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# Relating Spirituality and Politics: Love, Marriage or Friendship?

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In one of his numerous speeches, Vivekananda, the herald of modern Hinduism announced, “The other great idea that the world wants from us today [...] is that eternal grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the whole universe [...]. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and spirituality”(Halbfass 1990: 231). Since then, the term spirituality, as the unique marker of Hinduism has gained increasing popularity in both ordinary usage and nationalist rhetoric. At the most general level, spirituality appears to signify an eclectic and experiential approach to the sacred in contrast to organized or doctrinal religion. Unlike Christianity or Islam, Hinduism is supposed to be not so much a religion but a ‘spiritual way of life’. In this context, we hear that ‘Hindu spirituality’ ought to inform and energize the Indian enactment of liberalism, secularism and democracy. Given the rise of militant Hindu nationalism, there is understandable suspicion about any attempt to relate Hindu spirituality and politics. But then, not all modern Hindu thinkers envisaged a militant Hindu nation; some simply attempted to anchor liberal ideals in Hindu spiritual traditions. Gandhi’s and Savarkar’s works are usually mined for marshalling arguments for and against this attempt. In this paper, I focus on relatively less known writers such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari for reasons that will be clarified presently.

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Firstly, can we talk of Hindu spirituality at all given that there is no exact equivalent for the term spirituality in Indian languages? As Margaret Chatterjee points out, the absence of a word does not mean the absence of a concept except in case of material things (Chatterjee 1989: 19). The term 'spiritual' eludes easy definition and leads us to a 'cluster of concepts which net behavior, attitude, religious style and a lot more besides, all of which, however, center on the person and his world' (ibid.: 100). Undaunted by the diversity of roots and lack of a simple referent, Margaret Chatterjee writes that she 'finds in the wide scatter of usages and analogous terminologies evidence of a *need* which seems to be cross-cultural, a need to explore the trans-empirical [...] which embodies and points to goodness' (ibid.: 101). As a pointer to trans-empirical sources, it has seldom been used autonomously; the spiritual is usually distinguished from, if not opposed to the mortal or bodily or material realms. But this does not mean that the spiritual is identical to mystical, otherworldly things. Chatterjee points out that spiritual life and spirituality often meant transformative praxis within the secular world, an imperative that is forcefully affirmed in the Christian tradition (ibid.: 91 & 102).

There can be little doubt that Hindu texts and practices explore trans-empirical sources although the form and content of such sources evolved and changed considerably over time. The *Vedas* praise intra-cosmic deities and specify ritual performance, *Upanishads* underscore meditative gnosis with the 'One, without a Second' while the *Bhagavad Gita* recommends devotion and action. Hence there emerge several, sometimes conflicting vocabularies of ways, methods, obstacles and goals of religious life. However, the imperative of changing the world so as to reduce human misery and increase goodness is muted even in the worldliest of strands. Many orthoprax Hindus assiduously fulfill their duties at home and work but often regard such activity as hindering their religious pursuits.

In contrast, recent appropriations of Hindu ideas and symbols may be regarded as spiritual in that they emphasize the transformative aspect of the spiritual quest, especially in the socio-political realm. Whether it is canonical writers such as Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Tilak or Aurobindo or saint-activists such as Gandhi or Vinoba or Dada Dharmadhikari, all avow that spirituality should lead to ameliorative praxis. Proceeding from unorthodox readings of non-dualistic Vedanta, most of these figures envision a spiritualized politics where institutions of state and civil society would be deepened or even superseded by voluntary cooperation and genuine self-rule at all levels. They all freely invoke an end-state of universal peace, world community and universal trusteeship over resources. In the mean time, conflict and hatred have only to be removed and love will shine in and through socially responsible agents and actions.

As an outgrowth of the colonial past and national liberation movement, spiritual politics is not uniquely Indian. Liberation theology evolved in Latin America from a similar desire for genuine liberation and humane politics. Rooted in the pastoral needs of the poor, this theology spawned 'base communities' that reinterpreted the Bible and Christological doctrines through their ameliorative praxis. Liberation theologians drew upon Marxist analyses of development and dependency in hammering out their qualified support for violent revolutionary

struggles for social justice. While linking spirituality and social justice, many modern Hindu writers consciously distance themselves from Marxist methods of revolutionary action and insist upon compassion and non-violence towards the oppressor. Following Gandhi, many explicitly decry violent modes of political intervention. More importantly, advocates of spiritual politics in India have shied away from doctrinal grounding of their visions claiming that Hinduism emphasizes 'lived experience' over dogma.

However, the rhetoric of non-dogmatic and experiential Hindu spirituality itself has been shaped by the encounter with western Christianity and colonialism. Alongside the concepts of philosophy and religion, which also do not have exact equivalents in Indian languages, the concept of spirituality has become "a vehicle of self-understanding, of assimilation and "Westernization," but also self-affirmation against the West" (Halbfass 1990: 263). This attempt to construct Hindu spirituality distinguishes many English-speaking spokesmen from the more traditional gurus (say the Sankaracharyas) who speak relatively less to the west and more to the insider-devotees. While there are overlaps and common concerns, the former tend to be more self-conscious about the need to accommodate, universalize and reinterpret traditional Hindu ideas vis-à-vis the west.

In the existing literature, there are several analyses of the hermeneutic situation within which Hindu discourse evolved, the ambiguities and essentialism that haunt it, nostalgic and apologetic motivations of individual thinkers and the marginalization of subaltern strands of spirituality. Building upon some of these criticisms, I probe the sources and political visions underlying arguments for spiritual politics using the resources of political philosophy. After all, spiritual forces and their relationship to politics have been controversial ever since Socrates confessed his 'daimonic' inspiration. Socrates' daimon, as a new spiritual force, was immediately seen as a threat to the existing gods and liable to be abused by tyrannical and ambitious politicians. Plato's philosopher king, pulled by the daimon Eros poses a threat to the city with his radical antipathy to the body and family. In this connection, Aristotle's forceful delineation of the limits and possibilities of politics and the importance of practical reason in public affairs has been recalled time and again. This lesson from western philosophy may not be out of place because the thinkers considered in this paper often appeal to Plato along with Hegel and Kant. Further, the metaphysics that inspires the discourse of spiritual politics shares a lot in common with classical western thought. In other words, western thought may not provide doctrines or yardsticks but directs our attention to the problems integral to unleashing spiritual forces within the political realm.

In this paper, I explore the writings of three relatively less-known twentieth century proponents of 'spiritual politics' namely Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) and Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari (1878-1972). Their conceptions of spiritual politics are influenced by Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi who were the most notable Indian innovators in applying Hindu ideals to politics in this century. The main reason for choosing Coomaraswamy and Radhakrishnan is that they self-consciously deploy Hindu

texts and ideas in order to argue for a *philosophia perennis* and in this process, arrive at significantly different visions of the content of the spiritual and its implications for politics. While Ananda Coomaraswamy conceives the spiritual in terms of a metaphysical return to first principles, Radhakrishnan sees the experience of oneness as the essence of the spiritual and Rajagopalachari approaches the spiritual in terms of a set of core practices that inspire some moral and intellectual virtues. All three envision the spiritual as carrying the imperative of changing the political realm in specific ways.

I argue that there are at least three visions of what spiritualized politics might look like; the first variant, best amplified in Coomaraswamy, proceeds from an exegesis of classical texts and argues for a ‘traditional’ theory of government as an imitation of cosmic order. The ruling metaphor is of a marriage between the spiritual and temporal powers and the exemplary spiritual figure is the Brahmin-priest. The second variant, exemplified in Radhakrishnan, proceeds from an experiential account of spiritual life and argues for a deepening of modern ideals of freedom and democracy through emancipatory political praxis. Spiritual experience reveals the one essence pervading the cosmos and motivates a few to act for universal welfare and enlightenment. The ruling metaphor is love of the whole and the exemplary figure is the saint-activist. The third variant proceeds from spirituality as an attunement to God or Goddess and issues in ordinary acts of devotion. It strengthens the inner moral fiber and spreads its fragrance subtly over politics. Unlike the priest-husband and saint-lover who aspire to anchor politics in first principles, the mature devotee works for a ‘spirited’ politics where reasonableness, courage and friendliness may prevail. As in a healthy friendship, the independent identity of the spiritual and political realms is maintained while they are related in creative ways. I outline this version focusing on Rajagopalachari’s non-dramatic spirituality and sportive politics.

#### SPIRITUAL POLITICS AS MARRIAGE OF OPPOSITES: ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

Ananda Coomaraswamy, known primarily as an art historian, deserves attention also as a philosopher of spiritual traditions. As a keeper of the Indian collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for three decades, he relentlessly espoused the spiritual basis of Indian, especially Hindu art. For him, spirituality was essentially about tuning in to the ‘true reality’ and the ‘one immortal source’ that manifested itself both immanently and transcendently. Saying that ‘he never thought for himself’, he devoted himself to clarifying and expounding the metaphysics or first principles as articulated in different religious traditions. In his words, ‘philosophy or rather metaphysics represents a theory or vision and religion a way to the verification of the vision in actual experience’(Roger Lipsey 1977: 275). While philosophy was contemplative, religion was an active quest. But this did not mean that philosophical exegesis was only an academic exercise. For him, it prescribed the right order both within the soul and society. Consider the opening lines of his

*Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*: ‘It may be said that the whole of Indian political theory is implied and subsumed in the words of the marriage formula “I am That, thou art This, I am sky, thou art Earth” etc addressed by the Brahmin priest, the Purohita, to the King in *Aitareya Brahmana* VIII.27’ (Coomaraswamy, henceforth AKC, 1978: 1).

Focusing mostly on the ritual texts (*Brahmanas*)<sup>2</sup>, he sets forth a ‘traditional’ theory according to which right order requires that temporal power be guided by and subordinated to spiritual authority. According to him, the marriage formula invoked during the coronation rites, is uttered not so much by the king as is generally held but by the Brahmin priest thereby establishing the primacy of the contemplative over the active life. Given that the king is the feminine party in the marriage, he claims, it is ‘inconceivable’ that they could have been uttered by him (AKC 1978: 2). The king, in his turn, is the masculine party in the relationship towards the earth/realm. In this role, he is the ‘voice’ that gives effect to the purposes of spiritual authority. The marriage brings together “counsel and power, intellect and will, right and might”(ibid.: 11). Through this marriage, the ‘*purohita* (priest) becomes the alter ego of the *kshatriya* (king)’. He insists that in this marriage, there is no reciprocal equality; the relation of the king to the priest is that of part to the whole (ibid.: 7, fn 7). Underlying this relationship is a metaphysic that counsels the rule of the intellect over the emotional—a rule that implies right and proportional ordering of the emotional and erotic elements in the psyche and society.

In ritual terms, this marriage reenacts the sacred marriage of divine archetypes of priesthood and rulership namely *Mitra* and *Varuna* or *Agni* and *Indra* mentioned in connection with the Soma and fire altar sacrifices. This marriage of the priest and king, as a homologue of sacred marriages, brings about peace and prosperity to the realm. The priest supposedly mediates with and evokes intracosmic deities through his ritual expertise. Coomaraswamy also compares the priest to Plato’s philosopher-educator who ‘fathers’ strength and skillful speech in the temporal power through counsel. The priest seems to acquire wisdom through the study of scriptures and meditative reflection on the cosmic vision underlying them. Without priestly guidance, he insists that the ship of the state will destroy itself. Throughout, Coomaraswamy alludes to Plato, Neoplatonists such as Philo and Christian theologians to make his point about right ordering of the sacred and temporal powers.

But it appears that the establishment of right order even in the cosmos involves considerable conflict and violence between naturally antagonistic principles. Coomaraswamy recognizes the references in the texts to the natural opposition between *Mitra* (representative of priesthood) and *Varuna* (representative of royal power). Further, the *Satapatha Brahmana* says “the *ksatra* takes no delight in the *brahma*, nor does the *brahmavarcasa* delight in the *ksatra* (AKC 1978: 23, fn 18). But he goes on to add that the marriage effects a reconciliation that reflects their

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<sup>2</sup> *Brahmanas* are prose texts explaining the meaning of liturgy and clarifying ritual performance; they constitute the second portion of each veda; *Aitareya Brahmana* belongs to Rig Veda while *Satapatha Brahmana* belongs to (white) Yajur Veda.

‘transcendental unity’. For him, this unity emanates from the common source of both which is *Brahma*; the latter is described as the Infinite that encompasses the finite. The Brahmin priest is apparently representative of this ‘infinite source’.

But the texts do not unequivocally confirm the priority of the brahmin priest nor do they identify him solely with the contemplative life over the passion-ridden active life or the masculine over the feminine. The *Brhadaraanyaka Upanisad*<sup>3</sup> is quite ambiguous and mentions in the same passage that there is nothing superior to the ruling power and also that the priestly power is the womb of the ruling power and ought not to be harmed (Radhakrishnan 1994: 169). Secondly, the priest is not presented as a benevolent philosopher guide. The ‘*purohita* is originally Agni Vaisvanara of the five wraths, and if he not be pacified and endeared, he repels the sacrificer from the world of heaven [...]’(AKC 1978: 25). It has been noted that the priests did not just perform priestly functions but also warriorlike functions as charioteers and generals (Heesterman 1985: 151). *Aitareya Brahmana*, which he cites often, also presents the priest who, as a ritual expert is, ‘a receiver of gifts, a drinker of soma, a seeker of food and liable to removal at will’ (Bhattacharya 1983: 4). The king is provider of food for the brahmin. Far from being independent, the priest was dependent on royal power and needed the protection of the latter. In the *rajasuya*, the royal consecration ceremony, the Brahmin pays homage to the Kshatriya from a lower position. Also, every sacrifice involved a fee and lavish bestowal of gifts.

Coomaraswamy interprets this exchange from the standpoint of the priest; he claims that this patronage is only ‘proper’ to the king because he follows the path of action, a path that implies virtues such as generosity. Thus, royal bestowal of gifts should not be seen as one of gratitude for advantages or a fee for services (AKC 1978: 67 fn 47). For that would compromise the superiority of the Brahmin. Rather, by receiving gifts, the Brahmin gives the king an opportunity to be magnanimous. In a similar vein, he contends that the marriage transforms the King’s self so that he is more attuned to the claims of the sacred but denies that this marriage also implies the transformation of the priest into a devourer of gifts which impel more conquests for booty. This transaction entangled the priest in the vicious cycle of violent conquests undertaken by the king and compromised his transcendental authority thus rendering his purity open to ridicule. The Brahmin-priest and the barber are often linked in popular tales. More than harmony, the texts register the conflict-ridden dependence and cooperation between the two iconic figures associated with authority and power (Shulman 1985: 98).

Coomaraswamy himself notes some of the ambivalences but glosses over them consistently through esoteric readings. Hostile as he is to historical and literary treatments of the texts, he champions a theological method (AKC 1978: 59, fn 41). For him, subsequent texts simply explicate what is always already there *in nuce* in earlier texts. As such, criticisms that his approach is ahistorical and nostalgic, that it is brahminical and masculinist and that he is constructing a ‘high tradition’ may, however valid, appear external to his approach. For him, the context does not

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<sup>3</sup> Brhadaraanyaka Upanisad, the concluding portion of the Satapatha Brahmana is regarded as one of the oldest upanisads.

completely determine the meaning of a text; he probes the texts for *philosophia perennis* or eternal truths. While one may disagree with the very idea of such truths, an effective critique of his work must proceed from within his framework. Here, such an immanent critique is pursued. It may be asked whether we should not contextualize his readings; sure, for he fulminates at length against the ‘proselytizing fury’ of the colonial and modern west which only sees idolatry and flawed revelation in eastern religions. But his search for some eternal truths is not simply a product of his context; the texts in question do speak of cosmic truths and eternal principles of order. What he does not foreground is the ambivalence in the same texts about the extent to which such eternal principles and truths are realizeable in the mundane world.

For him, traditional civilization is one where ‘everything is seen as an application and extension of a doctrine whose essence is purely intellectual or metaphysical’ (AKC 1967: 74). Echoing Plato, he claims that the paradigmatic order is one where the superior rules over the inferior for the latter’s good. He writes enthusiastically about the ‘marvelous city of wooden automata’ in *Katha Sarit Sagara*, where “the whole citizenry consists of wooden engines or automata, all behaving as if alive [...] (ruled by) a comely man [...] the only sole consciousness there [...] (who is) enjoying the sport of a King, as a God all alone by himself” (ibid.: 100-1). In another portrayal of the city of resplendent wisdom, he writes of ‘the prince (who) instructed by his wife, has become a free man and performs his royal duties like an actor on stage and following his example and instruction, all citizens, no longer motivated by their passions although still possessing them, were playing at life and citizenship spontaneously and intelligently’ (ibid.: 106). Predictably, Coomaraswamy interprets these myths as articulating the right order within the soul and the city, where the “Self, inner controller, the immortal One” of the Upanisads (which are analogous to the *daimon* of Socrates or Plato’s Idea of the Good) rules over the passions and appetites (AKC 1967: 99).

These charming visions of cities organized according to first principles evoke not only wonder but also our curiosity. After all, Plato’s Republic, which informs Coomaraswamy’s reading, leaves enough doubt about the feasibility and desirability of the dream-picture. Plato’s Socrates suggests that only a rare combination of chance factors will bring about a coincidence of philosophy and politics. Besides, Socrates’ references to his *daimon* provoked deep suspicion in the city. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle introduces practical reason to moderate tyrannical desires to achieve wholeness in politics. Could it be that this issue never cropped up in the so-called traditional civilization of India? If the above-mentioned ambiguities are probed seriously, then the texts definitely seem to recognize the tension between the naturally antagonistic principles of *brahma* and *kshatra* and refuse to reconcile this tension in a conclusive transcendental unity.

This refusal to reconcile antagonistic forces is loud and clear in the *puranic* myths of divine marriages. From the *Siva Purana*, it is clear that even Siva’s marriage to Sati/Parvati is open to breakdown, violence, destruction, recovery and remarriage often in some holy spot on earth. The establishment of harmony and

order is often temporary and vulnerable to some demon's tricks or the other. And the marriage of Siva and Parvati cannot yield children in the normal sense; they both produce sons without the participation of the other. On the one hand, Siva's dangerous asceticism has to be tamed and his marriage to Parvati is necessary for cosmic welfare; on the other hand, Siva's excessive erotic play with Parvati is equally threatening for cosmic welfare. Marriage as the guarantor of harmony and fertility between opposites is at once affirmed and questioned in these myths. Divine marriage has to be disrupted and broken up for worldly good.

Further, some myths and rituals suggest that divine marriages cannot take place on earth and are deferred indefinitely. A good example here is that of Kanyakumari whose marriage to Siva is delayed till the time of universal destruction so that her virginal powers may be deployed to kill demon-foes (Shulman 1980: 145). Similarly, there is a well-known tradition that Meenakshi's marriage is postponed every year because someone sneezes before the ceremony is completed (ibid.: 166). The goddess has to be married but then her chastity also has to be preserved for cosmic fertility. David Shulman observes how ritual thus accomplishes the 'elusive synthesis of conflicting ideals'. In a similar vein, could it be that the *brahmana* texts were also registering the 'elusive synthesis of conflicting ideals' in their appeal to sacred marriage between King and Brahman?

Even if we interpret the divine marriage to be an internalized order within the soul (as Coomaraswamy does repeatedly), it is not unambiguously good as evidenced by the myth of *Parasurama*, the brahmin-warrior but also matricide and killer of Kshatriyas. To quote Shulman, 'Parasurama carries to a mythic extreme an enduring Brahmin conflict; on the one hand, restraint, purity, non-violence, detachment; on the other, inherent power, and the recurrent temptation to use it in the violent pursuit of an uncompromising vision. Indeed the myth implies that the Brahmin can never be wholly free of violence...' (1985: 118). Coomaraswamy is championing brahminical superiority but in the process, the brahmin figure is bereft of the inner conflict with consuming passions that the texts express.

Coomaraswamy admitted that he was supporting 'relatively unpopular sociological doctrines' in his interpretations of classical texts. In part, he was reacting to the modern reduction of philosophy to epistemology and politics to socio-economic issues. But then he also argued for traditional institutions such as the caste order as natural and proper. Expressing his admiration for Mahatma Gandhi he writes of the great leader as one who 'consistently refused to disassociate politics from religion and has never repudiated the caste system but would only reform its working' (Moore 1988: 349). And adds that the 'justice and freedom in the social order can only mean that it is just that every man should be free to earn his daily bread by following that vocation to which his natural abilities imperiously summon him'. Alluding to those who are untouchables because of no caste or loss of caste status, he concedes there may be ways of 'lifting up qualified outcastes' and quotes Swami Vivekananda who said that 'if the outcastes would improve their status, let them learn Sanskrit' (Moore 1988: 350). While admitting that there may be kinds and conditions of work to which none should be subject, he affirmed the hierarchy of caste order.

Given that Coomaraswamy's theological interpretation resonates with many Hindu ideologues, it may be useful to reiterate the tradition's ambivalence surrounding conflicting ideals as expressed in myths. Mythic ambiguities and ritual improvisation hint that sacred marriage between opposite principles or figures is often elusive and/or explosive involving violence and disorder. In this light, there is much to be learnt from Hindu myths and rituals about the possibility and desirability of a marriage between spiritual and political realms. At the same time, the realm of gods and demons, as much as that of humans, is ridden with factionalism and conflict; restoration of right order requires ingenuity and tactful redistribution of power and honor. This need not result in ideals being abandoned; their paradoxical nature is explored and affirmed as well as undermined in myths and ritual strategies. Obviously, recalling ritual or textual elisions may not make the ideologues embrace the liberal separation between the spiritual and the political; but it might serve to moderate simplistic visions of the so-called spiritual realm in favor of a richer, nuanced understanding of its limits and possibilities.

#### SPIRITUAL POLITICS GROUNDED IN SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND COSMIC LOVE: RADHAKRISHNAN

Turning away from myth and ritual, many modern Hindu thinkers celebrate the experiential essence of Vedic hymns and Upanisadic teachings. Claiming that Hinduism emphasizes 'spiritual experience' rather than doctrine, they stress that it is the most appropriate religion for modern man because it exudes a 'scientific' spirit. Inspired by Vedanta, spiritual life is seen as a quest for the experience of Truth or the whole. From this standpoint, spiritual politics seems to involve acting in the public sphere in a manner that promotes universal welfare through self-control and disinterested service. Gandhi and Vinoba are probably the most sophisticated and boldest experimenters of this genre. In the following, I focus on Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan for he consistently appealed to the spiritual experience as the philosophical basis for a saintly politics oriented to eschatological goal of universal enlightenment.

Radhakrishnan was primarily a philosopher who vigorously explained and defended the ethical and spiritual aspects of Vedanta for a western audience. Educated in Christian missionary institutions, he would later confess that 'the criticisms leveled against Hindu religion that it was intellectually incoherent and ethically unsound' disturbed him deeply (Minor 1989: 481). And add that Swami Vivekananda's writings mesmerized him and inspired him to systematically define and defend Hinduism (Minor 1989: 482). In the course of a long dialogue with western philosophy and religions, as an academic and ambassador, he evolved a defense of Hinduism that was mainly grounded in Vedanta, especially the non-dual variant of Samkara. Throughout his distinguished public career, as the Indian ambassador to Soviet Union, as Vice President (1952) and President of India (1962-67), he expressed a belief that spirituality based on experience of oneness

should be the basis for domestic and international order. Hinduism, for him, was essentially an experiential spiritual tradition.

Radhakrishnan often claims that "the experience of the mysterious is the fundamental quality underlying all religion" (1995: 44). Exactly what did he mean by spiritual experience? In the spirit of *neti, neti* of the Upanisads, he clarifies the nature of spiritual experience by way of negation. It involves an element of feeling, especially a feeling of 'creaturely dependence' but is not just that. It involves a metaphysical view of the universe but is not reducible to philosophy. It may include a moral consciousness but cannot be assimilated to the latter for it is moved by a 'mystical element'. In his words:

It is a type of experience which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself. It is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries are broken and ordinary distinctions are transcended. Past and present fade away in a sense of timeless being. Consciousness and being are not different from each other. All being is consciousness and all consciousness, being [...] It does not look beyond itself for meaning and validity. It does not appeal to external standards of logic or metaphysics. It is its own cause and explanation [...] It is self-established (*svatasiddha*), self-evidencing (*svasamvedya*) and self-luminous (*svayam-prakasa*) (Radhakrishnan, henceforth SRK, 1937: 72).

By stressing the holistic nature of spiritual or religious experience, he distances himself from empiricism which only focuses on the objective sense experience and romanticism which only grasps inchoate feelings. He insists that the experience is 'integral' in that it is the 'reaction of the whole man to the whole reality' (SRK 1937: 69). He foregrounds the blurring and 'falling away' of the boundaries of subject and object, past and present, inside and outside in a manner reminiscent of, though not identical to phenomenological accounts of 'pure experience'. While phenomenologists attempt to restore the pre-reflective unity that accompanies ordinary experience, Radhakrishnan is concerned with the uniqueness and extraordinary nature of religious experience.

Radhakrishnan does not justify these insights as products of personal experience. He admits that spiritual experience of the kind he describes is a rare occurrence and happens only to select saints and seers. Yet, ordinary human beings can affirm its possibility because they experience flashes of insight, ecstasy of poetry or romantic love. Even the few saints who undergo the sublime experience cannot command or continue them at will. While the participant seer does not initiate or control this experiential event, he or she does not lose consciousness; he or she experiences a different mode of awareness that Radhakrishnan describes as intuition. This is neither an irrational nor a 'mystic process but the most direct and penetrating examination possible to the human mind" (SRK 1937: 115).

What does it reveal? Relying on the Upanisadic teaching of *tat tvam asi* (That art Thou), he claims that spiritual experience discloses the intimate relationship between the cosmic principle (*Brahman*) and the innermost essence of human beings (*atman*). This experience reveals the 'I' or Self (*atman*) as a 'that' rather than as a 'what'. The 'I' referred to here is not the empirical-historical self with a name and form but the immortal 'I' that subsists when all attributes and conditions have been transcended. Spiritual experience is, at once, the realization and revelation of the Self as 'real being'.<sup>4</sup>

Thus spiritual experience discloses our identity or at least participation in a supreme reality that may be symbolized as an impersonal principle or God. Radhakrishnan recognizes that *advaita* mystics and philosophers are more inclined towards monism stressing the identity between the immanent aspect (*atman*) and transcendental principle (*brahman*) while theistic devotionalists emphasize the difference between God and *atman*/soul as also between different individual *atmans*. In the former case, the identity between *atman* and *Brahman* implies the erasure of duality in the final event of enlightenment. In the latter case, the relationship between individual *atmans* and personal god is one of separation, adoration and intimacy; as such the tension between the two poles is preserved. Although he grasps the rationale of image worship, offerings and pilgrimages pervasive in devotional cults, he claims that these are fit for the uneducated, and are inferior to contemplation (SRK 1995: 124). Needless to say, temple girls, animal sacrifice, greedy priests and unclean environs are seen as empty of spiritual value.

Traditionally, there is considerable skepticism about extraordinary experiences of the kind described above. Neither Sankara nor Ramanuja ground the truth of Vedic revelation in experience. Instead of intuition or experience, they use the resources of reasoned argument, spiritual discipline and preceptor's authority all of which are grounded in a prior commitment to Veda as divine revelation (Halbfass 1990: 388). Given the downplaying of most traditional mediations, Radhakrishnan's experiential spirituality sounds mystical and abstract and carries the risk of solipsism. In the absence of some training about the meanings of available myths, symbols and practices, one may not have the critical judgment to distinguish between genuine and spurious experiences. Further, not all spiritual experiences effect permanent change; the longing for and expectations of ultimate experience actually strengthen delusion and fuel rage against the world as it is. Psychoactive drugs and cyberspace now provide experiences of oneness with animals, plants or machines; they also encourage lifestyles that go beyond good and evil. This danger becomes clearer when we consider the key figure expected to usher in spiritual politics.

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike the Cartesian self which confronts the world as an other, *atman*-self seems to encompass all that there is. Radhakrishnan also finds Descartes' reliance on the thinking mind problematic.

*Saintly Love and the Cosmic Process*

Instead of the ritualistic priest, the saint becomes the key figure in this version. Radhakrishnan frequently presents saints as ‘prophets’ and as ‘great regenerators’ who demand a return to first principles and hasten to reform the social order (SRK 1995: 71, 119 & 126). Unlike ordinary social reformers, these saints are moved by love of the eternal. Denying the routine charge that they are otherworldly, he argues that they are filled with compassion for the unenlightened and work for their liberation. Traditionally though, seers like Sankara interfered little with conventional order; when *Bhakti* saints transgressed social norms, it was due to an excessive love of god rather than other humans. The love of the eternal did not compel these saints to work towards heaven on earth. Like other modern Indian thinkers, Radhakrishnan finds justification for this new role in the notions of *karma yoga* (path of action) and the Buddhist idea of *karuna* (compassion towards all creatures). Spiritual effort is directed towards ameliorating the misery of other human beings through self-suffering and struggle for justice. Such struggles often involve resisting political authorities and suffering for one’s convictions. Radhakrishnan is inspired by Gandhi in this regard. But then Gandhi did not claim any radically revelatory spiritual experience as guiding him; he may have had moments of insight stemming from keen attention. Nor did other saint-activists of our time like Simone Weil, Elie Wiesel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther all of who employed ‘spirituality for combat’ (Chatterjee 1989: 70). While they may have had extraordinary revelations, Gandhi and Simone Weil also confirm that spiritual experience is one of separation, waiting, longing, doubting and struggling to see Truth or God face to face.

Radhakrishnan’s saints are moved by Love of the whole and enter the worldly sphere to disseminate their wisdom. He clarifies that ‘deep love is not to be confused with explosive passions aroused by the body’ but with a heavenly love that seizes our souls (SRK 1995: 158). However, the daemonic nature of love has always meant that its role in transforming the world was suspect – a point that he may have been aware of given his frequent appeals to Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Discussing love and marriage, he argues that love need not be incompatible with institutions and goes on to confess that love moves us to transgress more often than not. In his words, ‘the tribulations of love are admitted to be beautiful but not moral’ (SRK 1995: 193). If ordinary love is so powerful, what about thee extraordinary love of the saints?

Closer home, Indian myths and epics are full of unpredictable sages who accumulate *tapas* or ascetic heat and return to make impossible demands, curse and unleash destruction. The tension between a sage’s forest-grown wisdom and ordinary life is often invoked in the epics and while there is interaction, there is also deliberate distancing and separation of the two worlds. Both gods and humans try to tame the hubristic tendencies through alluring damsels, trickery, gifts and devotion. Even texts such as the *bhagavad gita* instruct the saints not to disturb the ignorant. It appears that by simply leading the ascetic life, they remind ordinary

humans of other possibilities open to us. However, Radhakrishnan is drawn to the missionary enterprise of changing the world and returning it to 'first principles'.

The immoderate side of saintly love can have serious political repercussions when it is combined with a prophetic reading of history and spiritual mission of the Hindus. To quote him:

Cosmic history is working towards its highest moment when the universal tendency towards spiritual life becomes realized in one and all, when the ethical experience of non-attainment yields to participation by the creatures in life eternal, when the powerful will of the individual yields in love to the spirit of the universe. As matter was delivered of life and life of mind, so is man to be delivered of the spirit. That is his destiny [...]. Human life is being prepared for this end (SRK 1937: 242).

Radhakrishnan sees nature as well as history as preparing for the ultimate triumph of the 'Universal Spirit.' The 'secret desire' of man to be 'superman' is likely to become a historical achievement. For 'scientific theories suggest that man, as he is, need not be regarded as the crowning glory of evolution' (SRK 1995: 18). History is not an unending and meaningless process. At some future point, there must be a victory over all objectification and alienation and man would become fully autonomous. The 'final end' is the emergence of a 'world community' where we will regulate our relations, individual and national in terms of our membership in a 'spiritual commonwealth'. And science and technology have already prepared the world for a spiritual unification through physical integration. As he writes:

This oneness of humanity is more than a phrase, it is not a mere vision. It is becoming a historic fact. With the speeding up of communications, ideas and tools now belong to man as man. The necessities of the historical process are making the world into one. We stand on the threshold of a new society, a single society. Those who are awake to the problems of the future adopt the ideal of oneness as the guiding principle of their thought and action (SRK 1969: 6).

Following the destruction caused by two world wars and the threats posed by cold war, this exhortation to work towards universal peace is understandable. He laments that narrow nationalism and pride were wreaking havoc in the world. But his own universalism could not rise above the natural pride in one's own history and culture. Arguing in favor of 'spiritual values' in politics and society, he claims that India, especially the Hindu path, has a special role to play in the world. In his words:

Hinduism is not limited in scope to the geographical area which is described as India. Its sway in the early days spread to Campa, Cambodia, Java and Bali. There is nothing which prevents it from extending to the uttermost parts of the earth. India is a tradition, a spirit, a

light. Her physical and spiritual frontiers do not coincide (SRK 1995: 102).

Admittedly, he dislikes missionary activities and religious provincialism or narrow nationalism; but this does not prevent him from envisaging a special role for Vedanta in the spiritual regeneration of mankind. For him, Vedanta is not just another religion but the 'essence' of all religion. As such, it comprehends and surpasses all other religions. It is the epitome of a tolerant and universal religion. Paul Hacker has suggested that we understand Radhakrishnan's argument for Vedanta as 'inclusivistic' rather than tolerant (Halbfass 1990: 403). For the notion of tolerance as it is espoused in modern western thought is grounded in the rights of human reason rather than spiritual or religious truths.

Addressing the Indian constitutional commitment to democracy and secularism, he called for a spiritualized politics. Democracy must be grounded in the Vedanta ideal of divinity of all and secularism must be grounded in the spirit of 'true religion'. Instead of 'rootless secularism' which is only the worship of man and state, he advocated universal spiritual values. He interpreted secular to mean non-sectarian, non-fanatical but not irreligious or non-religious (Minor 1989: 501). Political order must not be only a set of norms and institutions but the organic expression of faith in the oneness of the universe and express the creative spirit of the universe (SRK 1995: 90).

Radhakrishnan was not unrealistic in his expectations of saint-reformers. After all, he was a contemporary of two of the greatest saints turned activists namely Gandhi and Vinoba. Gandhi's non-violent freedom struggle and Vinoba's *bhoodan* or land-gift movement embodied what Radhakrishnan envisaged. But their radical ideas of trusteeship and service have survived only in small experimental zones. They are respected but not followed in the same manner that radical leaders are not; this is not only because ordinary people like us are ignorant of metaphysical truths but also because we vaguely respect natural limits and attachments. Partly, what makes both Gandhi and Vinoba 'great souls' is that periodically they tuned in to the ordinary wisdom of the people and eschewed coercive reforms.

Given that such mature leadership is rare, it is necessary to remember the limits and possibilities of politics. The emphasis on 'integral experience', saintly activism and eschatological desire for spiritual commonwealth can lead to messianic politics. In the hands of self-styled reformers, organic unity and true religion might become a weapon against diversity and plurality of cultures and religions. In the face of such possibilities, it is critical to understand the political realm not so much in terms of spiritual experience but its distinctive potential. Are there not ennobling political experiences such as inaugurating a constitutional republic or signing a treaty? Could they tell us about how we ought to relate the spiritual and the political?

DEVOTION, FRIENDSHIP AND 'SPIRITED'  
POLITICS: RAJAGOPALACHARI

Unlike the above two versions which either oppose liberal modernity or seek to transform it, a third variant of spiritual politics proceeds from a practical political standpoint and seeks to promote virtuous governance within the framework of liberal constitutionalism. I delineate this variant by focusing on Rajagopalachari for he combined a private, minimalist and non-dramatic spirituality with a lifetime of political activity punctuated by both fame and vilification. Spirituality was less about metaphysics or theology and more about devotion toward a personal deity. Such devotion strengthened an inner desire to be noble and good. It was nurtured through love of epics and stories that inspire awe and wonder at the mystery of the universe. This sense of the spiritual engendered in him a profound sense of the insignificance of one's own life (Felton 1962: 15). As with Gandhi, humility appears to have freed him to act courageously in the public sphere despite the risk of being misunderstood as a power-monger or honor-lover. Devotion did not make him see politics as an evil necessity; instead it strengthened his desire to participate honorably and seize rare opportunities for magnanimous actions. Rajaji shows that spirituality can inspire us to approach politics in a friendly spirit. Friendship, more than love or marriage, lets the other be; it thrives on reciprocity, magnanimity, common tasks and interests, honest advice and at some critical moments, a demand that we act in a noble and glorious manner. Thus, we may participate in politics in a 'spirited' yet non-violent manner and risk 'sporting offers' that provoke and compel the opponent to reciprocate.

Like other modern Indian thinkers, Rajaji also praised the ancient 'catholicity' of Hinduism, the scientific spirit of Vedanta and the affinity between some aspects of modern science such as the theory of evolution and Hindu cosmogonies. But this partiality did not lead him to advocate a reformed Hinduism as the one universal religion for all. He warned that 'We should not, under pressure of political vanities and ambitions destroy variety' (Rajagopalachari, henceforth CR, 1980a: 49). Writing about 'religious tolerance', he pointed out that 'in defending the broadmindedness and the large doctrines of our forefathers, we have become narrow-minded and fanatical...Nothing will save our tolerance except tolerance. I wish that men were wise enough to the extent that even if they are Hindus, they could go to mosques and pray' (CR 1978: 195). He thought that congregational worship encouraged by Gandhi and Vinoba was not in tune with the gentler spirit of Hinduism which emphasized individual worship (Felton 1962: 39). Hostile to any regimentation, he remarked, "The Gita is like a railway guide. You should travel with its help, not commit it to memory"(Rajmohan Gandhi 1997: 317). Doctrines and rituals could not be specified, simplified or judged once and for all. However, openness to God or an ultimate ground had to be periodically affirmed and renewed in different spheres of human activity. As with friends, one had to keep in touch with this transcendental source to be vivified in everyday life.

Popular Hinduism with its enchanting epics, colorful idols, chariot processions and aesthetics of devotion provided several means of keeping in touch with the

divine. More than anything, it appealed to the heart through stories of scheming gods and goddesses, demon devotees, the cycles of curses and boons, of suffering and redemption. More than his translations of the Gita and the Upanisads, Rajaji's renditions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata have endeared him to many. These translations were meant not for scholars but for women, children and young adults. He advises them against a 'detective-police' mentality which sees the founders and teachers of religion as 'skillful deceivers' (CR 1989: 17). He admits that personal and class interests may play a role but do not determine the essence of religion. He urges 'reverent affection' towards the texts so that one may be able to perceive and enjoy the awe and mystery of the universe expressed therein. For him, 'when we see a dragon fly on the swift running stream or a little flower on the garden wall, we see God and nothing else' (CR 1948: 40).

Introducing Kamban's rendering of Ayodhya episode of the Ramayana, he recalls the emotional intensity of the scenes depicted therein; Rama's banishment, Dasaratha's death and Bharata's grief have shaped poetic imagination and didactic prose for decades.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Valmiki, Kamban speaks of Rama as God-incarnate for the people to whom he spoke only knew Rama as such. To 'un-deify' Rama or Krishna, Rajaji claims, would be futile and 'positively mischievous' (CR 1961: 9). While one may tell the story of Rama as that of an Imperial Prince, the story would be interesting but will not provide a foundation for morality. Instead of being cut off from feelings, morals have to be induced through a churning of the ocean of the heart. For Kamban, Bharata is the ideal devotee/*bhakta* who, separated from Rama, wants to hear all about him, much like a lover separated from the beloved. Though Bharata invokes ancient custom that a younger prince cannot usurp the right of the eldest brother to inherit the throne, his renunciation flows from love for his brother rather than legal propriety. Rama's sandals (*paduka*), which Bharata chooses as 'crown and blessing' figure in several exquisite verses by another renowned southern Vaishnava, Vedanta Desika. Rajaji revised the Uttara Kandam where Sita after the 'fire test' refuses to return with Rama to Ayodhya saying that 'he dealt with her like a mere mortal' whereas she knows she is divine and cannot spend her life with a mere king. She even advises him to make a golden image of herself for company (CR 1996: 209-10).

In his translation of the Mahabharata, Rajaji charms the reader through the power of mythic stories and cuts out didactic and theological discussions. He conveys the vitality of the characters so that one not only admires Arjuna but also appreciates Duryodhana's courage or Aswatthama's righteous anger or Krishna's all-to-human ways or Balarama's neutrality. More than his divine acts, Krishna's friendship towards the Pandavas, especially towards Arjuna has at once moved and troubled discerning minds. Balarama openly says that Krishna's affection for Arjuna has misled him into approving the war (CR 1999: 263). As J.L Mehta has noted, Krishna seeks Arjuna first, makes gestures of friendship, advises him to abduct his own sister and is delighted when Arjuna freely chooses him over his army (Mehta 1992: 123-124). And when Arjuna explains that he chose an unarmed

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<sup>5</sup> Kamban was a ninth century Tamil poet whose rendering of the Ramayana is regarded as a classic of Tamil literature.

Krishna to prove that he too can win single handed against the might of the whole world, Krishna is pleased (CR 1999: 226). Friendship, it appears need not preclude healthy competition. Through sensitive portrayals of the dilemmas faced by great heroes and principled men, Rajaji teaches that there can be no uniform formula for solving moral questions in life.

Popular Hindusim relied on aesthetic and performative arts in inducing morality and devotion. Rajaji was adept at melting hearts and extracting devotional love. Introducing Adi Samkara's famous BhajaGovindam song recorded by M.S. Subbalakshmi, he asserts:

The way of devotion is not different from the way of knowledge or *jnana*. When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the mind, it becomes wisdom. When wisdom is integrated into life and issues out in action, it becomes *bhakti*. To think that knowledge and devotion are different from each other is ignorance [...]. If Adi Samkara himself, who drank the ocean of *jnana* as easily as one sips water from the palm of one's hand, sang in his later years, hymns to develop devotion, it is enough to show that knowledge and devotion, *jnana* and *bhakti* are one and the same.

In a moving hymn to Govinda, set to music by M.S Subbalakshmi, he says 'no regrets have I Govinda/though you stand where I behold you not/I know you sustain me/you stand ...veiled by a screen only the learned can part/ you stand as a rock/you have entered a shaft of granite/no regrets have I Govinda' (Gopal Gandhi 2002: 1-2). In the spirit of Alvar Bhakti<sup>6</sup> poetry in the South, Rajaji expresses love-in-separation. The poetry of Alvars thematized both separation from the deity (inevitable due to our embodied nature) and ecstasy of divine presence (Hardy 1995: 288). It is a woman's attachment toward and love for particular beings that provides the paradigm for love of God. Not God in general but a specific manifestation at a specific location for distinct purposes is the focus of devotional love. Rajaji invokes here the Lord of the Seven Hills, Venkateshwara of Tirupati. Unlike many reformist Hindus who look down upon such idols as mere symbols, Rajaji identifies with the devotionalist idea that the divine is present in the granite image. While devotionalist literature is full of dramatic and transgressive acts, Rajaji identifies more with the non-dramatic and simple actions that signify ordinary devotion. Such ordinary devotion compelled him to break non-cooperation and defend a 'pariah devotee' who, 'in a fit of devotion and exultation of mind' went into a temple and was convicted.

In the public sphere, Rajaji saw ordinary devotion as ensuing in moral and civic virtues. He argued that the philosophy of action (*karma yoga*) had a 'civic dimension' that could provide a powerful inner motivation to individuals to regulate their desires and work for the public good. In several Convocation

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<sup>6</sup> Alvars, or 'those immersed in god' were Tamil poet saints of south India who lived between sixth and ninth centuries and espoused 'emotional devotion' to Visnu-Krishna in their songs of longing, ecstasy and service. See Gavin Flood (1996: 131).

speeches, he urges the young to shun idleness and propaganda, work hard and cultivate friendliness. He advises them to imitate exemplary public figures in shaping one's character. In the aftermath of independence, he explicitly warns them against taking part in politics of agitation and party activism. But when he launched campaigns against Hindi imposition in the south in the mid-fifties, he exhorted university students to get involved.

Rajaji's political career reveals the inconsistencies and contradictions that should be expected of a far-sighted, shrewd, passionate, honest, practical and public-spirited man. He took to politics around 1916, drew public attention in the Congress when he opposed council entry in 1922, became the Prime minister of Madras in 1937, opposed Quit India, became the governor of Bengal in 1947, the Governor General in 1948, Minister without portfolio, Home minister and finally Chief Minister of Madras in 1952. He retired only to write and argue against nuclear arms, Hindi imposition, socialist and populist policies of Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi and formed the Swatantra party. He often announced his retirement from active life but was easily persuaded to take up office or lend his support for various causes. Given such an intense and long involvement in public affairs, it is not entirely surprising that his views changed with the context and gave him a reputation for *realpolitik*.

The life of action in the political sphere involved two types of activity for Rajaji – one the humdrum work of administration wherein integrity, impartiality, efficiency and prompt decisions are crucial and two, policy-making, judging and creating public opinion, expanding space for ethical conduct, deliberating with seemingly impossible opponents and acting in a courageous way. As Premier and later Chief Minister of Madras, he epitomized administrative integrity and efficiency by scaling down emoluments and perks, supporting the public service in their tasks and keeping party politics at bay. As a parliamentarian, he delighted in the agonal nature of deliberative democracy somewhat excessively in that he would answer questions put to his colleagues in the assembly (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: 41 & 236). In 1952, when he was asked to increase food rations, he suggested 'pray for rain' and when the rains arrived that year in May, he removed controls (Rajmohan Gandhi : 234). He persisted in invoking God's grace in public speeches despite sarcasm and ridicule by friends like Nehru or enemies like the communists.

Devotion, in its ordinary guise, may have influenced his style of politics in a more subtle way; it may have moderated the love of one's own (culture, region and language), courageous defiance, flexibility and friendliness that marked his political advocacy. Arguably, there is no direct causal link between devotion and political virtues. But devotion can illuminate the political sphere as one more site where the dialectic of order and chaos is at play. Devotional love, as love in separation, may make us more tolerant of identity and difference vis-à-vis others regarding ideals and interests. It may temper both self-love and self-hatred so that one learns to affirm a reasonable pride in oneself and others. Devotion, as regular sharing of insights and doubts, may reveal the public sphere as one where principled friendliness is an important good. Of course, there are secular routes to these virtues although in Rajaji's case, given his regular contributions to Tamil

magazines on god and devotion, the possibility of a spiritual route cannot be denied. I have selected three moments, the first when he challenged Congress' attitude towards the war, the second, when he campaigned in favor regional autonomy and urged friendship with difficult regions and neighbors and the third, when he zealously appealed to super-powers to renounce the making and testing of nuclear weapons in order to highlight his style of politics. I have left out Rajaji's conservative economic ideas since they are well known.

In 1940, at the Poona AICC meet, he persuaded the Congress to disobey the Mahatma claiming that non-violence was not an absolute value, that the Second World War situation demanded active cooperation with the British both morally and militarily provided the British agreed to install a national government (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: .66-67). His attempt to forge Congress-Raj reconciliation failed and he lamented that he saw no '*greatness of conduct* in Britain's present attitude towards India' (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: 68). In contrast, upon hearing about the Viceroy's fears regarding Muslim rights, he made a '*sporting offer*' that in return for provisional national government, he would persuade the Congress to agree to the Muslim League's nominating a Prime Minister. Following the failure of Cripps' mission and a stint in jail for civil disobedience, he reassessed the obstacles to national government. Claiming that Cripps' offer displayed 'great political insight' and explaining that the Viceregal veto may not be a huge hurdle, he urged acceptance (CR 1998c: 405).

This was only one instance of Rajaji's flexibility that caused much misunderstanding. Was he just power hungry, having tasted the pleasures of prime ministership in 1937? Rajaji definitely enjoyed the opportunities for civic action and statesmanship such positions bestow. But then he never cultivated a coterie of followers necessary to retain powerful positions. He did not waste his shrewd political sense in this direction. Fully aware of the backlash in opposing the mahatma, he opposed Quit India in 1942 as a 'mere slogan'. Partly, his position was impelled by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the possibility of an attack on India from the south. His speeches in the south reveal intense anxiety about an imminent Japanese invasion and the need to resist such aggression. When he found the Congress unhelpful, he persuaded the Madras Congress legislature party to pass two resolutions, one recommending to AICC to concede the League's demand for separation of some areas and the second requesting support for including the League in an all-party government in Madras. The overall result was that he lost support and goodwill among the Congress luminaries and was compelled to resign.

Coupled with his opposition to Quit India, Rajaji's eagerness to accommodate the League's demands earned him much opprobrium from friends and enemies. But this did not stop him from urging publicly in 1943 that 'what is required now is to concede the ultimate right of regional self-determination. Subject to this, it is open to those who want a single and undivided State to persuade those who are reluctant either to accede in the normal way or accept alternatives' (CR 1998c: 413). The Rajaji formula combined autonomy with common defence and communications. Gandhi was persuaded about the viability of the formula and referred it to Jinnah

who rejected it. Rajmohan Gandhi has pointed out that the Mountbatten plan offered an identical territory as the Rajaji formula with formal common bonds and without a plebiscite (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: 134). While Rajaji's foresight has been rightly praised in this regard, the logic of his 'sporting offer' has gone unnoticed; he appears to have thought that if Congress were to concede the principle of self-determination, the Muslims may want stronger association with the union in due course. His actions proceed from a reasonable love of one's own cause and appeal to a similar love, pride and greatness in the opponent.

Rajaji did not pause to take credit or retaliate towards his former critics. Responding to queries as to why Jinnah accepted it in 1947 rather than in 1943, he asks, 'must we assume that Jinnah could never be reasonable?' (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: 134). Writing to his best friend Navaratna Rama Rao, he says, '[...] Yet it is what I asked them to do, but one need not claim credit for having discovered a necessary evil. The only credit is that I was rash enough to stand up for it. I find a mischievous pleasure in watching and enjoying my colleagues' studied silence on the subject. Vanity all over. But one abiding thing there is, love' (Rajmohan Gandhi: 139). True to Gandhian principles, Rajaji eschewed anger and vengefulness in politics. Like Gandhi, he too fought zealously and graciously for his convictions. The difference though is that Rajaji was always enthusiastic about taking up office, using the art of ruling and the resources of administration to tackle political and social issues.

Admittedly, Rajaji's views on regional self-determination were not always consistent. For instance, as Chief Minister of Madras in 1937, he had opposed a separate Andhra province but relented later to the inevitable. As Governor General, he encouraged a quick occupation of Hyderabad in the face of the Nizam's bid for sovereignty. And yet, when Goa was annexed, he opposed it on the ground that the Portuguese were not about to invade India. When Sheikh Abdullah was imprisoned, he urged his release and warned against turning Kashmir into a land dispute. He reminded that legitimate desires of the people cannot be ignored for long and title deeds cannot be used to deny autonomy. Boldly, he suggested making Kashmir an independent and friendly state so that India and Pakistan may move towards settling other disputes (CR 1993: 202). Similarly, he claimed that Punjabi Suba demand was not reducible to land or language alone but involved the collective pride and permanent interests of the Sikhs. He thought that national integrity had to be balanced by the need for tranquility and friendship between different regional and ethnic groups. Once the desire for separation or autonomy had taken root, the remedy consisted not in fighting it but in recognizing reality. In most cases, he urged immediate and reasonable concessions so as to strengthen goodwill and trust.

In general, he opposed uniformity at the cost of diversity and this was most evident in his campaign against Hindi as official language. Instead of proposing Tamil or Telugu which would be unreasonable, he argued that English be the 'airline across India' notwithstanding sentimental objections (CR 1993: 199). His love and commitment for Tamil evolved over time after initial prodding by Mahatma Gandhi whereas his love for English literature remained undiminished

throughout. Common sense and expediency apart, his experience as Premier of Madras shaped his opposition. Like 'chutney on the leaf, to be tasted or left alone', he had introduced Hindi for high school students without however detaining students for failure in that language (Rajmohan Gandhi 1984: 19). But his move had only strengthened the Dravidian parties and increased Periyar's popularity.<sup>7</sup> His joining hands with Periyar later on the Dravidian platform against Hindi only served to strengthen detractors who accused him of opportunism.

Among others, Ambedkar was quick to see that Rajaji's magnanimity did not extend to according minority status to the scheduled castes. In a devastating attack on Congress and Gandhi, Ambedkar quotes Ranga Iyer who having been roped into introducing the temple entry bill found himself at a loose end when Congress members withdrew support as soon as elections were announced in 1934. Ranga Iyer charged that 'Sriman Rajagopalachariar' who had 'begged' him to support the bill was now 'going back like a crab' on temple entry thanks to electoral compulsions (Ambedkar 1991: 121). In this incident, Ambedkar found further proof for his position that the Congress leaders were not serious about social reform. Rajaji was also accused of betraying the Mahatma by encouraging the temporary burial of the bill. Rajaji refutes Ambedkar's charges by recalling Gandhi's 'Herculean efforts' against untouchability and for temple entry. He claims that the Congress 'had to confine itself to specific political issues and could not afford to dilute it with other matters' (CR 1998a: 130). Rajaji felt that an immediate answer was needed from the electorate on complete transfer of power rather than temple entry. After a spirited defense of Gandhi and Congress, he concludes by counter alleging that the educated leaders among the scheduled castes have a 'vested interest' in denying reform and inciting hostility towards reformers. More devastatingly, he accuses the scheduled caste leaders of also being opposed to Indian freedom (CR 1998a: 137). Rajaji's patronizing attitude is unmistakable in this refutation and shows that he was not always moderate in his love of the 'majority community'.

Alongside courage and reasonable love of one's own, friendship was an integral component of his spirited politics. In his view, the art of friendship was governed by a spiritual law and was both simple and taxing (CR 1993: 273). Neither effort nor mutual advantage but unsolicited friendliness toward the other is the surest way to gain trust and friendship. But this did not imply that all could be friends. Rajaji could never accept the communists as political friends though some of them were personal friends. By the same token, communist China was the big enemy to be addressed firmly. He was consistent in this enmity towards the communists on the ground that their ideology fostered resentment among people, curbed individual rights and promoted statism.

These virtues of courage, love of one's own and friendship come together in his appeals to the super powers to eschew nuclear weapons. Explaining his position, he writes 'one should love science but we should hate the manufacture of nuclear

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<sup>7</sup> E.V Ramasami Naicker started out with Congress and Rajaji and later parted ways to lead the Dravidian movement which among other things was anti-brahmin and anti-hindi. He came to be known as 'Periyar' or the Big one'.

weapons for cowardly mass destruction leading to the annihilation of the civilization man has achieved' (CR 1998b: 188). The intimate link between governments and atomic research was a good reason to be suspicious of the rhetoric about peaceful use. He reminded that the world had some rights against radioactive poisoning of the atmosphere. He called for a unilateral renunciation of nuclear arms from Christian America, an act of 'absolute courage'. Subsequent to a Soviet proposal to ban tests, he called upon Americans to show 'relative courage'. He argued that nuclear disarmament ought not to be linked to conventional arms parity or unrealistic goals as the abolition of war. For nuclear arms threatened the whole of humankind. While a reasonable amount of suspicion and vigilance is necessary in international security, nation-states ought to move towards trust and friendliness. He also appealed to the soviet leader Khrushchev to unilaterally abjure the use of nuclear weapons in war and that a 'supreme moment had arrived for your republic to attain undying glory [...]' (Felton 1962: 106). At 84, he first visited America and presented his case to John Kennedy.

What is remarkable is that he appeals as a friend of the superpowers, recalls their respective moral strengths as nation-states, gently reminds them of the recent past, points out the absurdity of a strategy based on retaliation, reiterates the rights of mankind, and in the light of all this, he calls for noble acts whose moral force would be irresistible. Sporting offers and noble acts are encouraged from the standpoint of a clear-headed analysis of the immediate situation, an assessment of strengths and weakness, of the limits and possibilities of human nature and politics.

## CONCLUSION

In general, spiritual politics has meant subordinating politics to a higher end through a selective return to some aspects of Hindu tradition. For Coomaraswamy, the ritual marriage between the Brahmin-priest and King implies restoring contemplation as the ultimate end of political order. This, in turn, requires downgrading modern ideals of freedom and equality to the pursuit of wisdom. Instead of subordinating modern ideals of freedom, equality and secularism, Radhakrishnan attempts to ground them in 'practical Vedanta' that emphasizes spiritual experience over rituals and dogma. He envisions seers and sages, moved by their experiences of universal oneness, ushering universal enlightenment.

However enchanting the cosmos may be in India thanks to living traditions, the project of reinvigorating liberal politics through ancient wisdom is fraught with problems. Liberal norms and institutions do not easily lend themselves to final ends without considerable distortion. The development experience in postcolonial societies shows that the liberal ideology of progress can generate violence. By the same token, wisdom or universal enlightenment can generate messianic and fundamentalist politics. Of course, Coomaraswamy and Radhakrishnan do not advocate overturning liberal institutions; rather they endorse the moderate and ameliorative spiritual politics practiced by Gandhi or Vinoba. In the absence of

mature and charismatic leaders, spiritual longing for oneness and integral life might also open the floodgates of majoritarian tyranny in a democracy.

I have suggested that Hindu myths and rituals might open up a more nuanced approach to relating spirituality and politics. For they often highlight the elusive nature of perfect harmony and synthesis so that ideals are simultaneously affirmed and deferred. In this vein, I have explored Rajaji's 'spirited' politics which draws upon myths, epics and ordinary devotional practices. Instead of overarching first principles, it may be more worthwhile to recover practical reason to forge a 'spirited' liberalism. While appreciative of individual freedom and democracy, Rajaji recognizes the role of prudent statesmanship and civic virtues in the public sphere. Being god-minded or attuned to the mystery of the universe, one need not withdraw from the agon of politics nor wait for a complete overhaul of human aspirations sponsored by saints or state-power. Instead, Rajaji counsels working through extant norms and institutions seizing rare opportunities for courageous actions. This is perhaps why he clubbed Gandhi, Kennedy and Dag Hammarskjold together as men who 'spiritualized politics' and approved Dag Hammarskjold's view (CR 1980b: 196-7) that if Christ had lived today, he would have been UN secretary General!

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