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# Indian Spirituality: in Search of Truth and Reality

Kathleen Nicholls

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Sunand Sumithra*

In this moving article the author contrasts the intense Hindu search for truth, love and reality through four millennia of Indian culture with the more recent, but equally intense, Indian Christian experience of God in Christ. The language of poetry rather than prose, of symbols rather than ideas is shown to be the most effective vehicle of this search and its anguish. While Hindu spirituality focuses on the self in search of the Ultimate Self, Christian spirituality reaches out with the love of God in love and compassion to the poor, the marginalized and all who suffer. In this context, the Cross and the Resurrection shine as light in the midst of darkness.

Editor

**Keywords:** Hinduism, truth, life, love, awe, reverence, Incarnation, release, deliverance, grace, symbolism, austerity, ascetism, guru

As we look back over India's history as far as the Indus Valley civilization, we are conscious of 5000 years of search—a long, long search for truth and reality.

One of the strands of this search appears in Vedic times, somewhere in the second millennium B.C. as waves of Aryans migrated to India. Ritual sacrifice was made to a variety of gods who were personifications of the power of nature which affected people's daily lives. The concept of propitiation and expiation of the deities took shape in Vedic times.

With the development of the various schools of philosophy, we see the emergence of a new concept of deity, the 'descended' or *avatar*. The *Ramayana* demonstrates ideal behaviour towards family and community in the life of the avatar: Rama. The *Mahabharata* seeks to answer the moral and social problems of the times. In the 'Song of the Lord' (**the Bhagwad Gita**), we see the first suggestion that God can love man and man love God, as Krishna, disguised as the charioteer, converses with Arjuna.

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[www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/harry.html](http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/harry.html) and at [www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/scintro.htm](http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~hahne/scintro.htm). For some software of interest to theologians, see [www.pitts.emory.edu/bob/theosoft.html](http://www.pitts.emory.edu/bob/theosoft.html). Somewhat dated printed works include Jeffrey Hsu, *A Comprehensive Guide to Computer Bible Study* (Dallas Word, 1993), and John J. Hughes, *Bits, Bytes and Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). Jason D. Baker maintains a Web page supplement to his *Christian Cyberspace Companion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) on [www.bakerbooks.com/cc](http://www.bakerbooks.com/cc). Another list of books is found at <http://bible.acu.edu/ctt/ccbiblio.html>

As the philosophical ideas were developed in the *Upanishads*, the strand of synthesis of ideas and cultic practices became more evident. Hinduism became eclectic, drawing together diverse religious concepts and practices. Since then the ideals and ethical beliefs of various religions, including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, have been absorbed and adapted. Modern secularism and evolutionary science have led to further adaptation.

The Hebrew children of Israel, on the other hand, emphasised *analysis* rather than synthesis, the concrete rather than the philosophical. The Old Testament writers were concerned with the God of history, the God who acts.

The poets of the biblical Psalms spoke of God's chosen King as one who controls history:

Why do the nations plan rebellion?  
 Why do the people make their useless  
 plots?  
 Their kings revolt,  
 Their rulers plot together against the  
 Lord  
 and against the King he chose.  
 From his throne in heaven the Lord  
 laughs  
 and mocks their feeble plans  
 'I will announce', says the King,  
 'what the Lord has declared.  
 He said to me, "You are my son;  
 today I have become your father.  
 Ask, and I will give you all the  
 nations;  
 the whole earth will be yours.  
 You will break them with an iron  
 you will shatter them in pieces  
 a clay pot"

[Psalm 2:1, 2, 4, and 7, 8, 9.](#)

## THE SEARCH FOR GOD AS TRUTH, LIFE AND LOVE

In the long history of Indian spirituality we see a search for the God who creates and saves. The familiar Hindu prayer expresses this search: 'From delusion lead me to truth. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality.'<sup>1</sup>

Poets have expressed this longing for peace, for truth and light with great intensity. Kabir the 14th century mystic weaver, searches in such passages as:

To whom shall I go to learn about my  
 Beloved?  
 Kabir says: As you never may find the  
 forest if you ignore the tree,  
 so He may never be found in abstractions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1:3:28.

<sup>2</sup> *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill, (India: Macmillan).

*My You Where My You why You And On when Without* you life means nothing.<sup>3</sup>

*taught have faithful lit this candle abandoned set the raft of yet you seas of will you*

*Lord, love. gone? companion, love: now? a-sail me me pain; return?*

Light, oh where is the light?  
Kindle it with the burning fire of  
desire  
It thunders and the mind rushes  
screaming through the void.  
The night is black as a black stone.  
Let not the hours  
pass by in the dark.  
Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

*You ask me the marks of a man of faith?  
When death comes to him, he has a smile on his lips.<sup>4</sup>*

<i>O</i>	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>God,</i>	<i>mighty</i>	<i>fire,</i>
<i>glow</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>me,</i>	<i>burn</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>me</i>
<i>until</i>	<i>Thy</i>	<i>radiance</i>	<i>fills</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>soul.</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>God,</i>	<i>mighty</i>	<i>fire,</i>
<i>may</i>	<i>Thy</i>	<i>heat</i>	<i>consume</i>	<i>my</i>	<i>will</i>
<i>until</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>burn</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>Thee.</i>	
<i>May</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>flames</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>Thy</i>	<i>love</i>

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ever blaze upon the altar  
of my heart.<sup>5</sup>

Narayan Waman Tilak, Maharashtra's outstanding Christian poet and patriot, evangelist and social worker contributed this lyric to Marathi hymnody:

From this day onwards Thou art  
mine  
Brother beloved and King Divine,  
from this day on.  
To Thee I offer child and wife,  
My home and all my worldly life,  
To Thee surrender everything.  
My very self henceforth is Thine.  
O take it, Lord, for Thou art mine  
Brother beloved and King Divine  
My thoughts and words are all of  
Thee  
Thou Wisdom, Joy and Liberty  
Now Thee and me no rift can part.  
One not in semblance but in heart  
Set free am I, and for me shine  
The joys of heaven  
Since Thou art mine  
Brother beloved and King Divine  
From this day on.<sup>6</sup>

The outstanding Tamilian poet, H.A. Krishna Pillai, became a Christian as a mature man. His knowledge of Hinduism and of Tamil literature is evident in his poetry. In one of his lyrics, *Saccidananda* he says:

God is far from mysterious. He is 'father, mother and all Him . . . my preceptor too . . . my riches and my friend beside . . .'

Melting in compassion, for us, poor  
souls,  
Thou gavs't Thy life, and redeemed  
us;  
What recompense for this?  
Taking me in Thy charge, to the very  
end,  
Save me, who have no claim on Thee.  
I have no right to ask thus—  
But dear Lord, who but Thee can be  
my kin  
My refuge sure?<sup>7</sup>

## AWE AND REVERENCE

<sup>5</sup> Devenesan, Chandran, *The Cross is Lifted* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Upasana Sangeet*, No. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), p. 76.

In Hindu worship, the consciousness of the presence of the unknown produces a sense of awe and mystery in the more than casual worshipper. This is manifested in prolonged periods of silence and meditation, in exercising care in ritual bathing and the removing of shoes and sandals during worship, in visits to holy places—to temples, guradwaras and shrines and in pilgrimages to distant places.

The Christian poets, while aware of this mystery and filled with reverence, find that in Christ there is an open secret. In the Incarnation, God *revealed* himself in Christ. In Christ's life, death and resurrection, God is *with* us—Father, Son Holy Spirit.

There is no sentimentalising of the Nativity in Chandran's *Immanuel*:

God                      of                      God  
crying                      in                      the  
a                      familiar,                      homely                      human                      night  
like                      the                      sound                      of                      hooves                      sound  
flagstones  
like                      the                      rattle                      of                      chains                      tethering  
cattle  
like                      the                      crunch                      of                      straw                      in                      the  
mouths                      of                      of  
like                      the                      rustle                      of                      hay                      tossed                      into                      a  
manger.

And through 'Light' and 'Very God' to the awesome, prophetic conclusion:

God                      with                      us  
terribly                      simply                      with                      us  
And                      the                      shadows                      of                      men  
with                      arms                      outstretched                      to                      take                      Him  
fall                      across                      the                      manger  
in the form of a cross<sup>8</sup>

Hilda Raj in her unpublished poem, *Easter* reveals more of the open secret:

Gethsemane                      I                      knew                      not,                      Lord,  
I                      cared                      not                      what                      Thy                      captors                      did,  
Nor                      wept                      to                      see                      Thee                      on                      the                      Cross  
I                      did                      not                      mock                      Thy                      pain,                      nor                      asked  
Thy                      love;                      no                      incense                      did                      I                      bear  
To                      where                      Thy                      body                      lay,                      nor                      saw  
The                      empty                      tomb;                      no                      angel                      spoke  
Me                      fair.                      I                      sought                      Thee                      not                      with                      tears,  
I                      knew                      no                      bliss                      like                      hers                      who                      heard  
Thy                      voice                      and                      answered                      'Rabboni'.  
Within                      for                      fear,                      the                      door                      shut                      fast  
At                      last                      I                      heard                      thee                      seek                      me                      out;  
'All                      hail,                      and                      peace'—My                      Lord,                      my  
God!

## THE QUEST FOR RELEASE AND DELIVERANCE

By the law of *karma*, wrong actions lead inexorably to suffering and unending human existence. Only good actions can free one from this bondage. This law cannot be

<sup>8</sup> Devanesan, Chandran, op. cit. pp. 12 and 13.

changed—by man, by priest, by guru, by God. God *can* create new forms or actions, but not for any particular purpose; this is his sport or *lila*.

In tandem with the law of *karma* is *samsara*, the transmigration of the soul. Bodily released from changes, the soul transmigrates from body to body carrying its load of *karma* with it.

In order that future existences maybe conditioned by good deeds in this life a devout Hindu will seek to walk on one or more of the paths to salvation.

He may seek to achieve spiritual deliverance through *karma marga*. His religious duties will be performed as an offering to God. *Bhakti*, the way of love and of utter devotion, may depend on ritualistic worship, but it may seek direct communion with God. The attitude may be that of a servant to a master, wife to husband, man to friend.

For the intellectual few, *jnana marga* (higher knowledge or spiritual insight) is the path. The poets have described these paths.

Nimmi Prarembi, psychology lecturer in a Delhi women's college, expresses the longing for deeper communion in her unpublished poem, *Butterfly Heart*. A Christian herself, she has felt, like many of us, the longing to be lost in contemplation of the Lord, and our frustration at the distracting thoughts that creep in:

In		this		past		week
I	have		come		every	day
to sit in your Presence.						
Not	once		have		I	come.
The			chair			that
held						me
Held	but	a		part	of	me.
My	mind		and		my	body
were with you, my Lord.						
My						heart,
like			a			butterfly
fluttered		through		cool		meadows
and			pastel			flowers
drinking honey into itself.						
Today						
I						come
But	with		my	butterfly		heart,
And	I	lay	its	poor		gatherings
At			your			feet.
I			am			ashamed,
For			your			fragrance
is	fresher		than	the		perfume
upon			my			wings,
And		from		your		lips
I			am			drunk
with joy. <sup>9</sup>						

Iqbal believed that anything good came from a ceaselessly agitated mind:

Khuda	tujhey	kisee	toofan	ashna	kar
dey					

<sup>9</sup> Unpublished



Thence compassion's rain poured and poured  
in matchless flow.  
This holy flood gathering in a stream  
wends its way forever in that blessed land—  
the waters of eternal—the living Ganga.<sup>12</sup>

Another of the great Tamil poets, Vedanayagam Shastriar wrote long poems on various aspects of God's grace. *Perimbakadal* is a series of thoughts on the birth and sufferings of Christ, *Balasrithiran* deals with Jesus' incarnation and *Gnanavula* praises God's mercy and love. The latter themes are developed in *Parasparakanni*.

Narayan Waman Tilak had planned to write eleven books on the life of Christ. Only the first book of the *Christayana* was completed before his death. His wife courageously added 64 chapters to those already written. Unfortunately the force of the Marathi *ovi* metre is somewhat lost in translation although the translator has achieved a rhyme scheme. In his invocation, Tilak writes:

Lord of the world, hail, hail to thee!  
Creator, Sovereign, Saviour Thou!  
Joy of the saints, let all things bow  
In worship of Thy Majesty!  
Thou needest not that we should frame  
A thousand names to hymn thy praise,  
Children unskilled in scholar's ways  
We hail thee by the children's name  
Father! Dear home of all our trust,  
What loving kindness has Thou shown  
That as Thy children Thou should'st own  
Frail worthless creatures of the dust  
Lord Jesus Christ, all praise be Thine!  
Thee saviour of the world we own.  
'Tis Thou to fallen man has shown  
The wonder of the Lord divine.<sup>13</sup>

Prabhu Guptara, one of our younger poets, in his *Meditation on Good Friday* has much to say about God's Amazing Grace. He concludes:

Among the crowds,  
Many billion  
Tourists sightseers,  
jeerers, scoffers, hangers-on  
some had eyes  
It is not only  
the Friday that had to become bad  
before it could ever be good  
that brings us face to face with reality  
We were done with him

<sup>12</sup> Compiled by Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet*, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Tilak, N.W., *Bhakti Niranjana*, pp. 3 and 5.

but  
is not done with us.<sup>14</sup>

he

## SYMBOLISM

What is a symbol? Usually it is a visible object which represents a similarity to something not shown but realised through association. A message can be conveyed across the language barrier in a symbolic representation. If used well, this can inspire understanding and mutual response.

In the history of Indian spirituality symbols have been important. Symbols of sound have had their place in the ringing of bells and the blowing of conch shells. The most important sound has, of course, been that of OM, representing Absolute Reality. Symbols to touch and symbols of design have also had their place. Idols are often worn as symbols, lamps are a means to the light. The statues and small temples around a Hindu temple are meant to be seen by the pilgrim as he moves from image to image into the sanctuary from the light of day to the superluminous darkness. A Hindu woman is not dressed until she has applied *sindur* to her hair parting and *bindi* to her forehead.

In a valid and necessary search for Indian expression of worship and witness, Christians have sometimes been more enthusiastic than wise. The bells used in worship are not always appropriate ones. OM has been used to represent the revealed trinity. The controversy over the application of *bindi* continues unabated. Does it represent Parwati's menstrual flow, Shiva's blood, woman's subjugation, or is it now purely cosmetic? Should a Christian woman apply a cross instead?

No symbol is sacred in itself. Whether I wear a cross, install a stained glass window or buy a painting of the Holy Family, these have no magic powers in themselves. Stained glass breaks, silver melts, paintings burn. They can be only illustrations leading to contemplation of our Lord.

One symbol appearing through out history is that of the tree. Again and again in Indian religious and philosophical writings it deals with the nature of God's being and activity. The Upanishads may say that:

The One stands like a tree  
established in the heaven,  
By him, by the Purusha  
the whole world is filled.

Rabindranath Tagore pleads:

Send the love that would soak down into  
the centre of being  
and that from there would spread  
like the unseen sap  
Through the branching trees of life  
giving birth to fruits and flowers

I like Chandra Devanesan's use of the symbol:

O Tree of Calvary  
send your roots deep down  
into my heart.  
Gather together the soil of my heart,

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<sup>14</sup> Prabhu Gupthara, *Beginnings*.

the sands of my fickleness  
the stones of my stubbornness  
the mud of my desires  
Bind them all together,  
O Tree of Calvary,  
interlace them with thy  
strong roots,  
entwine them with the network of thy love.<sup>15</sup>

Sadhu Sundar Singh the Punjabi convert and evangelist writes:

True Christians who bear their cross die, yet they live, and in the midst of persecution are like the leaves of a tree which fall in winter only to appear in renewed vigour in the spring and prove they are really living. ([2 Cor. 4:8-10](#) and [6:4-10](#))  
In spite of sorrow and suffering their life is hid in God.

Prabhu Guptara in *Prayer 2* agonizes:

I don't want to move mountains, Lord  
But to be moved  
into your image  
For I am in a strait 'twixt  
twenty, crucified between what I believe  
and what I am  
Only your love  
earthed by a tree  
holds me.<sup>16</sup>

The theme of God as the heavenly painter has been popular with poets, but some of our Christian poets have used the symbol differently. Chandran Devanesan writes:

Lord,  
I am a painter  
and Thou  
art my subject.  
But my portrait will never be complete  
for thou art infinite  
like the eternal colour-pageant  
of Nature.<sup>17</sup>

New symbols have evolved. In South India, the banana tree with its little suckers sending out feelers for nourishment has come to represent eternal life. Old symbols have been given new content: A ship has come to represent the Church tossed by storm, persecution and heresy, many functioning for the good of all.

Christian poets could never begin to exhaust the biblical symbols: the Hand of God, the animals with their various attributes, the symbols of man and his world, his relationships and his walk with God. So Paul speaks of the master/slave relationships; he urges his readers to take the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith. Jesus speaks of a house on a rock, a city set on a hill, of wheat and weeds.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Guptara, *op. cit.* p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Devanesan, *op. cit.* 'The infinite Christ', pp. 14 and 15.

## THE WAY OF AUSTERITY AND ASCETICISM

One of the aims of the deeply spiritual man is to control and subdue the body so that complete attention can be given to God. One of the aids to this is *yoga* which by physiological and psychological means allows the devotee to control all physical and psychic energy with the aim of achieving spiritual perfection. Restraint and denial of the body, strict observance, and erect but relaxed posture, regulation of breathing, the withdrawal of the senses, concentration on a fixed spot or object, meditation and finally *samadhi* with the cessation of all activity are to be aimed for.

The negation of the world in poverty and fasting and the negating of life in the attainment of *brahmacharya* or total abstinence are the goals of holy men.

Simplicity of life is a goal that all of us should seek, but to what end? For the Christian, the disciples bring the self under the power of the Holy Spirit so that we might better express our love for God and for our neighbour. Prabhu Guptara has some very cutting things to say about the superficial and self-indulgent celebration of Christmas in *A Madness*:

Christmas anything the or company his born How ever Lord, son me? <sup>18</sup>	the  son in	pudding  pain humiliation director were, a could possibly that was	doesn't  of that would quite carpenter's	really  even feel accidentally, home you, think, your worth	say about childbirth a if home you, think, your worth
--	----------------------	--	--	--	--

In another poem, *Christmas* he says:

Not smartly window the grinning for or Christmas. I feel encouraging, being with me. <sup>19</sup>	the  shopping soft  Santa can his	dressed for  a Claus For look hand	superficiality  something sentimentality  carousel the into on	and first God's my	of suburbanites nice, of niceness season, turkey. time eyes shoulder resting,
---	--	---	--	-----------------------------	---

One of the most powerful poems demonstrating the need for simplicity in order to serve our neighbour is Chandran Devaneson's *Lines to a Rickshaw Puller*. The poet describes the life of a man in vivid terms—a life that led to expressions of 'unconscious communism'. Then, says Devaneson:

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<sup>18</sup> Guptara, op. cit. p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Guptara, op. cit. p. 23.

I pass you by like a hundred others  
 who also pass you by—  
 and the road may be the road  
 from Jerusalem to Jericho for all we know.

I would like to put my hand on your shoulder  
 and say to you 'Comrade,  
 there is one Who died for us  
 and dying made us blood brothers.'  
 But I am filled with the cowardice of the well-dressed—  
 for clothes are by no means flimsy  
 when it comes to erecting barriers  
 between man and man.  
 I am afraid you will wake with a start  
 and betray resentment in your eyes  
 as you see in me what I really am—  
 your well-dressed enemy.  
 And then you will acknowledge defeat  
 and put on your mask of patient stupidity,  
 you will jump up and dust the seat  
 and grin and point to it with a flourish of your hand.  
 You will want us to sell our brotherhood  
 for eight annas

Day after day I pass you by,  
 you the man by the road side  
 and I the priest and the Levite rolled in one,  
 passing you by.<sup>20</sup>

Narayan Waman Tilak's life was spent breathing the attitude of concern for his neighbour. He was prepared to give away money—even when he did not have it—food, clothes, cooking utensils (sometimes to his wife's bewilderment!), life itself to those in need. I have not found any reference to 'social service' in Tilak's poetry. I have found much of devotion to Christ. His poems overflow with devotion and a sense of servanthood; his life was the practical outworking of these attributes. One area of concern for others that does come through in his writings is his deep love and hope for his country. From the *Christayana*:

Whatever I have shed of tears  
 For Mother India in past years  
 A woven garland now appears  
 Laid, cleansed of fears at Thy blest feet  
 And in the days to come, what more  
 Of sorrow may yet be in store—  
 My Motherland and (though so poor)  
 Myself I pour into Thy hands.<sup>21</sup>

(This translation by Bishop Philip Loyd is a happier one than many translations of Tilak's poems retaining as it does the original marathi *Ovi* metre.)

One of his passionate songs about India is, I believe, the result of his agony at being accused of adopting a 'foreign' religion:

<sup>20</sup> Devaneson, op. cit. pp. 47, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Tilak, N.W., *From Brahma to Christ* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 91.

Bran shall I eat and grass shall I wear for the sake of thy love, my Motherland and I shall throw in the dust all that passes for glory and happiness . . .

My body will I sacrifice, my life will I lay down in the service of my noble land. Some will laugh and some will cry at this ecstasy of love. But I heed them not. Born to fulfil my relationship as a son of Thee, I will fulfil it. May God help me . . .<sup>22</sup>

Hetty Prim is so saddened by the lack of love in mankind for mankind that she declares *I Cannot Go To Church*:

They	stroke	guitars	and	pet	dogs,
Wear	crosses	round	their	necks	
With	hatred	on	their	foreheads	
And	blood-lust	in	their	jest.	
I	walked	the	road	to	Calvary;
I	found	nobody		there	
Except	a	bleak-eyed		leper	
All	knotted	up	in	prayer;	
His	hands	like	roots	and	tubers,
His	feet	like	mangled	clay,	
His	eyes	twin	pools	of	anguish
So	far	from	amber	day.	
I	will	not	go	to	church
Until	I	find	God	my	friend
Till	all	the	moneymakers		there,
To	let	in	God's	heavenly	move
Till	the	poor	are	loved	and
and	the	women	are	set	cherished
Till	I	can	meet	my	free,
and	worship	bold	and	Lord	again
Till	I	can	hold	my	free,
and	go	towards	my	brother's	hand
To	kneel		in	our	Lord
					adoration

and acclaim Him as our God.<sup>23</sup>

And Victor Gaikwad in *Administration Slips* laments the lack of ethics and helpfulness in a country that is the home of religious people.

If	something	were	to	go	wrong,
with	the	tap	again	it	can't
be	repaired	without	the		cracked
washbasin		collapsing	(duly		recorded,
cracked		before	occupation).		'Please
give	me	a	new	one',	I
The	MES	replied,	'It	can't	be
just	like	that.	Get	the	RMO's
that	the	washbasin	is		certificate
and	we'll	give	you	a	unhygienic
He's	your	friend.	No	new	one.
					problem.'

He smiled. I shrank (unpublished).

## THE NEED FOR A GURU/ACHARYA

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Hetty Prim, *I Cannot Go to Church*.

The functions of the *guru* were given elevation by the Siva Siddhanta sect of South India during the Puranic era. Siva might appear in any form to help his devotees, the chief form being that of the guru or teacher. In Sikhism *Nanak* organized his disciples into a close-knit community with himself as the first guru. The Sikh tradition of guru plays a mediating role in a Sikh's search for mystical union with the Formless One.

Today the modern gurus and godmen such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Satya Sai Baba and Rajneesh have given Hinduism a popular appeal. With them the problems of modern man are discussed and solutions sought. As man has reacted against the dehumanizing effects of our present day society, he has to resort to various types of mystical experience. The modern Hindu gurus have taken advantage of the modern Indian's consciousness of a vacuum in life. So we have gurus offering in exchange for complete surrender, physical experiences. Some South Indian Gurus claim to have supernatural powers. Others have updated Tantric techniques of attaining super-consciousness. The most influential have been those offering peace and energy along with intellectual alternatives to present secular world views.

Mirabai, the Rajasthani princess, mentioned her teacher, Raidas in some of her songs. Tayamanavar an 18th century steward of a Chola prince was very much influenced by his guru 'the teacher of the silence'. This guru persuaded him not to retire from the world but to stay still in the secular world, so he could write:

*Place has no power to poison his presence  
No-one can say 'He is here, He is there'.  
Not in this place, not in that, is the Godhead.  
Unbounded by places he abides everywhere.*

Ramalinga Swami looked on his eldest brother and a teacher from Kanjeevaram as his *gurus*. He eventually gathered a great many disciples around him and built a home of Charity and a Hall of Wisdom. Although he is comparatively modern (born 1823), he has a respected place in Tamil literature. Deep religion and a wide charity for all living beings mark his work. From **Confession**:

*I am the greatest sinner among sinners, unwilling to part with even a grain of rice for a noisy crow.  
Like the fly buzzing about without any rest, I seek O father; tell me what to do that I may not die, and grant me thy grace to support me.*<sup>25</sup>

Tukuram, the seventeenth century grain seller and poet, was visited in a dream by a mysterious teacher, Babuji, whose teaching indicates that Tukuram may have come under the influence of the Vaishnavite sect. It is difficult to choose from his prolific writing. The following is a sample of his sense of values:

*Some stones excel others in quality; they are priceless and illustrious.  
Some are found in the homes of rich  
and poor, but a few are highly valued.  
Some lie glittering on sandbanks,  
but no-one would cast a glance at them.  
Everything is blest and prosperous  
in its own place; the misery of poverty  
is an illusion.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid* p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid* p. 117.

What of the Christian poets? Have they found a teacher who has experienced truth? One who chooses disciples and passes on the secret of the truth? As we read their poetry, we find that in Jesus, the Word, they have found their *guru*, their *Sat-guru Maharaj*, their eternal teacher, the King. Says Pallai:

He is the supreme, the Ancient of days,  
the transcendent, Invisible Plenitude,  
Immanent yet above all things,  
Three-fold relation, pure, unrelated  
knowledge beyond knowledge  
The Father, Son, Supreme Lord, unborn,  
the seedless seed of tree becoming  
the cause of all, Creator, Providence,  
Lord of the Universe.  
The infinite and perfect Word,  
the Supreme Person begotten,  
sharing in the Father's nature,  
Conscious by essence, Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Narayan Waman Tilak writes in *Guru and Disciple*:

One moment rain, one moment sunshine  
then a beautiful mingling of the two  
So it is in nature and so is it within my heart.  
How much joy have I had in Thy company!  
I cannot describe it, O Christ, but my mind  
goes wild at the very remembrance.  
At one time I said, 'Thou art my guru  
I must be careful to behave with Thee as a disciple,'  
I sat at a distance in reverential fear;  
I tried to gain some sort of intellectual comprehension  
of Thee.  
But you spoilt it all with a smile!  
My efforts were all useless.  
I jumped up and ran to you and flung my arms around your neck, laughing.  
O Lord, I cannot keep my proper place with Thee;  
The servant says—how can Disunion and Friendship  
ever remain together<sup>28</sup>

The experience and writings of the Christian poets we have listened to indicate a number of guidelines. They suggest that as Christians, we can draw on the wealth of traditional Indian spirituality. We must reject everything that is idolatrous, immoral and contrary to biblical revelation.

The coming of Christ brings new dimensions into our lives. The past, with all its glories is transcended by the glory of the unique Christ. The hope that these poets experienced in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the fruit of the search for truth. Could it be better expressed than in the words of Chandran Devaneson's *The Cross is Lifted*?

Two thousand years have slipped by  
like freshets in the Ganges

<sup>27</sup> Appasamy, A.J., *Tamil Christian Poet*, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob, P.S., *The Experiential Response of Narayan Waman Tilak*, (CISRS, 1979), p. 113.

since St. Thomas came to our land.  
 Here, though the cross is lifted  
 amidst the paddy fields and coconut palms  
 and white clad Christians flock to the churches  
 when the bells call them to worship;  
 our wise men have not yet seen the star  
 and the manger of Bethlehem  
 is not yet the cradle of our land  
 But Christian hope never dies  
 and the ends of the strands of destiny  
 are held safe in the hands of God.  
 Pass it on to ends of the earth!  
 Christ is the answer—Ours! Yours!<sup>29</sup>

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## Book Reviews

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### THE BOOK OF ACTS IN ITS FIRST CENTURY SETTING: VOL. 1. THE BOOK OF ACTS IN ITS ANCIENT LITERARY SETTING

Edited by Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993, 479pp. h/b. No bibliography. Indices of Biblical References, Ancient Authors, Modern Authors and Subjects, ISBN 0-8028-2433-1

*Reviewed by Norman T. Barker*

*(Queensland Presbyterian Theological Hall, Emmanuel College, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia)*

This is a valuable aid to the appreciation and understanding of the Book of Acts. The material from a wide range of ancient literature illuminates many of the critical questions that arise in the study of Acts and makes a notable contribution to interpretation.

Acts occupies a unique position in the NT. Closely related on the one hand to the Gospels, and on the other to the Epistles, it provides a bridge between Jesus and the Church. Traditionally titled 'The Acts of the Apostles', it could be described more accurately as 'some acts of some apostles'.

This is the first of a projected new series on the literary, political, social, religious and theological background of the Book of Acts. Consulting editors for the series are I. Howard Marshall and David W.J. Gill. Volume 1 has been edited by Dr. Bruce W. Winter, Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge and a member of the Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University, and Andrew D. Clarke, research librarian at Tyndale House. The editors expect that all volumes within the series will be published within two years.

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<sup>29</sup> Devaneson, op. cit, frontispiece.