This is also a kind of ‘realization of limit’ equivalent to spiritualism.

Now what one has to do for this realization one has to undergo a rigorous understanding of oneself. David Hume reflects, if a man is asked why one believes any particular matter of fact, which one relates, one must tell some reasons and this reason will be some other fact, connected with it. But as one cannot proceed after this manner, infinitum, one must at last terminate to one’s memory or senses; or must allow that one’s belief is entirely without foundation.

One has to put oneself under various situations and circumstances so that one can realize what one can do and what one cannot. One has to undergo several trials and travails to bring out one’s potentiality. However, it is not practically plausible for every human being to undergo all kinds of trials and troubles. Some tests may be dangerous and may be life threatening. For that, one has to see the nature carefully where one finds all kinds of contradictions and inconsistencies, still one appreciates them and enjoys them. Read this verse and you will find enough pleasure and consistent coherence among the natural phenomena---

*Sthānuḥ svayaṃ mūlavihīna eva putro viśākho ramaṇi tvaparṇā /
Paropanitaih kusumairajasram phalatyabhīṣtam kimidam vicitram //*

The poem is included in the anthology the *Subhāṣitaratnabhaṇḍāra* which has a

number of negatives yet the verse ends on a positive note: they are presented that way through a play on words.

A third stanza in the same compilation also embroiders together a number of impossible, in order to please the reader and generate aesthetic pleasure with a piece of capricious nonsense.

*Mūkārabdham kamapi vadhiraḥ ślokāmakarṇayanti
śradhālustam vilikhiti kuṇiḥ ślāghayā vikṣte 'ndhaḥ /
Abhyārohatyahaha sahasā paṅgurapyadriśrangam
Sāndrālāsyah śiśubharanato mandamāyānti bandhyāḥ //*

If one closely follows nature one finds enough contradictions and incoherence there with one's judgemental supervision, yet if one observes with non-judgemental perspective one will derive enough material to keep one wondering and wandering. It is said *Vismayaḥ cittavistārayitās*, that is, a wondering mind expands its horizon. Newspaper and other mass media of today exploit this capacity of wonder by offering sensational write-ups. 'Don't read this! If you do not care for quality' begins an advertisement which naturally everybody will read. 'If you stress and care for value quality, we would recommend you to get so and, the quality colour T.V. for quality conscious people.' Such is the power of 'wonder' that immediately draws our attention to a new and unique view.

A way to new paradigm of spiritualism

Looking at from this perspective a new paradigm has to be evolved within the very process of differentiating itself from the traditional self enclosure system so-called religious/spiritual model and that of radical rationalistic model. The common issue between the two models is to reduce the tension of human situation and existence in which we live. The old religious model has to be redefined and replaced with aesthetic spiritualism. Keeping intact the basic concept of spirituality, that is, thinking beyond the given, the new model suggests a rationalistic construction of 'irrational element' of human faculty. Since, too much exposure to 'matter of fact' and so called logical constants confine us to a prison house and makes us dreary and lackluster, just as life in a modern city is delimited by the narrow cabins and keeps the mind in isolation.

The unique character of this kind of spiritualism that endorses 'wonder' in its lap opposes the Law of exclusion, that is, disjunction in the form of "either-or", or logic of ethical dilemma, "to be or not to be", logic of "negativity" and the logic of contradictions, that is, binary opposition of true and false, logic of mathematical conjunction, that is, logic of aggregate. It, finally, accepts the law of identity which is inclusive in nature employed by internal thought.

The (irrational) Wonder emancipates us from this prison and enables us to taste the joy of freedom. The aesthetic spiritualism, of literature, music and art removes the layer of familiarity from the things around us with the result that we begin to look upon them with new eyes of wonder. Thus, British empiricist David Hume, cried out, it is true that one is ignorant of the manner in which bodies operate on each other; their force or energy is entirely incomprehensible. But he further reflects, one is not equally ignorant of the matter or force by which a mind operates, either on itself or on

body. Thus, following Hume, it can be said that all one knows is one's profound ignorance that gives one joy of ignorance.

There may be some who may claim that such tendency to escape routes tends to ruin mental health. On the contrary, I would say, wonder-feeling is the guardian of our mental health. In today's life of tensions, frustration, literature, music and art allow wonder to act in order to sustain the sanctity of the mind. It enlarges our horizon, elevates the level of thinking and introduces other perspectives too.

Balancing with our Belief-system

The tendency of 'feeling wonder' occurs when one finds a discrepancy between the stimulus received and the schema of Belief system, previous recorded system that we already possess. The unusualness, uniqueness, unfamiliarity are the very stuff of which wonder is made of, that brings purpose and meaning to life. How strange it is that the same air which carries the clouds, again brings them back to the earth (as rain). So, indubitably, the mind acts as a great road-block and yet it becomes the stepping stone to elevate one for emancipation.

*Vāyunā nīyate meghaḥ punastenaivanīyate/
Manasā kalpyate bandhahmokṣastenaiva kalpyate//*

A coherent and consistent narration focuses on so-called conflicts and looks at them with plural-perception. It says that life does never follow any rule, yet it follows rule. There is no such dichotomy of good-bad, right-wrong and beautiful-ugly. What looked bad initially proves good and what looked good proves bad in the sequel, yielding surprise through misappraisal values. Our dreams are not fulfilled, our hopes are belied and we feel frustrated; but time shows how it was better that our dreams were not fulfilled and our hopes belied, we do not know what is good and bad for us. Thus I have found, there is nothing like true and false and nothing like good and bad, we are living in a twilight zone which is a play of light and dark. Time and again it is proved and found, yet we do not believe.

The strange thing is we believe that there is a dichotomy of good and bad etc., yet in life we never find so. This surplus of meaning is, as if overflowing and influx in the same internal system that we have inherited. This kind of spiritualism has moved into a new phase which is a voyage of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain open ended nature of reality/event/ incident. It carries the effacement of the boundary of the dichotomy between traditional spiritualism which is rooted in every religion yet the new model defies that model improvises a new thought. It includes all contradictions, negation, exclusion in our everyday life, and it goes beyond that. The collapse of the hierarchical distinction celebrates the life with plural-perspective, and emphasizes more on the process than on the product. That is to say, achieving the goal is as enjoyable as 'how does one achieve it'. It does not set itself in rigid relations and mathematical properties. A new cascade of reality emerges which goes beyond the elementary dichotomy of subjective and objective experience. The categorical dichotomy of subject and object is rejected and is shown to be interrelated in a functional way. The pendulum shifts not from subject to object or in reverse order but it absorbs both subject and object to a higher level--- from plurality within uniformity, flexibility within the rigidity, periphery within the centre, wonder impregnated within the crude reality.

There is no one model of solution for all issues. Just as Hegel sought the solution in spirit, Marx opted for proletariat, and modern cosmologists aim at universality and singularity theory for the solution of the cosmological birth, the alternative model searches poly-solution. It is the result of choice that one has made for one's search. In binary oppositions, there is always a conflict which remains irresolvable. Every opposition introduces a supplement to enrich and again a fresh opposition is introduced. But if one looks at this 'opposition' as the element that supplements, one can accommodate this other element in one's fold to enhance one's treasure.

An alternative way of living-life:

The art of living successfully consists of being able to hold two opposite ideas in tension, so that harmonious melody can be produced from them. This balancing act of opposites is sometimes described as *Madhyam Panthā* in Buddhist philosophy or the 'Golden Mean' in Aristotle's work. For example, one must make long-term plans as if one is going to live forever; and then, to conduct oneself in such a manner as if one is going to die tomorrow. Now, these two opposites seem to be too difficult to combine but not impossible. One has to train to hit the mid-point.

Conclusion

Thus, the present paper defines spiritualism as a tool for channelizing this power-flow within the framework, yet transmitting it beyond that framework so that one can develop the insight to understand the nodes and knots of one's life-web. This alternative way out is the nesting ground for spiritualism that can transform human instinct to the height of spontaneity! Surprisingly there is an old Sanskrit verse quoted in the *Hitopadeśa* advocating this set of opposite concepts. It says that life is non-eternal and very momentary yet if one is asked to lead unethical life, one should eternally refuse to do so. The beauty of the use of the word 'eternal' and 'non-eternal' is remarkable here. One is amazed to find that the truth is created every moment one reflects over the reality that gives us joy and happiness than rooting one to the adherence of eternal truth. If we would have known it from the beginning, we would have lost the charm of the mystery and surprises of life that blossom before us gradually---

*Ajaramaravat prājño vidyāmartha ca sādhayeta /
Gṛhita iva keśeṣu mṛtyunā dharmācareta //*

Let me conclude with the note that changes in modern physics, specially, quantum principles, have led us to view the world as an interconnected whole rather than a collection of mathematical parts. In this holistic worldview, the knower is connected to the known in an act of co-creation – a gifted power of spiritual subscription.

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