

An Indian Christian Appreciation of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: A Search into the Religious Heritage of the Indian Christian

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In Hinduism *Sakti* is associated with an extraordinary power. It is an energy coming into individuals by means of which people are able to do unique things and utter certain predictions. The gods associated with *Sakti* are Durga and Kali, the feminine aspects of the deity. In villages the Grama Devatas, like Poleramma, are the power goddesses at popular level. These goddesses with their *Sakti* are capable of inflicting epidemics or catastrophes and famines on men and cattle. When *Sakti* empowers any individual man, the individual in his ecstatic state with an extra energy is able to predict something in oracle form.

In the Aryan civilisation we notice the worship of *Sakti*. *Sakti* is called illusion (*Maya*) by which the world is created and it is also the creative aspect of Isvara. It is the origin and source of everything, even in the material world; it is the Universal Creator. It is "the form of all that is conscious. The origin, the knowledge, the perception of reality, the instigator of intellect."¹ Hinduism is non-dogmatic, experience-oriented and attaches importance to the experience and realisation of the spirit in man irrespective of his religious heritage. Hence the doctrine of the spirit must be studied against this background. It is appropriate to begin with non-Christian forerunners who propounded the idea of the Holy Spirit.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer and the founder of the Brahma Samaj, stood against polytheism and idol worship. He did not attribute any personality to the Holy Spirit. In his view the Holy Spirit is only an influence and the power of God. For Roy, the Holy Spirit is mere influence of God which keeps us in the right path. He ascribes to the Holy Spirit the role of mere influence in the birth of Jesus. He was anxious to safeguard the Holy Spirit from

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¹Devi Bhagavata Purana, quoted by Alan Danitton, *Hindu Polytheism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 255.

becoming another Hindu *avatara*, a fish or an animal, and thus makes the Holy Spirit the mere power of God through which Mary was able to conceive and give birth to Jesus.

It is with Chenchiah that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit received an altogether new interpretation. Chenchiah was very much attracted by Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga, through which a power enters into a person "from outside,"² renewing and reinvigorating a person, leading him to a higher stage in the progress of the human species. The idea of a power or *Sakti* coming from outside, not only to influence but also to change man was something appealing to Chenchiah, which he found missing in the Hindu idea of spirit. Chenchiah compares the life of the spirit to that of the yoga of the spirit. Chenchiah explains that the Christian believer is yoked with Christ and turns out to be a new man and his life becomes the channel through which the spirit flows. For Chenchiah, the Holy Spirit is the "the new cosmic energy; the Kingdom of God, the new order; the children of God, the new type that Christ has inaugurated."³

Chenchiah employs the Sanskrit word *mahasakti*, the great power, to describe the nature of the spirit. When he clothes spirit in Indian Sanskrit terminology he firmly believes in the personality of the Holy Spirit. Chenchiah thinks that the idea of power associated with the Holy Spirit is being neglected in Christianity. When utilised correctly the Holy Spirit is "the human energy that is sought to be harnessed to the Christian task and not the new cosmic energy—the Holy Spirit."⁴ And he firmly believes that, with the fresh interpretation of the Holy Spirit, Indian Christian theology passes one more milestone. As his theology vibrates with new creation, he sees that "the future of Christianity will ultimately depend upon the discovery by the Indian Church of the tremendous importance of the Holy Spirit and of its capacity to communicate that spirit to the Hindu."⁵ Chenchiah pictures Jesus as the one who ushers in this new creation; it is with the Holy Spirit that a new age and a new order commences.

Chenchiah goes beyond all the traditional, dogmatic categories that rent the Church, and completely revolutionises the idea of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transcends all historical limitations and surpasses all geographical boundaries and becomes the *Paramapurusha* and *Antharyamin*,⁶ the universal dweller in the hearts of men.

¹R. H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (1st edn.) CLS, Madras, 1969, p. 146.

²D. M. Devasahayam and A. N. Sudarisanam, ed., *Rethinking Christianity in India*, Hogarth Press, Madras, 1938, p. 55.

³*Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴D. A. Thangasamy, *The Theology of Chenchiah*, CISRS/YMCA, Bangalore, 1966, p. 218.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 217.

And men can draw inspiration from this, regardless of their religion. Jesus as the Holy Spirit meets here the spiritual thirst and cravings of the age-long need of the human heart. Considered as the new cosmic energy, Jesus will recreate a new heaven and a new earth through this energy. As *mahasakti*⁷ it introduces a dynamic power into the new creation, and a new life into the lives of believers. Chenchiah presents Jesus in this framework, as the one who makes everything new. And he feels that "for a transition from the old to the new mankind a 'new birth,' a birth of the Holy Spirit, is necessary (Titus 3:5; John 3:5). Thereby the reborn become 'children of God' (John 1:2). These terms 'new birth,' 'born of the Spirit,' 'children of God' must not be understood metaphorically but literally."⁸

With Appasamy the concept of the Holy Spirit acquires another new dimension altogether. He asserts in his book, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, that the experience of the indwelling spirit of God has been dear to the heart of India. From the days of the Upanishads the notion of God dwelling inwardly in human hearts is a common thing. He cites Kāṭha Upanishad:

He who is hard to see, entered into the hidd'n,
Set in the Cave, dwelling in the deep, ancient,—
Perceiving God through spiritual concentration,
The wise man leaves behind both joy and sorrow.⁹

Taking Ramanuja as his theological model, Appasamy explains that the latter has put forward the notion that God as *Antaryamin* is the soul, and the world is His body. As the body requires the soul, the world also is occupied by God from within. Since the body and soul are inseparable, the world and God also remain together. Appasamy elucidates the words "take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11b) as a sign of the indwelling nature of the Spirit. Even Jesus' explanation of the true nature of worship shows that worship is not bound to one place but everywhere, including the human heart. However Appasamy is quick to say that "while the general idea of God as found in the Old Testament tends to emphasise His majesty and holiness and His separation from the world and from man, there are here and there glimpses of God as being present everywhere in the universe."¹⁰

The Upanishads employ the term *Atman* to denote the Unseen Reality that dwells within the world and within man, and this is synonymous with the *Brahman* and is present in all things. However, in Hinduism the idea of God's immanence is to be seen more than the

⁷ R. H. S. Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁸ S. Estborn, ed., *A Christian Theological Approach to Hinduism*, CLS, Madras, 1956, p. 62.

⁹ A. J. Appasamy, *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, SPCK, London, 1942, p. 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

idea of personal indwelling in man. Appasamy feels that this notion of God indwelling carries with it certain defects. He goes on to disclose that the presence of God is seen both in good and evil. But in Christianity he finds that there are certain conditions to be fulfilled by the recipient of the Holy Spirit. Unless one invites the Spirit sincerely and with earnestness, He cannot enter into him. Then he explains: "Because we believe in a God who is present everywhere, we need not say that He lives in the hearts of all sorts of people, whether they care for him or not."¹¹ Here Appasamy wants to bring home clearly the fact that God does not dwell in every man, whether he is a saint or sinner. He stresses the need for morally righteous conduct in order to receive the Spirit. Because the Spirit is present in everyone, one cannot justify himself in whatever he does. Man as an individual is accountable for whatever he does.

Appasamy also discovers the hidden danger of pantheism creeping in when God is considered as present or indwelling in everything. This makes one think that everything is sacred because God is in it. In Hinduism, against a pantheistic background, where the world is considered as the body of God and God as its soul, everything in the world is sacred. And this eventually gives room for the elimination of the age-long distinction between sacred and secular. This distinction is essential and it is the corner-stone of Christian ethics and moral philosophy.

Chakkarai identifies the risen Christ with the Holy Spirit and sees the identification realised at Pentecost. The genuine knowledge of Christ must begin with a personal experience of the Holy Spirit. Hence he considers it more appropriate to begin with the Holy Spirit than with the historical Christ. In the early stages of Christianity this experience of the living Christ was fresh. But "when the Christian consciousness of the Church in the Graeco-Roman Empire did begin to reflect, the Holy Spirit became a distant and mystical something."¹² So Chakkarai sees the need for rethinking in Indian Christian theology. Our Christology must start with our direct experience of the Holy Spirit. Chakkarai thinks that it must be from "the Holy Spirit or *Antaryamin*, the Indweller, that we start our enquiry concerning the nature of the person of Jesus."¹³ The resurrected living Christ who is working in our hearts is the Spirit. The Holy Spirit in human experience is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Chakkarai's theology, his Christology, revolves around this axiom. R. H. S. Boyd summarises in this way: "Chakkarai's Christology is a Christology of the Spirit."¹⁴ His emphasis on the spiritual aspect of Christ and Spirit replacing the historical may take us to the advaitic view of Christ by releasing him completely from the historical framework.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹² V. Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, (2nd edn.), CLS, Madras, 1930, p. 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ R. H. S. Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Nehemiah Goreh, a predecessor of Chakkarai, orthodox in his thinking and a conservative, reiterates that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:11) and the third person in the Trinity. He takes St. John's Gospel as his defence to establish that the Holy Spirit is "a Person, and not a quality or power, in the abstract sense of the word."¹⁵ St John uses the pronoun *ekeinos* in the masculine gender, with reference to the Holy Spirit. The same is also presented by using the word *ho paracletos* about him. Goreh says that the Father is a Divine Person and the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person; we cannot imagine that the Person who occupies a position between them is a mere creature. The Holy Spirit cannot be considered as a creature for "the language of Scripture clearly shows that He is God."¹⁶

God in Hinduism is perceived from the spiritual point of view as *Paramatman*. The sages craved this and found it after diligent search within their hearts. For a Hindu, the oneness (*Ekatva*), either of identity, or of participation, of *Paramatman* and *Jivatman* is taken for granted and there is no need for it to be confirmed. There is a possibility that this realisation may be hampered or suspended temporarily, but the cordial relationship remains unaffected. So P. Fallon remarks: "At that level of ourselves where we are divine, nothing can 'happen,' no progress or regress is possible. Salvation is not a new birth out of spiritual death, a gracious adoption; the finite *ātman* is as immutable as the *Paramātman*."¹⁷ In India Christian theologians are cautious and do not make the mistake of identifying *ātman* with *Paramātman*. However Chenchiah advocates the union of the two (not *Ekatva*) which is possible only through Jesus.

The Spirit is also compared to *Ananda*, Joy, the triune aspect of God as *Saccidānanda*. It is the joy that comes from God to the believer; not an ordinary joy but the joy that dwells among any circumstances. But here the very idea of the Christian Trinity as persons is missing. Joy (*Ananda*) is seen as an aspect rather than as a person, inclining towards an Indian modalism. In Hinduism we see the presence of the Spirit as a common phenomenon and a common heritage without any event taking place. Here the dynamic aspect of Spirit as something revolutionary and creative is missing, whereas in Christianity the advent of the Spirit as prophesied by Joel and inaugurated by Jesus in the beginning and bursting forth at Pentecost and the gifts of the Spirit add to the extra energy of the Spirit. The breaking in of the New Age or renewal of the Spirit ushering in a vitality is lacking in Hinduism however. The Acts of the Apostles bears testimony to the fact that the Spirit received in the Upper Room by the disciples was doing wonders and guiding them in their

¹⁵ A. M. Balwant Paradkar, *The Theology of Goreh*, CLS, Madras, 1969, p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁷ P. Fallon, in "God in Hinduism: Brahman, Paramatman and Bhagavan," *Religious Hinduism*, St Paul Publications, Allahabad, 1968, p. 78.

lives. Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus was that he must be born of water and of the Spirit. A person is born physically of human parents, but he is born again spiritually of the Spirit (John 3:5-6). This is ample evidence of the spiritual birth concept, which goes beyond the Hindu concept of the Spirit.

In Christian pneumatology the manifestation of the Spirit in the personalities of men unfolds itself in an experience of fellowship with God. The Spirit indwelling in man does certain things through him, operating through particular individuals. As an example, we can see Pharaoh bearing testimony to Joseph (Gen. 41:38, 39). Joshua was taken as the dynamic successor of Moses, to run the government because the Spirit of God was dwelling in him (Num. 27:8). The Spirit of God filled a warrior like Samson to do mighty works. The same Spirit is seen as reviving dry bones into living human beings. Even in St John's Gospel the Holy Spirit guides God's people, convincing them about sin, judgement and truth (John 16:8). In the Church the Holy Spirit revitalises its whole thinking by equipping the former with the gifts to go into the world and carry on a challenging ministry. The Church as the body of Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives a new impetus and breathes new life into church worship (John 4:24).

The Holy Spirit is not a mere aspect but God himself. In our worship, we share and experience the joy of the Spirit, the joy of our Lord Jesus (Matt. 25:21). As joy, it advocates fellowship in the Spirit, a joy shared daily, in the community and society (Acts 2:46). This joy entered into the early Church with the advent of the Spirit (Acts 2:4). However, the coming of the Holy Spirit is not a spasmodic or transient experience, of coming and going, of dawning and fading out, but an abiding and permanent experience in the believers and in the Church. It is neither an influence nor an ecstatic element woven outwardly into the fabric of Church life.

The Holy Spirit in Christianity includes the idea of holiness. It is a holiness which expects the receiver to set himself apart from normal life for a higher lofty goal. It is not an awe-inspiring holiness nor a cultic holiness. But it is a holiness that demands and which ultimately leads the person to a Christian maturity. Arnold B. Come thinks that "if God is to come as Holy Spirit and dwell with man, man must be spirit to be truly 'present' with God."¹⁸ Christianity has taken care to distinguish clearly man's spirit from the Holy Spirit. The spirit of man clearly implies only man's inward capacity and power which constitute his very being and personality. St Paul makes this difference very clear in his theology by saying that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

¹⁸ Arnold B. Come, *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 73.

and we cry out in deep direct personal address, Abba, Father. Karl Barth also makes it plain that "He is not man's own spirit and He never will be. He is God, attesting Himself to the spirit of man as his God, as the God who acts for him and to him."¹⁹ Indian Christian theology must penetrate into all these points, distinguishing the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit not as something inherent but as an endowment of God depending upon the willingness of the receiver. It must also bring into the limelight the dynamic aspect of the Spirit, which catches an individual, enabling him to do extraordinary things which he cannot do in his normal capacity.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, part I, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1956, p. 646.