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Dan CHIȚOIU, Corina DOMNARI
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EDITORIAL

Meanings of Values and Spirituality in the Asian Context

Dan Chițoiu¹, Corina Domnari²

This Issue gathers research papers that explore multifaceted relationships between values and spirituality in an Asian context. Focuses are on Chinese and Indian cultural areas, as well as on a remote region of Pamir. There are two levels of investigation and field research: one assesses major cultural and spiritual areas on the Asian continent, while the second examines its borderlands and remote cultural regions. The first two papers consider the material support as a privileged way of expressing the spiritual values of a cultural tradition, focusing on *ding* (vessels) and *prayer beads*. The other two are discussing the connections between thinking, spirituality, and social values. The last one reveals the extraordinary ways of preserving a spiritual values code. These contributions offer a glimpse into the profound connections between spiritual codes, social codes, and the preservation of cultural identity in Asia.

Wei Hua and Cao Yuan, in their paper *Ding: Chinese Cultural Artifact Embodying the Thought of Unity between Heaven*

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and Man, evaluate an essential type of cultural artifact that embodies the thought from early Chinese history and its significant changes in appearance and function corresponding to its development during historical periods: *the ding*. From vessels of the Neolithic Age to paramount ritual vessels of the Bronze Age and today's precious gifts, *dings* have developed into a unique cultural artifact and symbol conveying authority, unity, solemnity, and harmony. Interaction with *ding* symbolism is a means for enhancing both cognitive and practical aspects in humans, enabling them to continually improve and ultimately achieve a state of complete unity with heaven, the fundamental scope of spiritual practice in Confucian tradition. The article discusses the historical changes of *dings* and analyzes the influence of thought on their appearances and functions. Due to the symbolic codes embodied in this type of vessel over all the historical periods, the *ding* gradually developed into a *unique cultural symbol* conveying authority, unity, solemnity, and harmony. Man and heaven were seen as identical in nature and analogous in composition, mutually connected and responsive in emotion and spirit.

Prakriti Mukherjee, in *Rosary as Artifact: From Religious Symbolism to Scientific Implications*, discusses the importance of prayer beads, focusing on a comparative analysis between Indian and Chinese traditions. In Indian Buddhism, *Japamala*, consisting of 108 beads, is utilized for mantra recitation, breath counting, and enhancing mindfulness and concentration. The emphasis lies on the transformative power of mantra recitation. In contrast, Chinese Buddhist prayer beads may exhibit variations in bead count and incorporate culturally significant materials such as jade. The article stresses the role of praying beads in integrating mind, body, and spirit, connecting the physical and spiritual dimensions, and the ethical aspects related to their use in moral growth and cultivating virtues. It also highlights similarities and differences in practice, interpretation, and philosophical foundations for adapting spiritual tools to resonate with local beliefs, philosophies, and ways of life. The evolution of prayer bead usage, from its strictly religious functions to broader cultural and fashion-related significance, is also examined. The study illustrates the adaptability of spiritual practices across cultures and opens avenues for future research into

the scientific basis of the effects of prayer beads, as well as deeper philosophical inquiries into their significance.

Pukhrambam Julia Chanu and L. Bishwanath Sharma explore in *Indian Culture and Western Thoughts* how Indian culture has the strength to uphold unity in a diverse country like India, the impacts of Western education and Christian missionaries on Indian society, and examine the evolution of Indian socio-political ideas and institutions. The *Integral Humanism* of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya proposes that the classical Indian understanding of nation and nationality arises from a worldview that prioritizes creative harmony, seeing everything as interconnected. All these life units are interrelated, not arranged in a hierarchy, but exist in a natural, innate, and inviolable simultaneity of respect for life. Upadhyaya says these ideals embody the essence of traditional Indian national life. Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy posited that every nation possesses a distinct consciousness, which sets it apart. If that consciousness, the cultural identity, which is seen as the 'soul' of a nation, thrives, the nation lives; when it withers, it ceases to exist.

Syamala K. in *Bhagavad Gita's Vision for a Harmonious Society: Ethics, Values, and Social Justice* stresses that the Bhagavad Gita is the most popular exposition of Indian Philosophy, religion, and way of life. Its ethical part has decisively influenced the Indian Philosophers. The Gita emphasizes the importance of ethics and addresses moral order, promoting peace, harmony, and social stability, while highlighting the concept of *desireless action*. In its message, the Gita advises individuals to adopt a life of action and recommends renunciation through action, rather than renouncing action itself. Gita insists that a man should shape his ideals according to the station in life that he occupies in society. The central point of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings is *nishkama karma*, an ideal achieved by performing selfless action. Practicing it makes a person firmly rooted in higher reason and unmoved by passions and emotions. He/she must work for the benefit of humanity in a spirit of detachment. There are no selfish motives, but it works for the preservation and welfare of society. This philosophy of action advocated by the Gita holds that every individual should be engaged in some action, and in the absence of it, life becomes meaningless.

Maxim Mikhalev in *Khalifa of Pamir, Custodians of Knowledge* examines the social roles and spiritual functions of local religious leaders in the Pamir Mountains. The state borders of China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan crisscross this remote and isolated mountainous region, serving as the abode for several obscure ethnic groups that have long adopted Ismailism, an esoteric branch of Shia Islam. Local representatives are called *khalifa*: they act as community leaders, solving the problems faced by ordinary villagers in the Pamir. They are preserving esoteric Gnostic knowledge of Ismailism in this remote part of the globe. According to Ismaili doctrine, there exists open exoteric knowledge *zahir* that is given in the form of law to ordinary people by the successive line of prophets, who aim at helping laymen to choose and follow the right path in life. There exists also an esoteric knowledge *batin* that is revealed through the prophet to its silent follower, who further entrusts it to a limited circle of his direct apprentices that he chooses by their capacity to be the bearers of such knowledge. The law defined by *Zahir* is changing, as every new epoch needs its prophet, while *Batin* remains the same. *Batin*, however, can be understood only through elaborating on that ever-changing *Zahir*. Ismaili Imam is none other than that seventh *Silent One* who doesn't proclaim the law but liberates the initiated ones by disclosing symbols. The idea of esoteric knowledge concealed in the Koran and the need for its interpretation through the perfect authority is something that distinguishes Shia from Sunni in general. Still, Ismailism goes further and includes into its doctrine prophets and teachings of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and other ancient Iranian cults. It also bears a lot of similarities with Sufism, as these two mystic teachings of Islam both combine mind and divine revelation under one roof, value concealed knowledge and apply poetic language for its expression, but as Ismailism doesn't recognize individual interpretations of the epiphanies and place all knowledge onto Imam shoulders endowing him with exclusive authority, for Ismaili he represents the entire microcosm being the repository of all meanings of the revelation. In other words, he is saving Gnosis, and as such, brings salvation to his followers, as salvation, according to Ismaili teaching, can be achieved only through learning the meaning of life and the meaning

of God. The paper results of a field research study in the area, conducted by Maxim, conclude that this was possible due to the innate characteristics of the local people, who are not only knowledge-thirsty but also knowledge-loyal.

In a separate section of the Issue, Savu Totu discusses *Divine wisdom and human wisdom in The Divine Names by St. Dionysius the Areopagite*. He indicates that through the image of the divine names, we will understand how we can acquire godly wisdom through the "third way" of working of our reason and mind. The difference between divine and human wisdom is one by nature. At the same time, however, it must be emphasized that the rational and understanding work of reason and mind is of man: body and soul, not merely body and soul. The relationship between divine wisdom and human wisdom is seen as the bond between spiritual experience and philosophical knowledge, bearing in mind that in the knowledge of God it is always a question of the transfiguration of human reason and the human mind and of the transfiguration of the senses, which become 'echoes of wisdom'. Totu is assuming that ontologically there is no opposition between reason and faith, and that man's natural logic is not exhausted by the contradiction between the rational and the irrational (as it exists in human limits), and therefore that it is possible to understand the inconceivable, but which are expressible by linguistic terms/constructions such as 'understanding as not understanding,' 'seeing as not seeing.' The spiritual experience, as actual knowledge, does not presuppose the exclusion of reason, but it is overcome mysteriously, by faith, in a way that can be learned. The difference between the two wisdoms can be understood only through faith in Christ, in whom the divine and human natures are united mysteriously, which makes possible the union of man with God by grace, as Savu Totu indicates in his paper.

The Issue also includes a Critical Review on *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision*, coauthored by Dr. Ivan Platovnjak and Dr. Tone Svetelj (University of Ljubljana Press, Slovenia, 2024).

RESEARCH ARTICLES
Values and Spirituality in Asian Context

Ding: Chinese Cultural Artifact Embodying Thought of “Unity between Heaven and Man”

Wei Hua¹
Cao Yuan²

Abstract: The relation between heaven and man has been the key issue of inquiries explored and studied by countless Chinese ancestors and scholars. During its long-lasting historical course, the Chinese nation developed the thought of “unity of heaven and man (天人合一)” as the answer to the relation between the two and never stopped to improve it. Unlike previous research, this article chose to unveil this great thought and shed some new lights on further research in this field, from a different angle of ding (鼎), an important type of cultural artifact embodying the thought from the very early times of the Chinese history. By analyzing the path of historical development of the thought, this article generalized the intrinsic connotation of the thought as threefold that man and heaven are identical in nature and analogous in composition, and they are mutually connected and responsive in terms of emotion and spirit, and consistent and corresponding in terms of morality and ethics. By enhancing the cognitive and practical levels of the above-mentioned three aspects, man can constantly improve, and finally reach the state of complete unity with heaven. Then this article introduced the historical changes of dings and analyzes the influence of the thought on their appearances and functions, claiming that it is due to the thought embodied in this type of vessels over

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all the historical periods that “ding” gradually developed into a kind of unique cultural symbol conveying the notions of authority, unity, solemnity and harmony in the hearts of Chinese people.

Keywords: The thought of “unity of heaven and man”, Ding, Traditional Chinese Culture, Cultural Artifact

Introduction

If one has to describe on the importance of the thought of “unity of heaven and man (天人合一)” in one sentence, it suffices to say that it is “the spiritual core of China’s traditional culture.”³ Traditional Chinese morality and ethics, religion and education, literature and arts, as well as sciences and technologies are all deeply rooted in and developed around this thought. Qian Mu (1991) proposed that the thought of “unity of heaven and man” is the ultimate source of Chinese culture, and all China’s cultural thoughts can be traced back to it. Zhang Dainian (1985) stated that the thought of “unity of heaven and man” is a philosophical view advocated by most traditional Chinese philosophers from the Pre-Qin Dynasty period to the Ming and the Qing dynasties. The ding (鼎), a kind of ritual vessel originated from the far ancient times, has witnessed the vicissitudes of the Chinese civilization in a wide span of thousands of years. Today it is deemed as a kind of cultural artifacts that has played a very important role in the Chinese history. By tracing the path of historical development of the thought of “unity of heaven and man”, conducting an analysis on the intrinsic connotation of the thought, and presenting the legendary dings and

³ Mingjun Li, *The Unity of Heaven and Man and the Spirit of Chinese Culture* (Shandong People's Press, 2015), 21.

expounding on the artifacts’ interconnection with the thought, this article not only aims at helping to further the understanding of the core and essence of China’s traditional culture for both the Chinese people and peoples in the world, but also hopes to provide valuable references and insights for better cultural exchanges and greater development of our human civilizations.

Unveiling the Thought of “Unity of Heaven and Man (天人合一)”, the Soul of Ding (鼎)

Before getting acquainted with this kind of cultural artifact ding (鼎), it is necessary to have a general knowledge of the thought of “unity of heaven and man (天人合一)”, the very soul embodied by the dings. This thought came into being and developed on the basis of unremitting explorations and practices regarding the relationship between heaven and man made by countless sages and scholars throughout the whole history of China. The thought reflects what the Chinese people basically comprehend about the relationship and is the key to understanding the Chinese culture.

1. The Meaning of Heaven (天)

Research on this thought has been vastly extensive and spans across ages, with a voluminous body of related literature. Even since the 1980s, though a lot of efforts have been made on the research of its connotations, no agreement has been reached on the meaning of “heaven”. Views vary from scholars to scholars, and can be roughly classified into 4 kinds which are the onefold meaning (Qian Mu, 1991; Ji Xianlin, 1994; Meng Peiyuan, 1998), the twofold meaning (Ren Wuxin, 1990; Li Zonggui, 2012;), the threefold meaning (Zhang Dainian, 1985; Yang Weizhong, 1997; Tang Yijie, 2013; Bai Xi, 2013), and the fivefold meaning (Feng Youlan, 1948; Ren Jiyu, 1996). This

article adopts, in its analysis, the threefold meaning proposed by Zhang Dainian which is the most popular among the above-mentioned views. The explanation for the character of “heaven (天)” in the book of *Explanation of Script and Elucidation of Characters* (说文解字) which means “the top, the highest point, without anything above it,”⁴ is also taken into the account. Therefore, this article proposed that the meaning of “heaven” in Chinese traditional culture is threefold that it refers to the fundamental natural origin in the sense of ontology, the supreme dominator in the sense of religion, and the ultimate ethics in the sense of morality. In summary, in Chinese traditional culture “heaven” means the highest and most original of all in the world.

2. *Connotation and Transformation of the Thought of “Unity of Heaven and Man”*

The first glimpse of the thought of “unity of heaven and man” can be spotted in as early as the primitive era of China. By taking close observations of astronomic and geographical phenomena, life activities of all animals and plants, the ancient ancestors believed though human and other species of nature are distinctively different from each other in terms of forms and characteristics, they come from and are consistent with the same fundamental origin all along. “Heaven and earth are the parents of all creatures; and of all creatures man is the most highly endowed (惟天地万物父母，惟人万物之灵)”⁵ and “Heaven and earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me (天地与我并生，而万物与我为一),”⁶ are the opinions

⁴ Xu Shen, *Explanation of Script and Elucidation of Characters*, ed. Li Qing (Yunnan People’s Press, 2019), 291.

⁵ Unknown Author, *Shangshu*, trans. James Legge (Hunan People’s Press, 2013), 165.

⁶ Chuang Tzu, *The Adjustment of Controversie*, ed. Hu Xingming (Nanjing University Press, 2018), 249.

in ancient philosophical works reflecting the early people’s cognition of “heaven” and the origin of the thought of “unity of heaven and man” in the primitive age. Moreover, it is also believed that the “heaven” which refers to the fundamental origin in the sense of ontology operates in accordance with its own basic law and order. It is written in the Section of “Major Court Hymns (大雅)” of the *She King* (诗经) “Heaven, in giving birth to the multitudes of the people. To every faculty and relationship annexed its law” (天生烝民，有物有则)。⁷ This basic law and order are called the “way of heaven (天道)”. Lao Tzu (老子), the founder of Taoism, interpreted the interrelation between these concepts as “Man follows earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Way; the Way follows its nature (人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然)”。⁸ It is further emphasized in the *Yellow Emperor’s Scripture of Hidden Contracts* (黄帝阴符经) that it suffices to view the way of heaven and follow with the heaven. Hence, in the Stone Age, what the primitive ancestors perceived about the relationship between heaven and man is their unity of heaven and man, and man’s due respect for heaven and conforming to the “way of heaven”.

However, with the passage of time, the ancient Chinese people’s understanding of heaven as the natural origin in the sense of ontology, were supplemented with the meanings of supreme dominator and ultimate ethics in the senses of religion and morality. On the one hand, since Chinese ancients believed that all things are born by the “heaven” and the “way of heaven” is inexorable, conclusions was drawn that “heaven” is the dominator of the

⁷ Unknown Author, *The She King*, trans. James Legge (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2011), 759.

⁸ Lao Tzu, *The Book of Lao Tzu*, trans. Wu Yi (Great Learning Publishing House, 1989), 88.

universe, and it is the will of heaven, namely the “decree of heaven (天命)” or “command of heaven”, that determines the rise and fall of dynasties and vicissitudes of human beings. For instance, according to the Section of “Announcement of the Duke of Shao (召诰)” in the *Shangshu* (尚书), the Xia Dynasty (夏朝) was meant “to enjoy the favouring decree of Heaven (有夏服天命).”⁹ And this reverent attitude towards and strong faith in the “heaven” which are well indicated in the Section of “Pan-geng (I) (盘庚)” of this book, as “When the former kings had any (important) business, they gave reverent heed to the commands of Heaven (先王有服, 恪谨天命).”¹⁰ were also held by the Shang Dynasty (商朝). On the other hand, the ancient Chinese deduced the existence of the ultimate ethics from the orderliness and just of the “heaven” that is the supreme dominator in the sense of religion. And they believed that virtue is the critical factor of conforming to the “way of heaven” and receiving the favour of the “decree of heaven” or the “command of heaven”. It was concluded in the Zhou Dynasty (周朝) that while it was still requisite to attaching great importance to religious sacrifices, virtue is vital to leading the people and governing the country, because “The fact simply was, that, without virtue and reverence, the decree in its favour fell prematurely to the ground (惟不敬厥德, 乃早坠厥命).”¹¹ As a result, a new era of the “way of man (人道)” in harmony with the “way of heaven” started from the Zhou Dynasty, and the Chinese ancients’ understanding of the relation between heaven and man in the Bronze Age further developed with the inclusion of the idea that the will of people reflects the will of “heaven”. Thus, it was

⁹ Unknown Author, *Shangshu*, trans. James Legge (Hunan People’s Press, 2013), 259.

¹⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹¹ Ibid., 258.

believed that if a king wants to keep his political power which has been ordained from the heaven, he should and have to revere the “heaven”, match his personal virtue with the virtue of “heaven”, and protect the life of his people as best as he can. This pursuit of virtue was appreciated and advocated by Confucius (孔子), the founder of Confucianism, and was considered of great importance to the building and governing of a country by the monarchs of later eras.

During the time from the Spring and Autumn period (春秋时代), the Warring States Period (战国) to the Qin (秦) and Han (汉) dynasties, the thinkers explored vastly and put forward an idea that there is a high degree of consistency between “heaven” and man in terms of appearances, structure, emotions, morality etc. In the Section of “Retention of the Evil (邪客)” of the book *The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine* (黄帝内经), it is said “The heaven is round and the earth is square, the head of a man is round and his foot is square, so, heaven and earth correspond with man. In heaven, there are the sun and moon, in man, there are the eyes; in heaven, there are the nine stars, in man, there are the nine orifices; in heaven, there are wind and rain, in man, there are overjoy and anger; in heaven, there are thunder and lightning, in man, there is voice; in heaven, there are the four seasons, in man, there are the four extremities.... in a year, there are three hundred and sixty five days, in human body, there are three hundred and sixty five acupoints; on earth, there are the high mountains, in human body, there are the shoulders and knees; on earth, there are deep valleys, in human body, there are the armpits and poplitea (天圆地方, 人头圆足方以应之。天有日月, 人有两目。地有九州, 人有九窍。天有四时, 人有四肢...地有高山, 人有肩膝。地有深谷, 人有腋膕).”¹²

¹² Unknown Author, *The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine*, trans. Nelson Liansheng Wu and Andrew Qi Wu (China Science &

The Doctrine of the Mean (中庸) emphasized that “Honesty is the way of Heaven, to be honest is the way of man (诚者天之道也，诚之者人之道).”¹³ It was stated, in the Section of “On the Desires and Natural Emotions (情欲)” of the philosophic book *the Annals of Lü Buwei* (吕氏春秋) in the Qin Dynasty, that “Humans are the same as Heaven and Earth in this regard. Though the external shapes of the myriad things are diverse, their essential natures have a single structure (人之与天地也同。万物之形虽异，其情一体也).”¹⁴ In the Section of “Yin-Yang Principle (阴阳义)” of *the Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (春秋繁露), Dong Zhongshu, a great Confucian scholar of the Han Dynasty, even put forward the theory of “interactions between heaven and man (天人感应),” and claimed “Heaven also possesses happy and angry qi and a joyful and sorrowful heart that mutually complements those of human beings. Thus if a grouping is made according to kind, Heaven and human beings are one (天亦有喜怒之气，哀乐之心，与人褶副，以类合之，天人一也).”¹⁵

In the Sui (隋) and Tang (唐) dynasties, the thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism had a fierce collision which greatly promoted their mutual learning and integration with each other. Among them, Confucian scholars absorbed concepts from the Taoist cosmology and the Buddhist mind-nature theory, re-examined ancient Confucian classics, and laid the ground for the Neo-Confucianism development in the Song (宋) and Ming (明) dynasties by restating the relationship between heaven and man.

Technology Press, 1999), 771.

¹³ Zi Si, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. He Baihua (Shandong Friendship Press, 1992), 53.

¹⁴ Lü Buwei, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, trans. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (Stanford University Press, 2000), 85.

¹⁵ Dong Zhongshu, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, trans. John S. Major and Sarah A. Queen (Columbia University Press, 2016), 429.

Inspired by the view in *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸) that the relationship between the “way of heaven” and the “way of man” is harmonized with the “honesty” (诚), a great Confucian scholar Zhang Zai in the Song Dynasty formally put up the philosophical proposition of the “unity of heaven and man”, and asserted in one of his works *Correcting the Unenlightened* (正蒙) that through investigation and learning, and finally achieving honesty, man can get unified with heaven. High intellectuals of Confucianism such as Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, among others, initiated the School of Principle (理学) which mainly advocated that people should observe and explore the fundamental principles of all things to gain the true knowledge of the natural heaven and the heaven of ultimate ethics. High intellectuals of Confucianism such as Wang Yangming and Lu Jiuyuan in the Ming Dynasty initiated the School of Mind (心学), proposing that the mind is the principle, and advocating that through practices of the unity of knowledge and action, one can restore the true conscience by conforming with the fundamental principles of the ultimate ethics, thus get unified with the conscience and the fundamental principles of the natural heaven.

In summary, the thought of “unity of heaven and man” has been explored and developed by countless sages throughout the Chinese history, evolving into the spiritual core and backbone of Chinese traditional culture. Its main connotations can be understood as follows: man and heaven are identical in nature and analogous in composition; man and heaven are mutually connected and responsive in terms of emotion and spirit; man and heaven are consistent and corresponding in terms of morality and ethics. By enhancing the cognitive and practical level of the above three aspects, man can constantly improve himself and finally reach the state of complete unity with heaven.

The Evolution of Ding (鼎) and Its relation with the Thought of “Unity of Heaven and Man (天人合一)”

Ding (鼎) is a type of ritual vessel that was very popular and important in the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties of China. According to the *Explanation of Script and Elucidation of Characters* (说文解字) which is the earliest Chinese dictionary compiled in the East Han Dynasty, the character of “ding” referring to a precious kind cooking vessel, mainly with three legs and two loop handles, to blend the five main flavors. And this character resembles a cooking vessel placed over some firewood. Ding not only witnessed the development of Chinese history and traditional culture, but also embodied the rich connotations of the thought of “unity of heaven and man” over thousands of years.

1. Primitive cooking vessels reflecting the idea of “Food is of the same importance as heaven to man”

According to archaeological findings, the original form of ding was a kind of pottery made during the Neolithic time. The ancients placed three legs at the bottom of the pot to facilitate their cooking with fire. The oldest pottery ding discovered is the “Lacquered Red Pottery Ding with Nipple-shaped Nail Pattern” dating back to around 7,000 to 9,000 years ago (as shown in Photo 1). The early pottery dings were mostly round-bottomed and had three legs, either with or without lids. In the early primitive society, the ancient people believed that human beings and all things were produced by the heaven as the fundamental natural origin, and food which is crucial to the survival of humans was also bestowed to humans by the natural heaven. As a kind of cooking vessel, ding bears within itself the original concept of the early people's plain understanding of the heaven and its relation with man. The importance attached to food

Ding: Chinese Cultural Artifact Embodying Thought of “Unity between Heaven and Man”

not only by the early people and but also by people in latter times can be well described in the book of *Records of the Grand Historian* as “Food is of the same paramount importance as heaven to man（民以食为天）.”¹⁶



Photo 1. The Lacquered Red Pottery Ding with Nipple-shaped Nail（乳钉纹红陶鼎）(http://ysxw.cctv.cn/article.html?item_id=4186570899321183453)

It dates back to around 7000 to 9000 years ago, measures 22 cm in height and 23 cm in diameter. It is collected by the Henan Museum.

2. *Divine ritual vessels for “communicating the upper and the lower realms, and bearing the blessings from Heaven upon all”*
Impressed by the vast power of the heaven as the fundamental natural origin, early Chinese ancestors believed that the heaven is also the supreme dominator of all things, and began to use dings for

¹⁶ “The Seventy Biographies in Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of Li Sheng and Lu Jia,” *Guoxuelu*, accessed March 2, 2025, <http://www.guoxuelu.com/shiji/1650168185.html>.

cooking and containing precious food sacrificed to the heaven as the supreme dominator. Among them, round dings with three legs were often used for cooking food, while square ones with four legs were mostly used for containing and storing sacrifices (as shown in Figure 2). In the *Records of the Grand Historian*, it is said “I heard that in ancient times, Emperor Fu Xi cast a divine tripod, symbolizing the ultimate One, which connects heaven, earth and all things into a unity (闻昔泰帝兴神鼎一，一者一统，天地万物所系终也).”¹⁷ This indicates that ding (鼎) was endowed with a status as holy as the symbol for the fundamental origin and supreme dominator as early as the time of Emperor Fu Xi (around 6,000 to 7,000 years ago). Since copper was a kind rare metal at that time, Chinese ancestors began to cast dings (鼎) with copper to match with this high status. As shown in the Section of the “Shuyi Annals: Chronicles of Yellow Emperor (疏仪纪·黄帝)” of the book of *Comprehensive History of Ancient China* (路史), the Yellow Emperor (about 5,000 years ago) used copper to cast three divine cast dings, symbolizing heaven, earth and man respectively. The purpose of casting the three divine dings is said for reporting his governing performance to the heaven, and prayed for blessing of the country and the people. And the first emperor of the Xia Dynasty, Yu the Great (about 4,500 years ago), after successfully leading the people to control the Deluge, collected copper from all the nine states of the country and cast nine divine dings. Each of them had the geographical features and supernatural figures of that state casted on its surface, and was used in the offering ceremonies to the heaven and ancestors to pray for their blessings. Since then, bronze dings began to gain the symbolic

¹⁷ “The Twelve Basic in Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of the Martial Emperor of Han Dynasty,” *Guoxuelu*, accessed March 2, 2025, <http://www.guoxuelu.com/shiji/1650167124.html>.

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meaning of “coordinating the upper and the lower realm, and bearing the blessings from Heaven upon all (协于上下、以承天休),”¹⁸ manifesting the ancient people's concept of revering and obeying the fundamental and supreme heaven.



Photo 2: The Pottery Square Ding from Erlitou (二里头陶方鼎)
([https:// baike.baidu.com/item/二里头文化陶方鼎/61550146](https://baike.baidu.com/item/二里头文化陶方鼎/61550146))

It dates back to about 3800 years ago, and measures 8.3 cm in length, 8.3 cm in width and 9.5 cm in height. There are patterns resembling solar vortexes on its surface. It is collected by the Erlitou Xia Capital Site Museum.

¹⁸ Zuo Qiuming, *Zuo Tradition: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals,”* trans. Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li and David Schaberg (Washington Press, 2016), 601.



Photo 3. The Square-patterned Copper Ding from Erlitou (二里头方格纹铜鼎)

(https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_4359802572530357481&sourceFrom=search_a)

It dates back to about 3800 years ago, and measures 20 cm in height, 15.3 cm in diameter at the opening and 10 cm in diameter at the base. It is the earliest known bronze ding in China, and is collected in the Erlitou Xia Capital Site Museum.

3. *Paramount ritual vessels in national temples symbolizing
“the Command of Heaven”*

After the history moved on to the Shang Dynasty (approximately from 1600 B.C. to 1046 B.C.), “ancestral deities gradually became

the main subject of worship,”¹⁹ due to the belief of this dynasty that ancestors will ascend to the heaven after passing away, and can protect the descendants from then on. According to the book of *On Propriety (Social and Individual Behavior)* (礼记), the ancestral deities took first priority of worship in the hearts of the kings and people of this dynasty. The scale and frequency of making sacrifices to ancestral deities and the heaven reached an unprecedented level in the history, and even national affairs were finally determined by making divination after sacrificial ceremonies. With the improvement and promotion of bronze casting technology, bronze dings were widely used in national sacrifices. During this period, the outer surface of most dings was featured with magnificent and terrifying face patterns of beasts which were believed to have the ability to communicate between humans and the heaven (as shown in Photo 4, 5, 6, and 7), and the inner side was often inscribed with texts about important events such as making sacrifices, having wars, and making alliances, etc. King Tang who is the first king of the Shang Dynasty announced that “but for the many crimes of the sovereign of Xia, Heaven has given the charge to destroy him (有夏多罪，天命殛之),”²⁰ and claimed that he dared not but to obey the heaven’s command for punishment by taking up arms to end the ruling of the Xia Dynasty. According to the Section of “Annals of Duke Xuan (宣公)” of the book of *Zuo Tradition* (左传), the Nine Dings cast by Yu the Great, as mentioned above in this article, were moved to the capital of Shang Dynasty after the fall of the Xia Dynasty, and were kept there for worshipping and sacrificing to the

¹⁹ Wang Zhenhong, “From the Perspective of ‘Human Beings’: The Formation of the Category of ‘Human and Nature’ in the Pre-Qin Period,” *Journal of Jiangsu Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* vol. 50, no. 1 (2024): 43-58.

²⁰ Unknown Author, *Shangshu*, 91.

heaven about six hundred years. The fact that bronze dings became the paramount ritual vessels in the Shang Dynasty's sacrificial culture manifests that the concept of the "command of heaven" was underscored in the relation between heaven and man during this period.



Photo 4. The Bronze Bing with Beast-faced Patterns (兽面纹铜鼎)
(https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_4686176463166670080&sourceFrom=search_a)

It dates back to the mid of Shang Dynasty, and measures 53 cm in height with a band of beast-faced patterns around the neck and beast-faced patterns on the feet. It is collected by the Museum of Shandong University.

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Photo 5. The Bronze Square Tripod with Beast-faced Pattern and Tiger Ears (兽面纹虎耳青铜方鼎)

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1799538129344871237&wfr=spider&for=pc>)

It dates back to the mid of Shang Dynasty, and measures 95 cm in height and is of 49 kg in weight. Four cylindrical empty feet are decorated with sheep-horn beast-faced patterns. Each of the two round-arched standing handles holds up a tiger. It is collected by the Jiangxi Provincial Museum.



Photo 6. The Simuwu Rectangular Ding (司母戊大方鼎)

(<https://www.zhihu.com/question/10902841511/answer/94806438941>)

It dates back to the late Shang Dynasty, and measures 133 cm in height, 110 cm in length and 79 cm in width at the mouth. It weighs 832.84 kg and was cast by a king for the purpose of offering sacrifices to his mother. It is the heaviest known ancient Chinese bronzeware and is collected by the National Museum of China.

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Photo 7. The Human-faced Bronze Ding (人面青铜鼎)

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1785782513797860822&wfr=spider&for=pc>)

It dates back to the late Shang Dynasty, and measures 38.5 cm in height, 29.8 cm in length and 23.7 cm in width. It is the only one of its kind with human- faced patterns discovered so far. It is collected by the Hunan Provincial Museum.

4. *Solemn ritual vessels conveying the notion of “matching one’s virtue with Heaven (天)”*

The history moved on to the earlier half of the Zhou Dynasty, namely the West Zhou Dynasty (approximately 1046 B.C. to 771 B.C.). It is known from the book of *The Mozi* (墨子) that the King Wen and the King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty, like the sage kings of the two previous dynasties, made sacrifices too, praying for guidance and blessings

from the heaven. However, the Zhou people firmly believed that the “command of heaven (天命)” is never constant, and virtue plays the most important role in keeping it constant, because “Great Heaven has no partial affections, it helps only the virtuous.”²¹ They also believed that the will of people can reflect the way and the will of heaven, as “Heaven (天) sees as my people see, Heaven hears as my people hear (天视之我民视, 天听之我民听).”²² Moreover, the Zhou people assumed that excessive reliance on sacrifices and failure to govern by virtue were the fundamental reasons for the downfall of the Shang Dynasty. Owing to the sage King Wen’s virtuous governance of diligence, benevolence and care for the people, the supreme and dominating heaven deprived the “command of heaven” from the Shang Dynasty and bestowed it to him and his descendants. The Zhou Dynasty strongly emphasized on the notion of matching virtue with the heaven, formulated a complete set of rites and etiquettes for regulating social behaviors, and composed lots of beautiful music to be played with the rites and etiquettes for moderating sentiments and improving morals. The Zhou Dynasty thus initiated the famous “Rites and Music Civilization (礼乐文明)” that has been influencing China’s culture and society for over 3 thousand years. Among the etiquettes, the Arraying System for Dings (列鼎制度) were set for regulating the diet of the nobles to avoid over-extravagance and wasting of food by making stipulation on the use of bronze dings. For example, the King of Zhou Dynasty, also called as the “Son of Heaven (天子)”, shall array nine dings for a meal, the feudal lords shall array seven, senior officials shall array five, and social elites shall array three or one. In addition, bronze dings were often cast and used in solemn events and ceremonies,

²¹ Unknown Author, *Shangshu*, 301.

²² *Ibid.*, 171.

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praising for achievements and virtues (as shown in Figures 8, 9, and 10) as well as in commemoration of honors awarded. The notions of matching one’s virtue with the heaven and governing the country with virtue that were conveyed by the bronze dings show a notable shift from divinity to morality with regard to the understanding about the relationship between heaven and man from in the Zhou Dynasty.



Photo 8. The Square Ding with Beast-faced Pattern (兽面纹方鼎)
(https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_4990425942068939992)

It dates back to the early Western Zhou Dynasty, and measures 36 cm in height, 33 cm in length and 25 cm in width at the mouth. It is collected by the Luoyang Museum.



Photo 9. The Chunhua Large Ding (淳化大鼎)

(<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/711610871>)

It dates back to the early West Zhou Dynasty, and is of 122 cm in height, 83 cm in diameter and is of 226 kg in weight. It is the largest and heaviest round ding among the known copper dings of the West Zhou Dynasty. It is collected by the Shaanxi History Museum.

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Photo 10. Mao Gong Ding (毛公鼎)

(http://www.360doc.com/content/24/0330/10/39564225_1118802993.shtml)

It dates back to the late West Zhou Dynasty, and measures 53.8 cm in height, 47 cm in diameter and is of 34.700 kg in weight. King Xuan rewarded his uncle Mao Gong for loyal and devoted services to the country. Mao Gong then cast this bronzeware, in commemoration of this honor with all his descendants.

*5. Precious ritual vessels through three dynasties
representing “the legitimacy of governance bestowed from heaven”*

The history, then, moved on to the latter half of the Zhou Dynasty, namely the East Zhou Dynasty (from 770 B.C. to 256 B.C.) which can be divided into the Spring and Autumn Period (from 770 B.C. to 476 B.C.) and the most part of the Warring States Period (from 476

B.C. to 221 B.C.). During these two periods, the rule of Zhou Kings declined so much that their authority over the enfeoffed kingdoms turned to be merely nominal, and their rites, music and wars were out of control, and the whole social orders became chaotic. These enfeoffed kingdoms not only fought with each other for hegemony, but also violated the Arraying System for Dings, cast excessively exquisite bronze dings of various shapes (as shown in Photos 11 and 12), and even coveted for the legendary “Nine Dings” which had been casted by Yu the Great and was enshrined by Zhou’s kings as the divine symbol. According to the records in *The Spring and Autumn Historiography*, the Solemn King of Chu who was one of the hegemon kings, once led a large military parade at one of the outskirts of the Zhou capital, and rudely inquired the envoy of the Son of Heaven, about the size and weight of the “Nine Dings”. The envoy replied, “Although Zhou virtue is in decline, the heavenly command has not yet changed. The question of whether the cauldrons are light or heavy may not be asked yet (周德虽衰, 天命未改, 鼎之轻重, 未可问也).”²³ Another hegemon, the Martial King of Qin, who was very self-conceited with his physical strength, attempted to lift one of the “Nine Dings”. Unfortunately, he lost his grip and was severely injured. In 256 B.C., the Kingdom of Qin ended the East Zhou Dynasty at last. Then, in 221 B.C., it eliminated the other kingdoms one by one, and unified the whole China. However, the “Nine Dings”, which were enshrined in the national temples of the Xia, the Shang and the Zhou dynasties, as the precious symbol for the legitimacy of governance bestowed from heaven, mysteriously got lost around that period of time and never emerged again in the history. Although the bronze casting

²³ Zuo Qiuming, *Zuo Tradition: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals,”* 603.

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technology in the Qin Dynasty was more advanced, dings(鼎)passed their prime time in these three dynasties, and gradually faded out from the Qin Dynasty due to the weakening of their function for representing “the legitimacy of governance bestowed from heaven”.



Photo 11. The Inlaid-Gold-and-Gilt Patterned Flowing-Flower Ding (错金银团花流鼎) (https://www.sohu.com/a/309839937_515314?sec=wd)

It dates back to the late Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. It measures 11.4 cm in height and 10.5 cm in diameter, and is collected by the Luoyang Museum.



Photo 12. The Prince Wu Ding (王子午鼎)

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1693680548825626857&wfr=spider&for=pc>)

It was cast and owned by Prince Wu, the son of the Solemn King of Chu, during the late Spring and Autumn Period. It measures 76 cm in height and 66 cm in diameter, and is collected by the Henan Museum.

6. *Important artifacts embodying the thought of “unity of heaven and man”*

History moved to the Han Dynasty (from 202 B.C. to 220 A.D.) and the period of the Wei, the Jin, the North and the South dynasties (from 220 A.D. to 589 A.D.). During these periods, the surface decorations of bronze dings became more simplified (as shown in Photo 13), and the content of inscriptions became largely shortened. While the production and use of bronze dings got significantly

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reduced, brass, lacquer, ceramics and jade dings (as shown in Photo 14) became more and more popular. Under the influence of Taoist concepts such as Tai Chi (太极) and Confucian concepts such as the “interactions between heaven and man (天人感应)”, furnace dings became widely used in religious activities in temples and monasteries, as the symbol for man interacting with and finally becoming one with the heaven.



Photo 13. The Shanglin Bronze Ding (上林铜鼎)
(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1732266872696568824>)

It dates back to the West Han Dynasty as an imperial vessel used by the royal family, and measures 36 cm in height and 39 cm in diameter. It is collected by the Shaanxi History Museum.



Photo 14. The Hotan Jade Incense Furnace of “Auspicious Beast, Dragon and Phoenix Pattern Ding” (和田玉雕“瑞兽·龙凤纹”鼎炉)

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1809880571351978186&wfr=spider&for=pc>)

It dates back to the Han Dynasty, and measures of 16 cm in length, 9.5 cm in width and 33 cm in height. It is collected by the Palace Museum.

During the North Song Dynasty (from 960 A.D. to 1127 A.D.), owing to a big trend of ancient culture renaissance especially for the Confucian thoughts, Emperor Hui made an imperial decree to cast a batch of bronzewares in copy of some famous ancient ones, including bronze dings. Great Confucian scholar Zhu Xi made high remarks about the bronze dings, describing them as significant vessels that can rectify one's mind and help to unify man with the

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“principle of heaven (天理)”, and have the meaning of “maintaining a proper position and preserving life (正位凝命).”²⁴ It is obvious that the thought of “unity of heaven and man” played an very important role of promoting the renaissance of Confucianism in the North Song Dynasty (as shown in Photo 15). In the Yuan (元), the Ming (明) and the Qing (清) dynasties (from 1271 A.D. to 1911 A.D.), besides continuing to be used as ritual vessels in national events and religious activities, dings further developed into small and exquisite indoor cultural furnishings (as shown in Figures 16, 17, and 18). This new development shows that the thought of “unity of heaven and man” had deeply rooted in the spiritual world of the Chinese people and immersed into their daily lives.



Photo 15. The Ox Ding (牛鼎)

(The Henan Museum, Chinese Ding Culture (Elephant Press, 2013), 192)

²⁴ Zhu Xi, *The Original Meaning of Iching* (Phoenix Press, 2011), 72.

It dates back to the North Song Dynasty, and measures 50 cm in height and 52 cm in diameter. It is collected by the Cultural Relics Protection Center of Hebei Province.

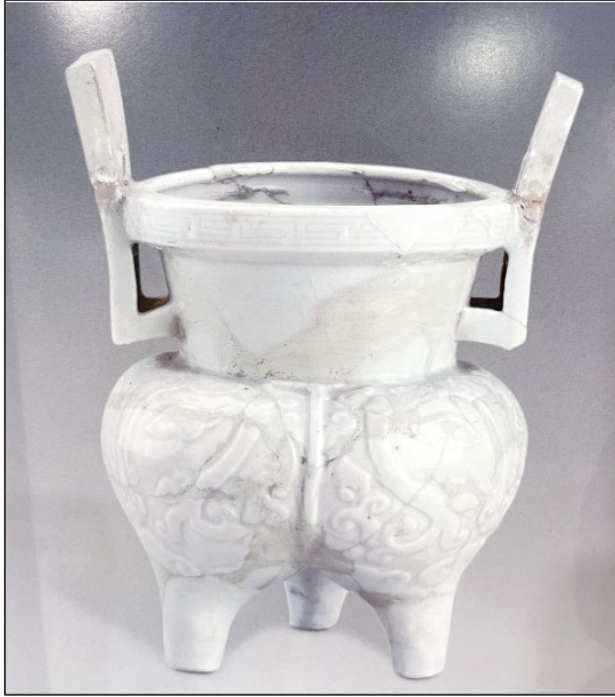


Photo 16. The Blue and White Glazed Ding-shaped Furnace(青白釉鼎式炉)
(https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_3647679158031137752&sourceFrom=search_a)

It dates back to the Yuan Dynasty, and measures 29.5 cm in height and 17 cm in diameter. It is collected by the Nantong Museum.

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Photo 17. The Yellowish-Golden Glazed Ding with Straight Ears and
Terracotta Beast Head (娇黄釉直耳饕餮鼎)

(<https://www.163.com/dy/article/E4GT3P5A0521DAJM.html>)

It dates back to the Ming Dynasty, and measures 16.2 cm in height and 13.5 cm in diameter. It is collected by the Taipei Palace Museum.



Photo 18. The Sapphire Shaofu Ding (青玉召夫鼎)

(<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1733164260159135653&wfr=spider&for=pc>)

It dates back to the Qing Dynasty, and measures 25.15 cm in height, 20.9 cm in length, and 13.8 cm in width. It is collected by the Palace Museum.

The dings that used to have a glorious history in the ancient times of China are rarely seen in public events nowadays, and sometimes are made as precious gifts and even high-end indoor cultural articles. However, dings are still cast by the government to show great respect and memory from the authority in very important occasions.

Conclusion

Evolving all the way from cooking vessels of the Neolithic Age, paramount ritual vessels of the Bronze Age, and all the way to today’s precious gifts and high-end indoor cultural articles, dings have developed into a unique cultural artifact and symbol conveying the notions of authority, unity, solemnity and harmony. During the past thousands of years, dings have been embodying the thought of “unity of heaven and man” which is the spiritual core of Chinese traditional culture. And the significant changes in their appearances and functions correspond to all the development of this thought in these historical periods. With other excellent legacies of the traditional culture, this thought surely will continue to be cherished by future generations of China, and can be helpful in contributing to the exchange and development of world civilizations as well as the common prosperity of mankind.

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Rosary as Artifact: From Religious Symbolism to Scientific Implications

Prakriti Mukherjee¹

Abstract: Prayer beads, referred to as a *Japamala* or rosary, are significant artifacts across diverse religious traditions, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism. This paper aims to explore the importance of prayer beads in Hinduism and Buddhism, with a focus on a comparative analysis between Indian and Chinese traditions. *Japamala*, which typically consists of 108 beads, is utilized for mantra recitation, breath counting, and the enhancement of mindfulness and concentration. In Buddhism, the philosophical emphasis lies on the transformative power of mantra recitation and the development of Bodhicitta. In contrast, Chinese Buddhist prayer beads, termed “Fo Zhu” or Buddha beads, may exhibit variations in bead count and incorporate culturally significant materials such as jade. The philosophical approach within Chinese Buddhism emphasizes the integration of mind, body, and spirit, along with fostering virtue in daily life. This study explores the ontological importance of prayer beads as concrete symbols of spiritual ideas, the epistemological impacts of their usage, and the phenomenology of practices involving prayer beads. Additionally, it investigates the metaphysical aspects of prayer beads, their role in connecting the physical and spiritual dimensions, and the ethical aspects related to their use in moral growth and the cultivation of virtues. By comparing the application of *Japamala* in both Indian and Chinese Buddhism, this research seeks to elucidate similarities and differences in practice, interpretation, and philosophical foundations, thereby demonstrating how spiritual tools can be adapted to resonate with local beliefs, philosophies, and ways of life.

Keywords: Artifact, Mindfulness, Recitation, Spiritual Practices, Tactile Sensation

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Introduction

Prayer beads, known as *Japamala* or rosary², are significant artifacts in various religious traditions, particularly in Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. This paper examines the significance of prayer beads within the contexts of Hinduism and Buddhism, with a particular emphasis on a comparative analysis between Indian and Chinese Buddhism. The research examines the philosophical, spiritual, and potentially scientific aspects of using prayer beads in religious practices. In Indian Buddhism, prayer beads, known as malas, typically consist of 108 beads and are used for mantra recitation, breath counting, and cultivating mindfulness and concentration. Chinese Buddhist prayer beads, known as “Fo Zhu” (佛珠) or Buddha beads, may vary in bead count and incorporate culturally significant materials, such as jade. The philosophical emphasis in the use of prayer beads may differ between these traditions, with Indian Buddhism focusing on the transformative power of mantra recitation and the cultivation of bodhicitta. At the same time, Chinese Buddhism places a greater emphasis on harmonizing the mind, body, and spirit, as well as cultivating virtue in daily life. The study also examines the potential scientific implications of using prayer beads, specifically in relation to tactile sensations and their impact on the body and mind. By comparing the use of prayer beads in Indian and Chinese Buddhism, this research aims to highlight similarities and differences in practice and interpretation, demonstrating how spiritual tools can be adapted to resonate with local beliefs, philosophies, and ways of life.

Prayer beads are considered artifacts, defined as objects made, affected, used, or modified by humans. Typically small, circular, and perforated, these beads are strung together to form a loop. While the number of beads can vary, 108 is a standard count in many

² The term "rosary" is predominantly associated with Christianity, whereas "Japamala" is the term used within Indian and Buddhist traditions. The nomenclature varies with language; thus, in English, "rosary" is often employed to denote *Japamala*. In this context, "rosary" does not pertain to the Christian rosary but rather refers to a string of prayer beads or *Japamala*. The two words *Japamala* and rosary are interchangeably used.

traditions. The use of prayer beads transcends religious boundaries, serving as tools for meditation, prayer, and spiritual practice. This study aims to investigate the role of prayer beads in Hinduism and Buddhism, with a particular focus on their significance in Indian and Chinese Buddhist traditions. It seeks to understand the spiritual significance of these artifacts and explore potential connections between their tactile properties and the psychological or physiological effects they may have. The paper will examine the historical context of prayer beads, their various forms and uses across different cultures, and their evolution from purely religious objects to items with broader cultural and even fashion-related significance. By comparing the use of prayer beads in Indian and Chinese Buddhism, this research aims to highlight similarities and differences in practice and interpretation. Additionally, the study will examine whether the use of prayer beads can be viewed not only as a spiritual practice but also as a potential scientific habit, particularly in relation to tactile sensations and their effects on the body and mind.

Historical Background and Description of the Rosary

The Rosary is utilized across numerous religions worldwide. It is regarded as a widely employed religious artifact. Rosaries are acknowledged as significant artifacts in various spiritual practices. A rosary is an arrangement of beads or knots employed to enhance memory and facilitate the enumeration of prayers or recitations of the Divine name or attributes. The quantity, configuration, and material differ based on tradition; however, the concepts they represent are universal. Irrespective of belief, pausing at a bead serves to reconnect one with their center and self. The term 'bead' elucidates and fortifies the significance, as well as the transcendental purpose, of prayer beads, which derive from the Sanskrit 'buddh' (self-realisation) and Saxon 'bidden' (to pray).³ The

³ Gray Henry and Susannah Marriott, *Beads of Faith: Pathways to Meditation and Spirituality Using Rosaries Prayer Beads, and Sacred Words* (United States: Fons Vitae, 2008), 10.

beads⁴ existing in a rosary are “A small, circular, tubular, or oblong ornament with a perforated centre; usually made from shell, stone, bone, or glass.”⁵ Thus, “Prayer beads are an artifact, they are a bead or group of beads used in prayer.”⁶ A rosary, which is used during prayer, is a group of prayer beads put into a single string. The counting of the beads varies, but the most common is 108 beads in a string. To define a rosary as an artifact, there is a need to define what an artifact is. According to Barbara Ann Kipfer;

An artifact is “Any object (article, building, container, device, dwelling, ornament, pottery, tool, weapon, work of art) made, affected, used, or modified in some way by human beings. It may range from a coarse stone or a needle to a pyramid or a highly technical accomplishment— and these objects are used to characterize or identify a people, culture, or stage of development. The most common artifacts are pieces of broken pottery, stone chips, projectile points, and tools. The environment may play a part in the nature of an artifact if it has been seriously altered by man through fire, house and road construction, agricultural practices, etc. Therefore, the line is sometimes hard to draw between a natural object and one used by man, but there is no doubt when it can be shown that man shaped it in any way, even if only accidentally in the course of use. Artifacts are individually assignable to ceramic, lithic, metal, or organic, or other lesser-used categories. A sociotechnic artifact is a tool that is used primarily in the social realm. A technomic artifact is a tool that is used primarily to deal with the physical environment.”⁷

Rosaries are ubiquitously accessible. They are commonly recognized as being associated with religious and spiritual practices. Nevertheless, the concept of rosaries is not a recent development.

⁴ For more details about history of beads please refer to papers like Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark, “History of stone beads and drilling: South Asia,” *Stone beads of South and Southeast Asia: archaeological, ethnographic and global connections* (2017): 127-150.

⁵ Barbara Ann Kipfer, “Beads,” in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology* (United States: Springer US, 2013), 147.

⁶ Barbara Ann Kipfer, “Prayer Beads,” *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology* (United States: Springer US, 2013), 1092.

⁷ Barbara Ann Kipfer, “Artifacts,” *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology* (United States: Springer US, 2013), 92.

While the specific design of a string comprising a series of beads may not be particularly old, the utilization of prayer beads has a long-standing history, with numerous examples documented throughout human history, readily available in various museums.⁸ In Sanskrit, rosaries are referred to as “*Japa-mala*,” or muttering chaplet⁹ where the term “*mala*”¹⁰ signifies ‘garland.’ This denotes a loop of beads utilized to chant or count mantras in various religions, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. These beads are employed for the explicit purpose of counting the recitations (*japa*)¹¹ of mantras, prayers, or other sacred phrases. Furthermore, they are utilized to ward off malevolent forces and to tally repetitions within other forms of sadhana (spiritual practice), such as prostrations before a holy icon. In addition, *Japamalas* function as symbols of religious identity.¹²

The one mostly used in the above-mentioned religions consists of 108 beads, with a distinctive one big in the middle and a tassel to mark the beginning and end of the cycle, as rosaries are circular. This big bead can be called by different names in different religions and cultures. In Hinduism, it can be called a “*guru bead*” or “*meru bead*.” The term “*guru bead*” is more often used in Buddhism as it represents not a guru or a teacher but Buddha himself. The term “*meru*” brings to mind the legendary sacred mountain that stands at the heart of the Hindu cosmic universe, serving as the divine throne of Lord *Vishnu*. In Hinduism, the number 108 holds spiritual significance, representing the twelve astrological houses and the nine planets within the solar system.¹³ This bead in a rosary (*guru* or *meru* bead), can be made out of

⁸ Monier Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians. Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays* (United Kingdom: Trübner and Company, 1879).

⁹ John Desmond Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2002), 78.

¹⁰ Please concern Apte, Vaman Shivaram, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* for the Sanskrit word explanation and meaning.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith: Pathways to Meditation and Spirituality Using Rosaries, Prayer Beads, and Sacred Words*. Moss Michel, “Prayer Beads in Japanese Sōtō Zen,” in *Zen and Material Culture* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹³ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 62 and 79.

various materials, including wood, stone, gems, bone, and precious metals. The *meru* bead marks the end of the counting of one round. In Buddhism, the rosary serves a function analogous to that in Hinduism. However, the central bead, as previously mentioned, is designated as the “guru” bead. This designation underscores its role as a reminder to practitioners of the significance of having a spiritual teacher. In the Sanskrit language, “gu” translates to “dark” and “ru” translates to “light.” The guru guides practitioners from spiritual darkness towards enlightenment, or the Light. This symbolism holds particular relevance in Buddhism, where the Buddha occupies the role of a teacher.¹⁴ However, at times, rosaries utilized in Buddhism may comprise various forms of beads in addition to the *guru* bead and the principal mala beads. According to Gray Henery and Susannah Marriott, the sequence of regular mala beads may be interrupted with accent beads of another material, perhaps at bead numbers 21 and 27. The jyuzu features four equally spaced, smaller beads representing the four virtues of the Buddha’s life. There are also two larger mother and father beads, both representing the Buddha. Cylindrical, jar-shaped beads act as receptacles for storing benefits accrued through chanting, and in some traditions, they signify knowledge or emptiness.¹⁵ The rosary in Buddhism may feature tassels on one end, adorned with additional beads hanging out. These elements primarily serve a decorative purpose and are not integrated into the practice of chanting. Occasionally, the aesthetic appeal is enhanced when the rosary is worn on the hand for safekeeping, with the excess portion hanging out; its appearance resembles that of a two-layered bracelet.

In addition to these religions, the use of the rosary is a common practice in other major religions, such as Christianity. While traditionally associated with spiritual and religious activities, it has now also become a fashion accessory. The use of the rosary has transcended the boundaries of theism and atheism. Just as religious discourse has evolved, so too has the discourse surrounding the use and connection with rosaries. The appearance and usage of everything have undergone significant changes.

¹⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Although the reasoning behind modern usage may not be entirely new, contemporary thinking has transformed it into a new pattern of use. Historically, beads were associated with the planets and the human body, with the belief that wearing specific beads could confer particular benefits. This belief persists, but the manner and style of wearing them have evolved over generations. This paper aims to trace the journey from the spiritual and religious reasoning behind using a rosary to its scientific application, akin to a bracelet. It seeks to establish a connection between the historical, spiritual, and religious justifications for rosaries and the current scientific rationale related to the tactile properties of stones. Thus, the rosary and prayer beads are presented as artifacts here, necessitating an explanation of what prayer beads are. This will illustrate how the rosary is also considered an artifact. Since the paper focuses on a comparative study of the Indian and Chinese use of rosaries, its scope will be limited accordingly. However, in doing so, it will also provide necessary descriptions and details about other religious practices involving the rosary, as history encompasses more than a single perspective.

Importance of Japamala in Hinduism

Most authors who have written about rosaries and their origins, along with their history, mention that the use of rosaries likely originated in India within Hinduism and was subsequently adopted in other religions.¹⁶ Monier-Williams suggests that *Japamala*, like the invention of the *Sutras*—concise memorial rules for the proper execution of complex rituals—arose out of necessity. No other country in the world requires such aids for religious practices as this one does. *Vaishnavas*, *Shaivas*, Buddhists, Jains, and Muhammadans rely on these devices to ensure the precise fulfillment of their endless daily repetitions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 59. Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110. Michel Mross, "Prayer Beads in Japanese Sōtō Zen," 102. John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2003), 118.

¹⁷ Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110.

The probable rationale for this is that it facilitates mindfulness and meditation, a topic that will be explored in detail in the subsequent sections of this paper.

The *Japamala* is used to repeat mantras or Divine names through *japa yoga*, a devotional act. Sculptures illustrating this practice have been found dating back to the Mauryan Shunga dynasty (185–73 BCE) in northern India.¹⁸ These works of art showcase humanity’s enduring quest to overcome temporal attachments. By repeating sacred names on malas, sin is cancelled out, and worldly distractions are minimised. Constant invocation of holy names and syllables brings devotees closer to God, revealing the true nature of humankind: pure, eternal, and free.¹⁹ In Hinduism, liberation and self-realisation, or moksha, is the final union with the Supreme. This is achieved through service, devotion, and total self-surrender. Devotees on the *Japamala* recite sacred formulae, mantras, or the names of deities. *Mantra*²⁰ or a combination of word recitations is believed to erase sin from within and sanctify the worshipper. Chanting the holy names of Divine incarnations, such as *Rama* or *Krishna*, is believed to transform the physical body into a spiritual one, enabling the believer to reach *ananda*, a state of transcendental bliss where the ego merges with the Divine.²¹ Through sadhana, or devotional meditation and prayer, the exterior world of duplicity and separateness is left behind. While the mind and body are occupied with the movement of beads and the repetition of a single word or phrase, one withdraws into a place of stillness and completeness. Dualities, such as inside and outside, male and female, presence and absence, body and soul, begin to dissolve. An attempt is made to achieve samadhi, the realisation of the interconnectedness of all things,

¹⁸ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 60.

¹⁹ Ibid., 59. Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110.

²⁰ The Sanskrit word “mantra” derives from “manas” (mind), and “traī” (to free from), “deliver” or “protect.” A mantra literally protects the mind and frees it from the world. It is not an end in itself, but a way to approach the ultimate truth. Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith: Pathways to Meditation and Spirituality Using Rosaries, Prayer Beads, and Sacred Words*, 64.

²¹ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 60. Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110-112.

which are part of the same Divine Essence.²² This knowledge enables the faithful to comprehend how *Brahman*, the all-pervading God, is also manifest in *Atman*, the self, and every other thing, as expounded in the *Upanishads*. The rosary used by *Vaishnavas* is crafted from the wood of the *Tulsi*, also known as holy basil, a shrub venerated in the context of *Vishnu* and considered a manifestation of *Rama's* wife, *Sita*. This *Japamala* is traditionally composed of 108 smooth beads. In contrast, the *Japamala* worn by *Shaivas* comprises either thirty-two or, at times, sixty-four berries from the *Rudraksha* tree (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus roxburgii*).²³ These seeds possess a rough texture, unlike the smoothness of *Tulsi* beads, and are typically characterized by five distinct lines. The rough texture is believed to represent the austerities associated with the worship of Lord Shiva, with the five lines symbolizing the deity's five faces or distinct attributes.²⁴ *Rudraksha* beads, also known as the “eye of Lord Shiva,” as the Sanskrit word “*rudra*” denotes Shiva and “*aksha*” refers to the eye, thus the “eye of Shiva.”²⁵ However, some scholars may refer to *Rudraksha* as representing the tears of Shiva.²⁶ The Shiva legend²⁷ mentions that *Rudraksha* is the tears of Rudra (or Shiva), which he let fall in a rage (some say in grief) and which crystallized into this form.²⁸ The meaning of which is that use of it will end your sorrows and heal your ailments (Which refers to any illness, mental and physical). *Rudraksha* beads evoke the austere lifestyle of an ascetic or *sannyasi*, who forsakes worldly possessions for a life of wandering. Semi-precious stones are also deemed appropriate for malas, as they connect deities with planets in

²² Ibid.

²³ Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South-Indian Gods: A Manual of the Mythology and Religion of the People of Southern India, Including a Description of Popular Hinduism* (India: Higginbotham, 1869), 27. Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110.

²⁴ Monier-Williams, *Modern India and the Indians: Being a Series of Impressions, Notes, and Essays*, 110. Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 63.

²⁵ John Desmond Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2002), 79.

²⁶ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 63.

²⁷ Please refer to *Shiva-Purana* for the descriptions and use of *Rudraksha*.

²⁸ Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion*, 79.

Jyotish, the Indian astrological system. For example, ruby is associated with the Sun and *Brahma*. Consequently, the *Japamala* is consistently accorded special care and respect. It is not permitted to come into contact with the ground, nor is it to be treated as an object of idle curiosity. The role of the mala is to create a devotional focus and concentration of attention. It involves the body with finger movements and the mind with invocations. The object and its accompanying rituals prepare the soul to leave the everyday and enter a sacred dimension. Counting beads measures out the immeasurable, where dualities and a sense of the horizontal dimension cease.²⁹

Importance of Japamala or Chinese FoZhu 佛珠 in Buddhism

In India, Buddhist rosaries appear to exhibit minimal variation from those utilized by Hindus. Certain *Japamalas* are crafted from more expensive materials than others, with the most valuable composed of turquoise, coral, amber, silver, pearls, or additional gemstones. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status typically possess *Japamala* beads made from wood, pebbles, berries, or bone, and they often content themselves with merely 30 or 40 beads.³⁰ Following the introduction of Buddhism to China,³¹ the *Japamala* were also introduced, undergoing gradual development in form. In Chinese Buddhism, prayer beads—more precisely referred to as Buddha beads or *fozhu* (佛珠)—serve as both essential religious instruments and carriers of Buddhist cultural heritage. The term "recitation beads" or "prayer beads" or "*nianzhu*" (念珠) is more general. The recitation beads are described as tools to assist with chanting practices, or as "mindfulness beads", implying that "chanting supports meditation and can even be considered a form of it."³² To distinguish among the different names, the recitation or

²⁹ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 63.

³⁰ Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion*, 80.

³¹ For the history of Buddhism traveling from India to China and then traveling to Japan establishing the Zen Buddhism please read Smart, Ninian. *The World's Religions*, 124-152.

³² Michel Mross, "Prayer Beads in Japanese Sōtō Zen," *Zen and Material Culture* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106.

prayer beads utilized in Chinese Buddhism are consistently referred to as Buddha beads or *fozhu* (佛珠), indicating their purpose in venerating the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The evolution of prayer beads was closely associated with the practice of *nianfo* (念佛) or Buddha-recitation, as well as the dissemination of Pure Land Buddhism. Transitioning from mental contemplation to counting with beans and eventually using beads, Buddha beads became widely adopted by the populace. In early Indian Buddhism, *nianfo* originally denoted the contemplation of the great deeds, supreme virtues, and majestic forms of the Buddha, guiding practitioners toward introspection and purification to ultimately attain Nirvana. Initially, *nianfo* was a meditative practice akin to *guru yoga* in Tibetan Buddhism,³³ except its focus was directly on the Buddha or Bodhisattvas rather than a guru. A Tibetan mala, or *trenqwa*, may be adorned with ghaus prayer boxes and appears more ornate than its Hindu precursor. The “eternal knots” symbolically acknowledge the interconnectedness of all things. Two separate cords of 10 beads or discs terminate in thunderbolt pendants, known as dorjes, or small bells. These permit the counting of 20 rounds, forwards and backwards, of the 108 beads, making 10,080 repetitions of a single mantra theoretically possible in one go!³⁴ In Buddhism, chanting is not limited to a small number. The suggested count for chanting varies, with some suggesting a million or even more. Consequently, the concept of beads also changes. A simple rosary of 108 beads is insufficient for completing such a large number of chants. Therefore, the significance of the beads plays a role in this. While the number of beads can vary significantly, the standard is often 108, a number rich with symbolic meanings. It can signify the 108 meditations and the 108 passions

³³ The paper primarily examines the role of rosaries in Hinduism and Chinese Buddhism. Historically, however, rosaries accompanied Buddhism as it spread to different countries. This historical context makes it difficult to clearly differentiate the various Buddhist practices involving rosaries. Although their usage varies across countries based on local customs and rituals, making precise distinctions is challenging. Consequently, it is sometimes necessary to discuss the use of rosaries in other Buddhist traditions to bolster the paper's argument.

³⁴ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 79.

recognized in Buddhism, which arise from the six senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and consciousness. Each sense is linked to feelings that are either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, resulting in a total of 18 distinct feelings. These can be further categorized as either attached to or detached from pleasure. By multiplying these 18 feelings by the two categories, we get 36 basic passions that manifest over time. Multiplying 36 by the past, present, and future results in 108 passions.³⁵

Fifty-four beads correspond to the fifty-four stages of practice, which include the ten faiths, abidings, practices, transferences, groundings, and four roots of good. Rosaries may have fifty-four beads or two strands of fifty-four each. Forty-two beads represent the first forty stages plus two enlightenment stages. Twenty-seven beads symbolize the eighteen learned and nine unlearned individuals. Beads of that number represent the fourteen fearless qualities of a Bodhisattva.³⁶ The number of beads holds doctrinal significance, categorizing the teachings. While this complexity may not be suitable for the average layperson, these meanings persist due to enumeration. The rosary functions as a catechetical tool for those who choose to employ it in this manner. However, with the evolving world and the increasing challenges in people's lives, changes have also occurred in the use of rosaries by laypeople.

Meditation In Hinduism and Buddhism

The preceding discussion has illustrated the significant role that the *Japamala* plays in meditation. Philosophically, within the realm of spirituality, meditation has consistently been regarded as an essential path. Furthermore, in the context of modern life, meditation represents the most compelling path for individuals seeking peace. Consequently, in addition to its importance in spirituality, the *Japamala* has become an indispensable component of contemporary life, even in the absence of spiritual connectedness.

³⁵ Shinshō Hanayama, *The Story of the Juzu* (United States: Bureau of Buddhist Education, Buddhist Churches of America, 1962), 5.

³⁶ George Joji Tanabe, "Telling Beads: The Forms and Functions of the Buddhist Rosary in Japan," *Publikationen.unituebingen*, 2012, 5.

Chanting a particular sound consists of vibrational energy. Similarly, in the Indian *Vedic* tradition, mantras possess a unique blend of sounds³⁷ that, when repeated, whether aloud or silently, release vibrational energy. This energy establishes a pattern of reactions in the mind and body, potentially facilitating spiritual transformation and drawing individuals closer to God. There are three main types of mantras: abstract sounds, such as *Om*, which represent the Absolute; invocations of specific deities; and seed mantras derived from Sanskrit sounds. A *mantra* should be chosen and bestowed upon an individual by a *guru* or *mantrakara* (mantra-maker). This sacred transmission is passed down through generations from the original ancient *rishi*, the seer who first received it. The strict rules governing the sound's pronunciation, duration, pitch, and intonation ensure that a *mantra* remains in its vibrant, original form.

Chanting "Om", regarded as the primordial sound from which the universe is said to originate, holds significant reverence. Pronounced as Om, it is believed to be the original source of all language, the eternal syllable that simultaneously encompasses past, present, and future. No mantra is considered more powerful than this; all other sounds are derived from it, akin to how the pantheon of Hindu deities represents various aspects of a singular Supreme Being. On a physical level, chanting Om exerts profound effects, such as clearing the mind, opening energy channels, and enhancing awareness. Spiritually, Om provides a direct pathway to a profound state of understanding, liberated from human failings such as ignorance, desire, and delusion. Om embodies the three aspects of God in its three audible syllables: "A" represents Brahma, the Creator; "O or U (the sound)" signifies Vishnu, the Preserver; and "M" denotes Shiva, the Destroyer, as Om is pronounced "Aah-ooo-mmm." Each repetition brings the practitioner into the presence of these Divine principles and into union with the three energies, or *gunas*, that underlie everything in the universe. These

³⁷ Each tradition can be characterized by a distinct auditory profile, setting it apart from others. For instance, the sounds associated with Buddhism differ from those of other Indian traditions. This distinction arises from the specific set of words chanted, which produce unique sounds. These varied sounds generate different vibrational energies.

syllables also symbolize the three states of time - past, present, and future - and the three states of consciousness - waking, dreaming, and sleeping - from which humankind seeks liberation. The profound meaning of Om facilitates a permanent meditation practice. In addition to chanting Om, individuals may chant the name of the deity they believe in. This practice again represents sound as the name of the deity embodies the essence; the name is merely a vibrational energy of the essence. The constant repetition of the name eventually brings the devotee into union with these divine qualities, initiating the necessary process of self-dissolution.

In contrast to other religious traditions, the usage of a rosary in Buddhism is not linked to the worship of any deity. Nevertheless, the sound "Om" is also present in Buddhism. While its meaning may differ, the sound holds equal significance within the Buddhist tradition. Buddhists focus their attention not on a divine figure, but rather on attaining a supreme state of existence: enlightenment or nirvana. In one of the most widely practiced forms of Buddhism in China and Japan, this ultimate reality can be attained through the recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha. This chant, repeated three times in reference to the Buddha dharma (spiritual teachings) and the sangha (the Buddhist community), conveys the remembrance invoked with mala beads, which guides the devotee towards this elevated state of being. The phrase translates to "I take refuge in the Buddha of Infinite Light."³⁸ Chanting with a string of 108 prayer beads helps the Buddhist faithful to reach an interior state of supreme reality beyond time and place. In his silent flower sermon, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (563-483 BCE), when asked to shed light on Buddhist laws, merely held up a flower and gazed at it in silence.³⁹ This silence corresponds to the mystic calm reigning within the supreme state of nirvana. The word derives from the Sanskrit verb nir-va, meaning "to blow out", very like a candle. It suggests the extinguishing of ingrained thought and behaviour patterns based on human attachment to sensual pleasures, which bring with them hatred, jealousy, anger, and delusion.

³⁸ Henry and Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, 76.

³⁹ Ibid., 75.

Meditating with mala beads on this present state of samsara, or the cyclical nature of attachment and suffering, enables you to become aware that, as everything you desire and cherish must end, so attachment to it is futile. By confronting this truth, Buddhists come to terms with the transience of all things, gradually learning to surrender the illusion of permanence and attain release from temporal bondage.⁴⁰ The use of a rosary in Buddhism, which entails the act of pushing and pulling the beads, is believed to serve the purpose of warding off evil and inviting good fortune and salvation. As a ritualistic instrument, it fills the gap where human effort concludes, transcending the law of karma without contravening it. Ritual, in essence, represents a form of virtuous human conduct; however, the outcomes it engenders surpass what can be attained through moral actions alone. Were the law of karma adequate for salvation, the rosary and its ritualistic potency would not be deemed necessary.⁴¹ Rituals can serve as moral actions that generate karmic outcomes, or they can transcend the karma law, resulting in effects beyond mere retribution. For instance, chanting, which involves reciting scriptures or repeating formulas and phrases, primarily aims to create karmic merit. This is often done, particularly in structured services, without any specific request other than accumulating merit, although chanting can undoubtedly be used to seek something specific.

On the other hand, prayer is typically a form of supplication, a request for some benefit, rather than a means of accumulating merit, although it is also a virtuous act with positive outcomes.⁴² The benefits of chanting and prayer lie in their combination of virtuous behaviour and ritual power. The third role of chanting and prayer is to express reverence or piety. In everyday practice, this is perhaps the most common way the rosary is used, as people place it around their hands as a sign of reverence rather than for merit accumulation or invoking ritual power. For many, praying or showing reverence without a rosary feels incomplete, akin to trying,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tanabe, "Telling Beads: The Forms and Functions of the Buddhist Rosary in Japan," 14-16.

⁴² Ibid.

as Rennyō described, to grasp the Buddha with bare hands.⁴³ The rosary primarily serves as a tool for the hands, and its meanings are intertwined with the significance of reverent hand gestures. However, in the contemporary global landscape, the utilization of the rosary in its traditional form may be perceived as less significant by lay believers, as well as by non-believers who adopt it ceremoniously. Consequently, it is sometimes worn on the wrist. Adherents may don the rosary with genuine faith and a profound understanding of its significance. Conversely, non-believers may choose to wear rosaries in the form of bracelets to establish a tactile connection, often believing that it will bestow good fortune upon them, which can be interpreted as a form of material value of a rosary.

Throughout history, the function of the rosary has undergone substantial transformation. John Kieschnick elucidates the changes during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), during which court beads underwent significant modification.⁴⁴ The reminders, previously attached to the central bead, were repositioned to extend from the sides of the bead string, ascending upwards.⁴⁵ This modification implies that they were no longer utilized to count the number of times a devotee circled the rosary. Despite Qing officials' awareness of the rosary's Buddhist origins and functions, they repurposed it for entirely different objectives. Within the court, the rosary evolved from a symbol for Buddhist laypeople or monks to a representation of political status. Ritual specialists at the court meticulously differentiated between the rosaries of the emperor, empress, civil officials, military officials, and others, thereby reinforcing its significance as a political emblem. Concurrently, these figures enhanced the rosary's symbolic power by attributing various meanings to it, thereby associating it and its owner with a broader cosmology that diverged from its Buddhist origins.⁴⁶

In a similar vein, when ritual specialists at the Qing court embraced the rosary as a symbol of court rank, they did not invoke Buddhist recitation and promptly redefined the significance of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, 137.

⁴⁵ Lois Sherr Dubin, *The History of Beads* (New York: Abrams, 1987), 70.

⁴⁶ Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, 137.

beads for their own objectives.⁴⁷ However, to suggest that the rosary possessed an inherent significance would be misleading. There was no intrinsic meaning to the rosary that persisted despite attempts by others to alter it. Historically, the beads themselves possessed no inherent meaning; significance is attributed to them solely through the efforts of various social groups—whether monks, connoisseurs, or emperors—who endeavor to imbue the beads with meaning.⁴⁸ Consequently, as the rosary transitioned from one group to another, its meaning evolved from a sacred devotional object with specific symbolic content to an aesthetically pleasing curio, and finally to a marker of rank within a clearly defined bureaucratic hierarchy. Currently, this diversity has expanded, and the rosary is used by individuals with varying interpretations. Often, the stones or materials used in the beads are associated with astrological and medicinal values, which is why individuals wear them in their traditional 108-bead form or shorter versions on their hands. The aesthetic value has also captured the interest of the present generation. In addition to believing in its traditional and scientific value, they appreciate it for its aesthetic appeal. The values of a rosary cannot be precisely defined, as they hold different meanings for different individuals. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the rosary, in its modern form, has endured throughout history. Moreover, it holds significant value in countries such as India and China. In every region of these countries, different types of rosaries, particularly those worn on the hands, are prevalent among the current generation, facilitating a connection between mind and body in general. Most religious traditions use prayer beads, but this paper specifically focuses on the comparative studies between Indian and Chinese practices regarding the contemporary use of rosaries. It examines the significance of prayer beads within these faiths, their philosophical and spiritual connections, and whether they can be considered scientific practices due to their tactile sensations. This exploration has led to the modern trend of wearing rosaries as bracelets. Such bracelets can symbolize different aspects, including philosophical beliefs, religious faith, astrology, or personal aesthetic preferences. While using prayer beads for prayer

⁴⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

is recognized as a spiritual practice, it raises an intriguing question: can it also be deemed a scientific habit due to the tactile sensations involved, which connect the body and mind? This question is fascinating yet challenging to answer. Currently, the use of *Japamala* is more closely linked to various astrological meanings.

The Scientific connotation of Japamala

The *Japamala* encompasses various scientific dimensions, particularly concerning the acoustic properties and medicinal applications of the seeds employed. Both *Rudraksha* and *Tulsi* possess notable medicinal value and utility. The beads, crafted from stones and other materials, also exhibit medicinal properties, with tactile sensation being a standard feature. During typical use of the *Japamala*, individuals engaged in meditation or religious practices utilize their fingers for counting. Consequently, the sensory experiences involving the eyes, fingers, and the entire body, mediated through the mind, become crucial in these activities. Each participant may derive a unique significance from this practice. Numerous studies conducted globally reveal diverse outcomes across different cultural contexts. Nonetheless, it is sufficient to assert that the impact of *Japamala* is profoundly significant, occasionally benefiting patients with severe conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and acute anxiety.⁴⁹

The prayer beads consist of 108 beads per string, with a central Guru Bead serving as the 109th, as previously noted. A pertinent question arises regarding the rationale behind selecting the number one hundred and eight instead of a simple one hundred,

⁴⁹ For additional reading on the numerous studies conducted regarding the connection between the mind and body, particularly in relation to meditation, please refer to works such as: Jain et al., "A Randomized Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Meditation Versus Relaxation Training: Effects on Distress, Positive States of Mind, Rumination, and Distraction." Hari Sharma, "Meditation: Process and Effects," *AYU (An International Quarterly Journal of Research in Ayurveda)* 36, no. 3 (2015). Mark Blows, *The Relevance of the Wisdom Traditions in Contemporary Society: The Challenge to Psychology* (Netherlands: Eburon, 2004). Jai Paul Dudeja, "Scientific analysis of mantra-based meditation and its beneficial effects: An overview," *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Technologies in Engineering and Management Sciences* 3, no. 6 (2017): 21-26.

as well as the importance of counting mantra repetitions with the rosary. Veena Minocha⁵⁰ provides compelling insights into these inquiries. The number 108 holds cosmic significance; by summing the digits one and eight, we arrive at nine, which signifies the 'completion' of the single-digit series. Progressing from one to nine suggests that all numerological sequences have been encountered and the vibrations of each number have been assimilated. This circle of beads represents the elliptical trajectory of the sun and moon across the sky. Ancient Indian astronomers divided this elliptical path into 27 equal segments, known as 'nakshatras'. The 27 nakshatras are subdivided into four segments each, referred to as 'padas', resulting in a total of 108 steps that the sun and moon traverse to complete their elliptical path. Notably, this number is not coincidental, as the Universal mathematics operates on a Base 12 system, and 108 is the product of twelve and nine, the latter symbolizing completion. Consequently, each step represents a blessing that has been perpetuated through time, and as we turn the 108 beads, we align ourselves with the Universe's complete blessings.⁵¹

After completing the entire rosary cycle and reaching the 109th bead, called the Guru Bead, we attain a mastery of the Mantra we've been chanting. Upon reaching the Guru bead, we must turn the Mala around and start again from the last bead we stopped at. This act symbolizes retracing our journey of realization and carries spiritual significance, harmonizing with the universe's natural rhythms. Consequently, it is considered to be highly scientific. Similarly, Buddhism offers a narrative that underscores the repetitive practice of actions to achieve alignment with one's mind and transcend worldly concepts. This approach facilitates transcendence beyond the material realm. In addition to utilizing a rosary for prayer, the creation of a Mandala represents a comparable concept and significance. The process entails constructing the Mandala without attachment, subsequently

⁵⁰ Veena Minocha, "The Science Behind 108 Beads of the Mala," *Hindustan Times*, February 24, 2004. This newspaper article is cited to shed light on the contemporary perceptions and understanding of rosaries. This analysis provides insights into the current use of modern rosaries and the choices related to their beads.

⁵¹ Minocha, "The Science Behind 108 Beads of the Mala."

followed by its destruction, which serves as an exercise in mental discipline. The regulation of the mind is a crucial, if not central, theme in Buddhism, particularly within the Yogacara school.

Moreover, the Guru Bead serves as a symbol for the summer and winter solstices, during which the sun appears to pause in its elliptical trajectory and subsequently reverses its course. This phenomenon signifies that the sun, having reached its maximum extent in one direction, now retraces its path in the opposite direction. Similar to the oscillation of a pendulum, the sun's movement demonstrates a reciprocal action. Therefore, the practice of inverting the Mala at its conclusion represents the microcosm's imitation of the macrocosm's movements and patterns. This method serves as a poignant reminder of our profound interconnectedness with nature, offering a symbolic representation of the cosmic cycles that govern the Universe.⁵²

Japamala is more than just a simple counting tool for mantras; it is a sacred instrument steeped in spiritual meaning, with its materials and appropriate usage playing vital roles in the practitioner's spiritual path. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and various spiritual traditions, *Japamala* is revered as a sacred device that aids in meditation, focus, and fostering inner peace. The action of sliding through the beads while reciting mantras is believed to synchronize the practitioner's mind and spirit, enhancing their connection with the divine. Moreover, malas often symbolize religious identity and commitment. They are thought to possess a source of sacred power, enhancing the soul's energy, referred to as *Shakti*, which transforms negativity into positivity. This practice helps transcend the duality of the surrounding world, guiding one toward unity and becoming a divine channel. Each mala embodies a potent energy that leads to enlightenment, guiding the wearer from ignorance to knowledge. The universe consists of five elements: earth, fire, water, sky, and air. The five fingers that engage in the movement of the *Japamala* also symbolize these elements. When combined with the sound of mantras, one cultivates a new relationship with the emerging energy, gradually

⁵² Ibid.

transitioning towards positivity, spirituality, and transformation. However, it is essential to follow the correct prescribed methods during this process. The choice of material for a *Japamala* is believed to influence its spiritual potency. For example, *Rudraksha* beads are associated with Lord Shiva, and *Rudraksha malas* are believed to offer protection and promote spiritual growth. *Malas* made with Tulsi beads, derived from the sacred basil plant, are revered for their purifying qualities and are commonly utilized in Vaishnavite practices. Sandalwood *malas* are renowned for their calming aroma and are believed to facilitate meditation and promote tranquility. Quartz crystal *malas* are believed to amplify energy and intentions and are used for various spiritual purposes. These materials are selected not only for their physical properties but also for their symbolic associations within spiritual traditions and scientific reasoning. Using a *Japamala* involves Finger Counting, which has several advantages compared to manual counting. The tactile interaction with the beads aids concentration during mantra recitation and boosts focus. The mala's structured design enables accurate tracking of recitations, which is crucial for practices that require specific numbers. This contributes to consistent repetition for mental development. Additionally, physically handling the mala can strengthen the practitioner's bond with their spiritual practice and the sanctity of the mantras.

The aforementioned discussion encompasses profound philosophical dimensions that merit further exploration in future work on rosaries. Specifically, the ontological significance of prayer beads as physical manifestations of spiritual concepts invites deeper inquiry, while the epistemological implications of using them as tools for understanding Buddhist principles could enhance scholarly dialogue. Additionally, examining the phenomenology of prayer bead practices can provide insight into the subjective experiences of practitioners. There is also a need to consider the metaphysics of prayer beads, focusing on their connection to reality and their role in bridging physical and spiritual realms. The ethical implications surrounding the use of prayer beads as a means of moral development warrant further consideration, alongside the concept of intentionality and its relationship to consciousness and mindfulness. Future studies could explore the aesthetics of prayer

beads and how their beauty reflects spiritual truths, as well as delve into the philosophy of language related to mantras recited with prayer beads. Investigating the roles of time and temporality, including cyclical versus linear perspectives in prayer bead practices, could offer valuable insights. Moreover, the philosophy of mind in relation to meditation practices involving prayer beads, as well as the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) associated with their materiality, warrants attention. The aspects of philosophy of religion, particularly in understanding devotion and faith expressed through prayer beads, should also be examined. The interplay of causality in Buddhist philosophy and its connection to karmic purification via prayer beads can provide fertile ground for future research, as can the analysis of symbolism in how prayer beads represent complex concepts. Lastly, focusing on the philosophy of practice, especially how the repetitive nature of prayer bead use cultivates wisdom and compassion, can significantly contribute to the ongoing academic conversation.

Moreover, the philosophical significance attributed to the utilization of prayer beads may vary considerably. Indian Buddhist traditions frequently emphasize the transformative power inherent in mantra recitation and the cultivation of *bodhicitta* (the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings). Conversely, Chinese Buddhist practices, influenced by Taoist and Confucian ideologies, tend to place greater emphasis on harmonizing the mind, body, and spirit, alongside the cultivation of virtue in daily life.

These distinctions in the application and interpretation of prayer beads underscore the dynamic nature of Buddhist practice as it disseminated across diverse cultures. They illustrate how spiritual tools and concepts may be adapted and reinterpreted to resonate with local beliefs, philosophies, and lifestyles, all while preserving their fundamental purpose as aids in daily life, fostering wellbeing, the pursuit of enlightenment, and inner peace.

Conclusion

This paper explores the significance of prayer beads, particularly the *Japamala* or rosary, across various religious traditions, with a

focus on Hinduism and Buddhism in India and China. The study delves into the historical, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of these artifacts, including their potential scientific implications. Key findings highlight the importance of prayer beads in meditation, emphasizing the symbolic significance of the number 108, which holds both spiritual and astronomical connotations. The evolution of prayer bead usage from strictly religious functions to broader cultural and fashion-related significance is also examined. Additionally, the research discusses the tactile sensations associated with prayer bead use and their effects on the body and mind. Differences in the philosophical approaches of Indian and Chinese Buddhist traditions regarding prayer beads are noted, underscoring how spiritual tools can be adapted to resonate with local beliefs while maintaining their fundamental purpose of aiding in spiritual practice and fostering inner peace. Ultimately, the *Japamala* or rosary serves not only as a religious artifact but also as a bridge between spiritual practices and potential scientific benefits, illustrating the complex interplay between tradition, culture, and modern understanding. This comparative study also reveals similarities and differences between Indian and Chinese Buddhism regarding prayer beads, emphasizing their historical and cultural significance, and the philosophical nuances that may emerge in their usage. Materials used for these beads, such as Rudraksha or Tulsi in Hinduism, carry symbolic weight in practice. Furthermore, the tactile nature of using prayer beads may yield psychological advantages, aiding concentration and mindfulness. Their contemporary relevance extends beyond religion, finding roles as fashion accessories and stress management tools. This study illustrates the adaptability of spiritual practices across cultures, while suggesting avenues for future research into the scientific basis of prayer beads' effects, as well as deeper philosophical inquiries into their enduring significance.

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https://publikationen.unituebingen.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10900/47040/pdf/Tanabe_2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

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There are various YouTube videos that demonstrate the usage of *Japamala*; some of them include:

<https://youtu.be/OEfecEbdgjY?si=pOQHNLN xuunWF81Z>, accessed on 18th May 2025.

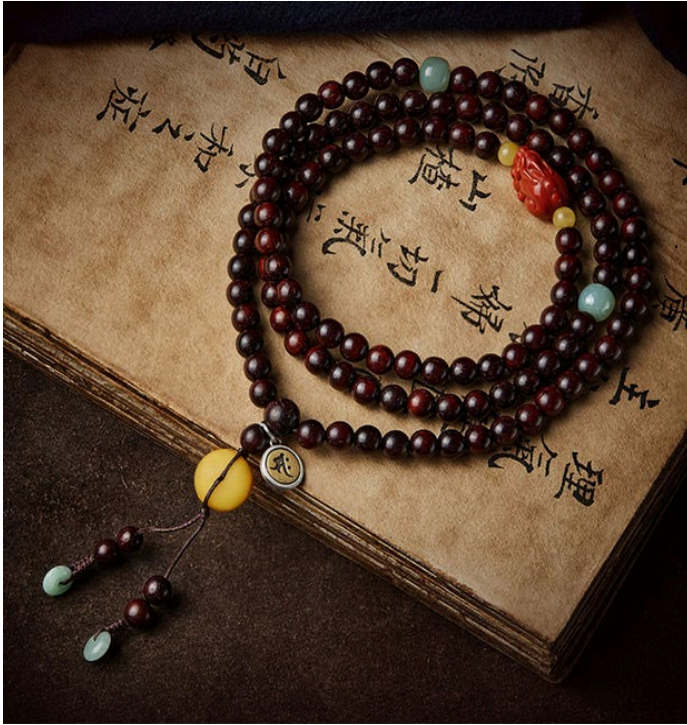
<https://youtu.be/op68neAjiZg?si=v52mAL7oSL-TTpzG>, accessed on 18th May 2025.



Example of a Rudraksha *Japamala*. These are the seeds of the plant Rudraksha. <https://rudrakshayoga.wordpress.com/2013/10/22/spiritual-symbolism-and-significance-of-mala-beadsjapa-mala-in-meditation/>. Accessed on 19th May 2025.



This illustrates a *Tulsi Japamala*. In contrast to the *Rudraksha Japamala*, these mala beads are crafted from the stem of the *Tulsi* plant. <https://images.app.goo.gl/r4R41WcW2FarPGzT8>. Accessed on 19th May 2025.



This image serves as an example of a simpler Buddhist rosary that was used. <https://images.app.goo.gl/VKbDfqdBz5xLf57f7>. Accessed on 19th May 2025.



This image serves as an example of a simpler Buddhist rosary that was used.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/cbSUVsM87ZKmpV6>.

Accessed on 19th May 2025.



The contemporary utilization of *Japamala*, as well as the practice of wearing them on one's hand, presents considerable diversity. The size of the beads, the materials used, and their colors vary according to individual preferences.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/Ho8LUxMqNJBW6qk9>.

Accessed on 19th May 2025.



This is an example of the Japamala that could be worn on the hands with faith in a spiritual connotation or also worn due to its aesthetic beauty.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/E3UB2RETdQvACHdM6>.

Accessed on 19th May 2025.

Indian Culture and Western Thoughts: A Philosophical Insight on the Essence of Cultural Identity by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya

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Abstract: Culture, which shaped our religious beliefs and practices, plays a significant role in preserving an age old civilization. Its value and impact on a group of persons, society, state or a nation is limitless. This paper demonstrates how our culture has the strength to uphold unity in such a diverse country like India. It also investigates the impacts of Western education and Christian missionaries in Indian society. In the course of the study, it also analyses the evolution of the Indian socio-political ideas and various institutions. The objective of this study is to highlight Upadhyaya's vision of future India so that every individual in India remains connected to its own original roots.

Keywords: dharma, regeneration, protestant, mendicant, etc.

Introduction

Culture, which defines people's beliefs, values, behaviour and personal interests, is an integral part of every nation; it is transferred from one generation to another. Culture includes traditions, respects, values, customs, religion, arts, literatures, and other social practices and behaviours such as food, dressing styles, ¹ languages, faiths, etc. Human beings across the globe communicate each other, feed themselves with food, and so on etc. However, they speak different languages, eat different types of food,

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and follow distinct faith and beliefs. When we compared world culture, similarities and differences, both, can be seen. Often, people of one culture may not agree with the values and beliefs of another culture, and as such, it became a major reason for causing various socio-political and ethical issues. But, why is culture important for a nation? According to Upadhyaya, culture allows us to maintain a national identity and it also helps individuals to find an identity which influences their daily lives. Culture taught us the values of humanity, respects, family, morality, openness and ethnicity. For me, the Bharatiya culture is a big part of 'my identity' and also what other can 'identify me'.

India is famous for its culture and tradition, where people of more than one religious culture live together. The culture of India reflects its social structure, beliefs, and religious inclination of Indian people. Some of its vital components are etiquette, good manners, beliefs, rituals, civilized communication and values. It is interesting to point out that despite these differences, there exists a strong bond of unity and that the people of different culture are socially interdependent. Indian culture constitutes an important part of our lives, and dealt with various social, ethical and political issues in the country. And, though culture is what separates us from other parts of the world, in our country, it brings people together and people from various backgrounds, traditions, languages, interests and skills co-exists together with respect.

Introduction of Western Education and the Emergence of Indian Nationalism

Before the arrival of the British East India Company, India has Her own system of education and administration. The national life of India underwent significant change due to the spread of Western education, which was first introduced in India by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay. The introduction of Western education angered the majority of Indians because it decried Sanskrit literature; the traditional sense of values regarding of education, religion, culture, and sense of aesthetics underwent great change and new sense of imported values developed. It led to the emergence of a new class of people, who would be Indian in colour and blood,

but English in opinions, in taste, in intellects and in morals. And since 1935, the importance of indigenous literatures such as Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, etc. was reduced and English became the official language of the nation.

As a blessing in disguise, it introduced English education to Indian intellectuals, which freed their minds from the bondage of superstitions and the so-called socio-religious traditions and customs of the country. The liberal and democratic ideas of John Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, Wilberforce, and Cobden and the dedicated contributions of Mrs. Annie Besant and A. O. Hume inspired the educated Indians. Western doctrines such as nationalism, secularism, democracy, socialism, marxism, individualism, utilitarianism, etc also influenced many Indian thinkers. With the introduction of English education, the educated Indians began to question about the validity of every cultural practices, beliefs and customs, and everything that cannot be proved through scientific test and rational mind was rejected. Not only these, it led to reformation of new practices such as abolishment of untouchability, sati system, child marriage, prohibition on widow remarriage, dowry; added new values such as liberal humanism, secularism, welfare state, and egalitarianism to Indian values system; improved India's communication and transport systems; and promoted globalization of Indian economy by introducing efficient methods of production of goods and services. The Indian social reformers were aware of the fact that unless the socio-religious barriers, inequalities, superstitions and evil practices, were not removed, it would be impossible to transform India. In the words of Lala Lajpat Rai, "We want to preach a gospel of social democracy. We know that we cannot fly the flag of socialism, but the present constitution of society is wrong and unjust. It is cruel and barbaric. We want equal opportunity and equal justice for all."² Thus, the spread of English education, on the positive side, generated a spirit of national unity and national independence, and its knowledge and sciences helped the Indian to understand the weakness of the country; it awakens Indians' nationalist intimacy.

² H. H. Das, *Indian Political Thoughts* (Jaipur: National Publishing House, 2015), 7.

On the negative side, Westernization in India reduced the religious values and cultural practices, affected indigenous social structures such as marriage, joint family, misuse of freedom, and the like. Due to British' policy of Divide and Rule, it planted communalism among various religions, regions and caste of India. It not only widened the gap between the educated and the uneducated Indians, but also resulted in the destruction of Hinduism due to large scale conversion of Indians to Christianity. The liberal writings of Voltaire, Robespierre, Rousseau, Milton, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Burke, J. S. Mill, Spencer, etc., considerably inspired the Indian intellectuals and political leaders to cherish the democratic spirit and the ideal of political liberty. If we look inside the emergence of India's nationalism, one can easily notice such predominant influence.

The British East India Company, which came to India as a trader, became the chief administrator of the country, and mercilessly exploited the Indian economy. Their incompetent and autocratic administration, favouritism, extortion, corruption, insensitivity and apathy towards the problems of Indian people impoverished the miseries and caused great resentment. The exploitative, arrogant and aggressive of the British rule has its reaction in the form of development of Indian renaissance, which contributed greatly to the growth of modern Indian nationalism. The European Renaissance, which liberated man from the clutches of moribund customs, superstitions, and the doctrine of original sin, was incorporated with the Hellenistic spirit of free unhindered intellectual enquiry, but revivalism was the dominant aspect of the intellectual Indian Renaissance. The Brahmo Samaj (1830) of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1837) had high admiration for Western culture, Christianity, education. Roy was against unnecessary rituals, idolatry and polytheism, and attempted to reinterpret Hinduism. Roy wanted to rebuild India on the Western model for he had immense faith in the western sense of equality, justice and fairness. According to Roy, India's progress could be achieved only by operating within the western system and by cooperating with the British rule. In his petition against the Press Revolution to the King-in-Council, he wrote, "Your dutiful subjects consequently have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors, but rather as

deliverers, and look up to Your Majesty not only as a ruler, but also as a father and protector.”³

In 1875, Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj as a reaction to the Brahmo Samaj. As a Hindu protestant reformation movement, the Arya Samaj was vehemently opposed to blind Western imitation, rejected Western culture, values, and religion, and asked the Indians to be proud of being a Hindu. His philosophy insisted to maintain Indian identity and the former greatness of ancient India and the pristine purity of the Vedic principles. The Arya Samaj, thus, strongly refuted the theory of Brahmo Samaj that without the British rule and western culture there could be no regeneration in India. Thus, the revivalism of the Arya Samaj, its emphasis on Vedic religion, self-confidence, pride in India's past traditions and cultural heritage, and its concept of sacrifice for the cause of the country and the people, its call for the Indians to give up the parasitical characters of other culture, etc., was a reaction against the ethics of Brahmo Samaj that the spirit of Western culture has pervaded the entire atmosphere of Indian society, and we think, breathe, move and feel in a western atmosphere.

Because of the clashes between these two predominant groups, it led to the emergence of two extremities: the Moderates and the Extremists, which represents the ideology and the philosophy of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj respectively. Although both these groups worked for the purification of Indian society and the Hindu religion, the former was eclectic and cosmopolitan, and tried to assimilate the good aspects of other cultures and religions, whereas the later was nationalistic and conservative in its approach, and aims at the revival of the great Bharatiya culture and the introduction of social and religious reforms. From these standpoint, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was known as the Father of Modern Indian Moderates. The Moderates leaders of the Congress, without any exception believed in the fair play of western systems; they followed a mendicant policy or the policy of petition and prayers, which have its origin to the Brahmo Samaj's ideology. The Extremists, on the other hand, who advocates a radical policy wanted them to be ousted from the country. As they were deeply

³ Das, *Indian Political Thoughts*, 11.

influenced by the preaching of the Arya Samaj, the philosophy and programme of action of the Extremists includes pride's in India's past glory, national identity spiritual nationalism, intense patriotism, an element of antipathy for the British rule, the preparedness to sacrifice for the cause of the country, etc. Indian political leaders like W. C. Bannerjee, Manmohan Gosh, Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pherizshaj Mehta, and so on were all known Indian Moderates for their softness towards this foreign rule. Such creed for extreme loyalty was reaffirmed by Gopal Krishna Gokhale when he quoted, "Our motto is reform, not revolution."⁴ On the contrary, Extremists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Rajput Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, etc. were also influenced by the western thoughts, concepts of liberty, equality and rights, English institution and education, and personalities, however, they were differ from the Moderates as they do not want to be uprooted from their own culture and traditions.

Indian Culture and Western Thoughts

The Indian society is entirely dominated by Hindu culture. Some main features of the faith of Hindu culture consists of its different sides of philosophical basis, ethical character religious experience and traditional faith. The Indian culture is marked by its rational character and is based on the spiritual principles and realisation of ultimate truth. The Indians believed in the law of karma and accepted the spiritual truth' as preached in the Vedas and many sacred books of the Hindus. Everything in Hinduism consist of spiritual truths, devotion, mythology, philosophy, code of conduct, rituals, ethics, poetry, etc. Sacred books such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranas provides religious guidance through legend's and stories; ancient Indian law books like Manusmriti provides the ethics for Hindus. The Vedas are considered as the fountainhead of Hindu culture. The Upanisadas also contains the philosophical truths realised by the Indian sages such as '*sarvam khamlu idam Brahma*', meaning '*oneness is everything*', and '*aham Brahma asmi*', meaning '*the individual is one with the universe*'. The Smiritis prescribes the social code and

⁴ Ibid., 26.

the personal code of conduct, starting from the most trivial daily acts on an individual to the highest philosophical wisdom and spiritual realisation to lead a good life. Then a question arises as to why Indian culture is unique? The approach of Indian culture is completely different from the rest of other cultures and religions. Unlike western culture, the goals of Indian culture is to improve the individual's quality of life in accordance with *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Here, the *dharma* stands for righteous living that results in a more meaningful life; the *artha* aims at the acquisition of wealth through rightful means; the *kama* means enjoyment of desire and pleasures without transgressing the social and religious norms; and the *moksha* means liberation from the bondage of birth and death. Apart from these four-fold *purusharthas* (goals of individuals), the Indian culture is also advocated the idea of complete renunciation and total control over all mental functions that lead men towards *mukti*. In classical Indian philosophy, schools of Buddhism and Jainism preaches for right knowledge, right faith, and right action. Hinduism stands for spiritual freedom, universal acceptance, prosperity and renunciation, which make it unique from other religions and culture. "Hinduism is inclusive religion. In comparison to this, every other religion is exclusive which at times make them more intolerant towards others. Only Hindu Dharma accepts every past and future religion as a valid path to the Divine, and also treats each of them as its own."⁵

The Indian leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak wanted a genuine reform of Indian society and does not entertain blind imitation of the West in the name of reformation. In an article, written by Tilak, in the *Kesari*, he explained his philosophy of social change. Tilak was not opposed to social reform brought about by growing enlightenment and progressive education, but firmly opposed to the creation of fractions and sections for social reform. He argued that people who have no faith in the primacy of spiritual principles have no moral right to impose their ill-conceived borrowed ideas of the West. Tilak believed that India's downfall responsible is due to the ignorance of Hindu religion. So, he think it as unwise to wipe out the Indian values for European ideas of rationalism, materialism and

⁵ Samarpan, *Living Hinduism: Scriptures Philosophy Practices* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2017), 18.

utilitarianism. As a nationalist, Tilak wanted a healthy foundation by restoring the vital traditions of India's ancient culture. However, Tilak's concept of nationalism was influenced by Wilson's concept of self-determination, and the Western ideal of national freedom. His nationalism was an integration of the Western ideas of Edmund Burke, Mazzini, J. S. Mill and Woodrow Wilson, and the Vedantic ideal of the spirit.

Rabindranath Tagore, in his book, '*Nationalism*', explained that the real problem for India is the problem of race unity. India, as a country with diverse race, the moral spirit of cooperation and brotherhood should not be limited by geographical boundaries; it should be the true basis for India's greatness. His philosophy calls for spiritual unity of all men. He added that the educated Indians, contrary to the lessons of our ancestors, has been trying to absorb some lessons from other people's history. He wrote, "Either you shut your doors against the aliens or reduce them into slavery. And this is your solution of the problem of race-conflict."⁶ What Tagore meant by this statement was that to reform for India's national life, we do not need to borrow other foreign methods, but our own ideals evolved through our own history; it should not be guided by the impulse of competition and greed. India is not a beggar though others may think She is; She must have confidence in Her past glory and wisdom; our social instincts imposed restrictions in our pursuit of wealth and material gain. He was of the view that when we copy alien methods, the same social weakness may prevail in our own country, and as a result, we simply became a victim for other nations, and that is why China, even at Her darkest period, look upon other nations with Her best confidence. He wrote, "Japan, for example, thinks that She is getting powerful through adoption Western methods, but, after She has exhausted Her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to Her. She will not have developed Herself from within."⁷ Thus, Tagore envisages us that our political freedom would not give us real freedom unless our mind is free from all unclean entanglements. In the same way, Upadhyaya's philosophy represented a confident

⁶ Ravindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Prakash Books India, 2015), 105.

⁷ Ibid., 96.

Bharat that can be ready to meet the challenges with the help of its ancient wisdom rather than blindly aping of conflicting alien ideas which complicated the prevailing issues in the country.

The Essence of Cultural Revival of Deendayal Upadhyaya for National Reconstruction

Among the contemporary Indian intellectuals who consider Indian culture as the bedrock of a nation's foundation, notable figures such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Veer Savarkar, Sri Aurobindo, Krishnachandra Bhattacharya, and S. Radhakrishnan have emerged. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, a genuine Indian reformer, also belonged to this group of thinkers who perceived Indian culture as the guiding light for a country engulfed in darkness. In his lectures on Integral Humanism, Upadhyaya emphasized that the neglect of national identity is the fundamental cause of India's problems. He argued that without a strong sense of identity, India's independence loses its significance and the nation cannot progress and develop comprehensively. The lack of awareness about our national identity has hindered the realization of our full potential. Upadhyaya attributed this to the continued influence of colonial policies on various aspects of the Indian constitution even after gaining independence from British rule. Moreover, he criticized Indian leaders who blindly embraced foreign doctrines and pursued models or ideas for modernizing India. According to Upadhyaya, the suppression of our national identity by these alien policies hampers our progress and leads to numerous problems as a nation's natural instincts are stifled. Even those actively involved in the country's affairs remain oblivious to the root causes of these issues. Upadhyaya's holistic philosophy aims to rectify such situations and establish unity and discipline in society, as the neglect of India's rich traditions has resulted in their abandonment in the pursuit of development.

The main problem in the West was that they saw man as a political animal, thereby conferring upon him absolute sovereignty, and at the same time, they ignored the values of other aspects that are connected or related to men's lives. To be sure, as they perceived things separately, most of them resulted in faulty conclusions. In

Indian culture, there is no such separateness, and everything is seen as an integrated whole, not merely in collective or social life, but in individual life as well.

It can be noted that Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy is deeply rooted in Bharatiya culture, which is characterized by its integral nature and integrated perspective. Unlike the various 'isms' of the Western world, Upadhyaya does not endorse them as they can be seen as a tangled web of ideologies. Bharatiya culture recognizes and values the innate human instinct to live and places great importance on the pursuit of happiness. Upadhyaya acknowledges that the desire for lasting happiness is inherent in every individual. However, he criticizes the notion that sensory pleasure alone can bring true happiness, considering it to be a narrow understanding of the concept. According to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, "the cultural freedom of the nation is of utmost important because culture communicates like life in the entire body of the nation. The way of life that man creates in an attempt to conquer the elements of nature, and in the imagination of human perception, is his culture. Culture is never motionless but constantly moving; Yet it has an existence of its own. Though constantly moving like the flow of a river, it keeps her own personal characteristics, which are in the culture of the society producing that cultural attitude and with that cultural spirit the literature, art, philosophy, memory, scriptures, social creation of other nations. It is expressed in various parts of history and civilization. During the period of dependence all these get affected and the natural flow gets blocked. Being independent today, it is necessary that all the obstacles of our flow should be removed and we can develop according to our talent in all the areas of the nation."⁸

As far as the question of possibility that our culture can point the direction of the country's all-round progress, Upadhyaya is of the view that the concept of independence is closely intertwined with an individual's own cultural identity. Without culture serving as the foundation for independence, the pursuit of political autonomy would be reduced to a chaotic race driven by self-centred and power-hungry individuals. True significance can only be attributed to

⁸ R. S. Agnihotri, B. P. Shukal, eds., *Rastra Jivan Ki Disha* (Lucknow: Lokhit Prakashan, 2008), 33-34.

independence when it serves as a means to express and showcase our cultural heritage. This expression not only contributes to our advancement as a society, but also grants us the invaluable experience of joy. Hence, it has become imperative, both from a national and human perspective, to contemplate the principles of Bharatiya culture. "It is indeed surprising that those who claim to reform the society by removing dead traditions, themselves fall prey to some outdated foreign traditions."⁹

Concluding Observation

It is observed that the birth of various 'isms' has greatly fascinated the minds of Indian intellectuals. However, as these ideas were unable to provide solutions to the problems faced by mankind, Upadhyaya was always doubtful about its principles and policies. According to Upadhyaya, a nation is not merely a geographical area or a political concept; it does not emerge from a social agreement, nor does it cease to exist if that agreement is dissolved. A nation emerges from a profound life-force; it is self-created, '*swayambhuha*'. While it has a historical development, history itself cannot fully describe it. Language, culture, and literature are certainly fundamental components of a nation's unity, but they are foundational because they reflect something even more essential to a nation, i.e. its unified or collective consciousness. These elements characterize the nation, rather than serve as its origin. The Integral Humanism of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya proposes that the classical Indian understanding of nation and nationality arises from a worldview that prioritizes creative harmony, seeing everything as interconnected. The individual, with his unique existence, legitimate self-interest, desires, and pursuit of happiness, finds fulfilment within the broader context of society: society derives meaning from the even larger existence of the nation, which in turn achieves its ultimate purpose by serving the universal interests of humanity. All these life units are interrelated, not arranged in a hierarchy, but exist in a natural, innate, and inviolable simultaneity of respect for life. These ideals, according to

⁹ S. S. N. Bakshi, *Deendayal Upadhyaya: Life of an Ideologue Politician* (New Delhi: Rupa Publication India, 2018), 75.

Upadhyaya, embody the essence of traditional Indian national life. They constitute the Indian consciousness, its vital life-force, the reason for its existence—its cultural identity. His philosophy propounded the idea that every nation possesses its distinct consciousness, which sets it apart from others. As long as that consciousness, the cultural identity, which is seen by Upadhyaya as the ‘soul’ of a nation, thrives, the nation lives; when it withers, the nation ceases to exist.

So, for Upadhyaya, the progress of humankind and the sustenance of life depends on its capacity to mould its nature towards the attainment of social goals. Therefore, he regards dharma as the fundamental and eternal principles that can bring about peace, harmony, and progress, both in man and society. Bharatiya culture is not concerned only with the salvation of the soul, but also for the body, mind, and intellect. As dharma is given the foremost place in our culture, his philosophy insisted that the government must maintain law and order in accordance with dharma; any chaos that can destroy dharma should be prevented. He said, “When nature is channelized according to the principles of Dharma, we have culture and civilisation. It is indeed this culture which will enable us to sustain and sublimate the life of mankind.”¹⁰ Thus, the cultural revivalism of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, in shaping a healthy foundation of Indian national life, thoroughly examined the life of an individual in an integrated manner, and set the aim of developing body, mind, intellect and soul in a balanced way. This ‘integrated-life’ constitutes the principle underlying our culture as well as its aims and goals. His philosophy tried to fulfil the diverse desires of humanity, ensuring that the pursuit of one aspiration does not clash with another. This holistic representation encompasses all four dimensions of an individual’s aspirations. Undoubtedly, the notion of a whole human being, an integrated individual, should serve as both our ultimate aim and the path we follow.

¹⁰ D. Upadhyaya, *Integral Humanism* (Noida: Jagriti Prakashan, 1992), 28-29.

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Bhagavad Gita's vision for a Harmonious Society: Ethics, Values and Social Justice

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Abstract: Gita emphasizes on the necessity of ethics and deals with moral order maintaining peace, harmony and social order- It highlights the notion of desireless action- In its message, the Gita advises individuals to take up a life of action and recommends renunciation in action rather than renunciation of action- Gita insists that a man should shape his ideals according to the station of his life in society or follow his Swadharma - The central point of the teaching of Bhagavad Gita is Nishkama karma - this ideal is realized by performing selfless action- In Gita, we can see the description of the man who has attained perfect state or sthitaprajña - A yogi is sthitaprajña who is firmly rooted in higher reason and unmoved by passions and emotions - This karma yogi has to work for the benefit of humanity in a spirit of detachment- Here the yogi has no selfish motives but works for the preservation and welfare of society- This is called Lokasamgraha - This philosophy of action advocated by Gita holds that every individual has to be engaged in some action and in the absence of it, life becomes meaningless.

Keywords: Swadharma, Nishkama karma, Sthitaprajna, Karma yogi, Lokasamgraha

The Bhagavad Gita is the most popular exposition of Indian Philosophy, religion and way of life. Its ethical part, have decisively influenced the Indian Philosophers to the extent that they have called it the 'Fifth Veda'. It is one among the Prasthanatrayi, the other two being Upanishads and Brahmasutra and together they are referred to as the basic texts of Vedānta.

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According to Swami Prabhavananda, “To understand the place of the three works in modern Indian Philosophy, we recall once again the three steps to attain self –knowledge prescribed by the Upanishads. We must first hear of the truth of the self; we must reason upon this and we must meditate upon the self. The Upanishads speaks to us of the truth of the self. The Vedānta-sutras aid us to reason and understand. Finally, the Gita affords us practical ways and means of living and prescribes details of conduct and methods of meditation.”² The ethics of Gita intends to ensure to ensure the proper development of all aspects of man. It has synthesized both social and individual interests. The ultimate end, no doubt, is absolute perfection of the individual, but his perfection can be attained only through consolidation of society on the one hand and God-realization on the other. According to Gita, the only way of freeing the soul from its various limitations is social service and devotion to God. This is a humanistic ideal which is attainable either through knowledge, devotion, or action. The focus of this paper is to analyze these concepts of ethics, social justice and humanistic implications of Bhagavad Gita.

The philosophy of action advocated by the Gita holds that every individual has to engage in some action or the other. In the absence of action, his life becomes meaningless. Gita emphasizes on the necessity of ethics and deals with moral order maintaining peace, harmony, and order in society. The most important element in Gita is the doctrine of Nishkama karma. It highlights the notion of desireless action. In its message, the Gita advises individuals to take up a life of action and recommends renunciation in action rather than renunciation of action. From this view point let us now analyze the ethical and social aspects of Gita through the concepts of Swadharma, Nishkama karma, Sthitha prajna and Lokasamgraha which are the important facets of it.

² Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), 268-269.

Swadharma

As per one division, dharma is divided into *samanya dharma* and *swadharma*. *Samānya dharma* elucidates the duties of an individual towards society. By performing *samānya dharma*, one contributes towards preserving a self-sustaining society. *Swadharma* guides individuals to perform their duties in accordance with time and situation. It has been believed that one cannot evade dharma in life as it is associated with a person's life eternally. The ethics of Gita can be considered the ethics of Nishkama karma and *Swadharma*. While counseling Arjuna to fight in the battle of Kurushetra, Krishna was always emphasizing the importance of *swadharma*. According to the Bhagavad Gita, the observance of *swadharma* has been emphasized to such an extent that at the time of a possible conflict between *swadharma* and *sadharana dharma*, it is *swadharma* that is given preference. It is because of this that Krishna advised Arjuna to fight without any hesitation. As a Kshatriya, it is the appropriate dharma to be observed by Arjuna. Gita emphasizes on *swadharma* and urges Arjuna to fight rather than retire to the forest as a hermit as it holds that *swadharma* leads to supreme good. We can say that the word *swadharma* has a wide significance and it is social obligations mainly that are asked here to be discharged so as to secure and preserve the solidarity of society. The Gita insists that man should shape his ideals according to the station of his life in society, endeavour to follow his *swadharma*, and do his duty according to the state of his growth. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "*Swadharma* is the work in agreement with the law of one's being. We worship God by doing our ordained duties. God intends every man for some work in connection with society."³ The aim and the true goal of karma yoga is the union of one's self with God through action. We can accomplish this through the performance of *swadharma*, i.e. doing the particular duties proceeding from the law of one's individual nature.

³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 489.

Nishkama karma

The central point of the teaching of Gita is Nishkama karma. This indicates that we have to perform duties just for the sake of duties. We should not be inactive in any stages of our life. It stands for action with no selfish gain or for no desired end. It is action for action sake alone. Nishkama karma is not inaction, but action par excellence. By following this path, the individuals can reach their goal of realization through service. Gita recognizes that it is through work that we are brought into relation with the rest of the world. So, the lesson that Gita gives us through Nishkama karma is that the spirit in man is satisfied only when it sees the spirit in the world. Nishkama karmas are actions done without any conscious intention of achieving an end or any attachment. It means desireless actions. However, in Indian thought, desireless indicates only absence of narrow egoistic desires. According to Bhagavad Gita, the ideal of Nishkama karma is realized by performing selfless actions. It clearly says that actions are to be done and nobody can remain without being active or performing actions. In spite of doing actions, one should not be involved in the fruit of action. What is required is not renunciation of but renunciation in action. According to Tiwari, "The ideal of Nishkama karma may be taken as a synthesis between what has been called *pravrtti* and *nivrtti* in the Indian ethical system. *Pravrtti* is the path of active life and the object of attaining heaven or some such state of happiness. Thus, *pravrtti* refers to desireful actions, the desire being happiness in the present life or happiness in heaven. Such acts include all the rituals and ceremonies prescribed in the Vedas or other Sastras. Such acts are definitely attached actions. As opposed to *pravrtti*, *nivrtti* is the path of total renunciation of works. It is a quietist path, taking *sadhana*, Samadhi etc. as the sole pathway to salvation. The essential thing involved herein is that, for salvation, one has to take recourse to what is known as jñana-marga or the path of knowledge. The doctrine of Nishkama karma cuts a middle course between the above two extreme pathways. It holds that what is required for liberation is not the renunciation of world or worldly actions, but the renunciation only of *kama* (passion or egoistic desire). The Gita clearly says that actions are to be done; nobody can remain without performing actions. So, renunciation of works is not required. What

is required is renunciation in action. That is even in spite of doing action; one is not to be involved in the fruit of the action.”⁴ Nishkama karma refers to action without attachment to the fruits thereof. Duty is to be done only because it is duty and for no other consideration. The performance of duty will certainly bring its reward now or later, but that must not be the impelling force for the duty. The reward is not man's concern that is rather God's concern. So, man should perform his duty with sense of devotion without any concern for the result. Here, it is to be noted that Gita is totally against inaction. It prohibits inaction also along with attached actions.

Renunciation of fruits of action to God is true renunciation. The performance of one's specific duties without attachment and desire for fruits is true renunciation. One attains perfection by doing one's specific duties with detachment and worships God by dedicating them to him. Whatever action is done should be dedicated to God. Actions which are motivated by desires for fruits lead to bondage. But, if they are performed without such desires, and desires are surrendered to God, they will yield permanent peace. So, Gita stresses the performance of duties as service to God. As stated by Sinha, “A karma yogin should dedicate all his action to God. Whatever he does, whatever he eats, whatever he offers in a sacrifice, whatever gifts he takes gifts he takes, and whatever penance he undergoes, he should dedicate to him. His acts of duty are consecrated to him. They bring him in complete union with God. Divine energy flows into him and actuates all his actions. He becomes an instrument of divine action.”⁵ It follows from the above account that extinction of egoism and attachment is an indispensable condition of Nishkama karma. Karma yoga thus unites the human will with divine will when all our actions are done without desire and it dedicates to God.

Hence, we can say that karma yoga has two faces: secular and religious. The secular aspect arises from the fact that karma yoga requires selfless dedicated action or Nishkama karma. For

⁴ Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Classical Indian Ethical Thought* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 129.

⁵ Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), 627.

this, it is necessary to go along the path of religious belief with the conviction that there is a Supreme Power, that the authority of the scriptures is unquestionable and so on. All that is required is the belief in the equality of every member of society and natural respect for human dignity. On the other hand, the religious facet of karma yoga stands for the dedication of all our actions to God and this attitude would require a belief in God. All works should be done as service to God while dedication of his actions to God leads him to Moksha or liberation. When he does the actions without selfishness and desire, it will not bind him. Such actions are the summum bonum of karma yoga.

Sthithaprajña

In Gita, there is more than one beautiful description of the man who has attained the perfect state. Gita teaches us that karma yoga is the basis of the foundation for jñana as well as bhakti. It transforms the ideal of *sanyasa* by stating that perfect man also should continue in work. There is no period when activity when may be wholly renounced. Passivity is equal to wrong activity. The perfect man (karma yogi) has to work for the benefit of humanity in a spirit of detachment. He who performs actions in a detached manner is the ideal man. He is not contaminated by sin just like a lotus leaf living in water is not contaminated by it. The yogi is *stithaprajña*, one who is firmly rooted in higher reason and unmoved by passions and emotions. He curbs his passions and maintains calmness in heat and cold, in joy and sorrow, and in honor and dishonor alike. He is happy within himself after having cast off the desires arising in his mind. Neither desire nor fear nor anger can upset him. He is neither overwhelmed by grief nor excited by pleasure. He receives experiences as they come- whether pleasurable or sorrowful. The one does not enthuse him and the other does not depress him. Just as a tortoise withdraws its head and all its limbs under its shell, he withdraws his sense organs from their trivialities of sense perception. Such a person goes about the world desireless, rid of all egoistic concepts of mine and thine, ever peaceful and happy. He is called sthitha prajña, one of firm wisdom. Jadunath Sinha explains this concept of sthithaprajña or karma yogi as, “A person who has transcended the three *gunas* is not

moved by them and remains an indifferent spectator of their functions. He becomes devoid of positive action (*pravṛtti*) and negative (*nivṛtti*). He does not exert himself to realize an empirical end or abstain from an action to avoid an undesirable end. He transcends empirical knowledge derived through the sense –organs. He abides in the essential nature of his self (*svastha*) free from pleasure, pain, and delusion. He is unperturbed by joy and grief, praise, and blame, honor and dishonor. He is free from love and hatred, and equal to friend and foe. He is free from greed and makes no distinction between a stone and a lump of gold. He gives up all actions for the fulfillment of egoistic desires.”⁶ A true karma yogi may appear to be immersed in activity, but he practices inner detachment like the water on the lotus leaf. He is in the world, but not of it. As stated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “So long as he continues to live in the world, he is committed to some action or other. Sankara sees in his activity the modes of nature’s working, and Ramanuja the actions of the supreme. These are two different ways of expressing the impersonality of action. His work is done in a freedom of the soul and with an inner joy and peace which does not depend on externals for its source or continuance.”⁷ The karma yogi is not elated by success or depressed by failure but enjoys mental equanimity. Neither the utility of an act nor its futility can affect the good will and its disinterestedness. This attitude of *samatva* or equanimity is stated to be the differentia of yoga.

Lokasamgraha

As we noted earlier, the Gita exhorts on action in the world, and exhorts men never to turn away from activity and the doing of good to others. Even when he has reached a perfect state and everlasting peace with nothing more to gain from his work, the yogi still works and does not stop his actions. According to Swami Prabhavananda, “Those who reach *samādhi* and attain Brahman return to the lower plane of consciousness and then realize that it is he who has become man and the universe. The singer cannot hold to the highest note

⁶ Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2006), 210.

⁷ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, 496.

longer. He comes down to the lower notes. Similarly, the man of realization comes back from the transcendental consciousness and perceives the world of relativity and, though he sees the world, he sees Brahman everywhere.”⁸ A liberated man overcomes the karma, and though he continues to live and work, he is not bound or tainted by it. The perfect man/karma yogi, according to Gita, has to work for the benefit of humanity in a spirit of detachment, disinterest, and selflessness with no desire for the fruits of his action. He simply acts for the good of the people. He has nothing to accomplish for himself but acts for the benefit of humanity (*lokasamgraha*). It holds that only such a person can set moral ideals for us, who have won over the fire of passions, have no selfish motives, work only for the preservation and welfare of the society. This is called *lokakalyana* or *lokasamgraha*. As it is stated by Hiriyanna, “The point to which it is necessary to draw special attention in this connection is that the Gita requires man to continue to work even in this perfected state, there being nothing in outer activity which is incompatible with inner peace. Here we see the exalted position assigned to work by the Gita. It contemplates no period when activity may be wholly renounced. Passivity, in its view, is almost as reprehensible as wrong activity.”⁹ Bhagavad Gita holds that the liberated person or the karma yogi has to work for the good of humanity without moral obligation. According to Gita, the doer of good of mankind never suffers here or hereafter. Karma yoga consists of the selfless pursuit of the moral good of mankind as service to God. It follows from the above account that moksha in Gita is transcendental state of immortality and life eternal or *amaratva*. It is inseparable union with God. The yogi of this state no longer identifies himself with the limitation of body, the senses, and the mind. He united in consciousness with the all-pervading divine being which is the transcendental consciousness. But he cannot dwell continuously in that state of complete absorption and so, he returns to normal consciousness. Here, we can say that Gita through this concept of *lokasamgraha* insists on social duties and holds that even though the karma yogi is aloof from the society, he

⁸ Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, 112.

⁹ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 127.

has compassion for all and works for the benefit of the whole mankind.

Humanism in Bhagavad Gita

The central issue of Gita is the development of the self of man and its realization of the divine. Its emphasis was on work without concern for the fruit or reward. The Bhagavad Gita laid down the norms of Indian humanism through its concepts of the effusion of the empirical self with the divine self, divine or *Paramātmān*. Indian humanism best embodied in the Gita. Thus, in Gita, we see that humanism does not embrace a particular group of people, any religion or culture, but mankind as a whole. It is universal humanism unprecedented in its depth and intensity. Hence, we can say that Gita can be considered a handbook for practical living and a guide for spiritual attainment. If we rightly pursue the practical life, it also leads to the paths towards the spiritual goal. These paths are called 'Yogas' or the ways of life according to Gita.

Gita tries to build up a philosophy of karma based on jñāna and supported by bhakti. Its teachings cover the entire spectrum of paths to spiritual perfection. Gita, hence, contains teachings for people at various stages of growth, in different stations of life, and having diverse temperaments. It has much philosophy to teach and has many practical hints for solving issues that we confront in our daily lives. Its message is universal, comprehensive, and everlasting. In today's atomic age, when human society is grievously endangered by excessive materialism, its messages of Nishkama karma (karma yoga), Lokasamgraha, Swadharma etc have assumed an even greater importance.

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Khalifa of Pamir, Custodians of Knowledge

Mikhalev Maxim¹

Abstract: This paper explores both social role and spiritual functions of the local religious leaders in Tajikistan sector of Pamir mountains, called Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast. This remote and isolated mountainous region is criss-crossed by the state borders of China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan and serves as the abode for several obscure ethnic groups that since long have adopted Ismailism, an esoteric branch of Shia Islam. The leader of Ismaili Aga Khan IV helped local people to survive horrors of civil war that ravaged this region in the 1990s, and now effectively administer Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast through the network of his local representatives called khalifa. They act as community leaders solving the problems of ordinary villagers of Pamir, yet at the same time they help esoteric Gnostic knowledge of Ismailism to be kept safe in this remotest part of the globe. The paper concludes that this became possible due to innate characteristics of local people, who are not only knowledge-thirsty, but also knowledge-loyal.

Keywords: Ismailism, esoteric knowledge, Pamir, Tajikistan, khalifa

Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast

Pamir mountains is the land a little bit closer to heaven, especially its central part, the second highest plateau in the world, whose valleys lie at the elevations of 3500-4200 m above sea level. Two thirds of Pamir is confined within the borders of Republic of Tajikistan under the name of Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), while the southern and the eastern parts of Pamir belong to Afghanistan and China respectively, inheriting and reflecting those border agreements signed at the end of the 19th

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century. Initially an artificial creation that appeared on the map mainly due minute political interests of the great powers, over time GBAO, or Russian Pamir, solidified into a distinctive entity. Nowadays, Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast occupies 64,200 sq. km of mountains in the eastern part of Republic of Tajikistan and accounts for almost 45% of its territory. Rugged and harsh, it is populated by the peoples of numerous Iranian-speaking ethnic groups that are collectively known as Pamiri, or sometimes referred to as mountain Tajiks (Ishkashimi, Shugnani, Yazgulemi, Wakhi, Rushani among others). They differ from lowland Tajik significantly and not only because they speak strikingly different languages². As early as 11th century the peoples of Pamir adopted Ismaili teaching of Shiah branch of Islam and this allowed their Sunni neighbors to stigmatize them as infidels and justify any atrocities towards them. Together, all these peoples make up now only insignificant 3% of the total population of Tajikistan (there were 220,600 people living in GBAO in 2010), but their role in the history of modern Tajikistan is much bigger.

For better or worse Gorno-Badakshan was a sort of showpiece of the Soviet Union development model for the Central Asian region and it was supposed to demonstrate the advantages of the socialist system. For this purpose, this remote backwater, once one of the poorest regions in the entire Asia, was transformed into a model zone. University was founded in Khorog, the capital of GBAO, and peasants descended on there from the obscure mountain hamlets to get their PhD degrees. The education level among Pamiri was one of the highest among the nationalities of the former USSR. There were negative effects of the Soviet rule too, however: *pirs*, or elder-priests, were executed in the 1930s and atheism was imposed, people were not allowed to practice their religion and had to hide their sacred books.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and declaration of independence by Republic of Tajikistan in 1991 GBAO declared independence from Tajikistan and came down on the side of the opposition during the war, Pamiri living in Dushanbe were victimized and many were killed during pogroms, while Pamir

² Tohir Kalandarov, *Puteshestviye v Stranu Rubinovykh Gor* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006).

itself was effectively cut off from supply lines by mining roads that led to this remote region. As local people had lost their survival skills³, the winter of 1992/1993 turned especially disastrous for them as GBAO itself could provide only small percentage of what it needed and at the same time had to accommodate refugees from the plains. The full-scale humanitarian catastrophe was averted by Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of Ismaili, who didn't leave his followers in despair during those troublesome days and managed to arrange convoys with humanitarian aid into Pamir via the neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Later he also was one of those who managed to persuade both Tajikistan government and the opposition to sign a peace agreement, so that by 1997 the civil war was over and fragile peace ensued.

As Dushanbe had no reason to show sentiments towards the former enemies, GBAO was almost left abandoned and all post-war rehabilitation efforts were loaded onto the shoulders of the numerous international NGOs. They did make a significant contribution and helped Pamir economics start moving in the direction of self-sufficiency, but the outlook remains bleak till nowadays as some authors argue that "that development was no guarantee of sustainability, but rather led GBAO into a position of dependency"⁴. Ever since, it is Aga Khan global network of different NGOs that are both political authority, economic hope and social skeleton of GBAO⁵, and at the heart of this highly sophisticated system of religious management stand local communities leaders that link the head of Ismaili sect with common people on the ground.

³ Hermann Kreutzmann, "Ethnic Minorities and Marginality in the Pamirian Knot: Survival of Wakhi and Kirghiz in a Harsh Environment and Global Contexts," *The Geographical Journal* 3 (2003): 224.

⁴ Frank Bliss, *Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs (Gorno-Badakshan, Tajikistan)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 330.

⁵ Ali Akbar Pesnani, "The AKDN: Tajikistan's biggest development implementation agency," *The Wordfolio* (2015), <https://theworldfolio.com/interviews/the-akdn-tajikistans/3421/>.

Khalifa

Those people are also entrusted to supervise “trade” between worlds of humans and world of gods, and as such they can’t be ordinary persons as they must be endowed with special qualities. People shall trust them and seek their advice as they believe those mediators are able to help them in difficult situation; they are also the ones looked for when it is necessary to conduct a ritual or make a talisman; sometimes they are even believed to be able to cure sickness, although in such case they usually forwards those in need to a local hospital. In Siberia they would be called *shaman*, but in Pamir there’s another word for such spiritual community leaders – *khalifa*. Such people existed in Pamir since times immemorial and even under communist rule they didn’t disappear, albeit those days they had to perform their activities unofficially.

These days *khalifa* are very much institutionalized as they are being approved and supervised by the office of Aga Khan in GBAO along administrative lines resembling that of Soviet bureaucratic system. Sometimes they even appoint former communist cadres to act as village *khalifa*. Yodgur from Langar, a remote settlement in Wakhan Corridor, is a good example of this tendency: before being appointed as the representative of Aga Khan he had been working in the local committee of the Communist Party for many years. Neither himself, nor people in the village recognize any controversy in this situation, however, as to their understanding the representatives of Aga Khan in Tajikistan are doing the same job and often under the same pretext as Communist Party used to do during the Soviet Union times. In the eyes of the laymen, the concerns of both the Soviet government and Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) are pretty much identical and, subsequently, they enjoy similar respect and popularity. Indeed, it seems that only the names of the dominating ideologies changed with time and with them the titles of the representatives, while the style of work and the social status of modern *khalifa* do remind those of the local party leaders, even if the scriptures they read and the rituals they perform differ. Unlike the latter, however, *khalifa* do not receive any remuneration, and as such it is rather a responsibility than a job, even if in return they yield respect of the fellow villagers and a higher status within community.

Officially approved *khalifa* of GBAO are normally elected at the village gatherings according to personal qualities of the candidates that can include model behavior, high social status, sound knowledge of Koran and Ismailism doctrine, and deep understanding of local traditions. After being elected and approved by the office of Aga Khan, they become seen as the representatives of local communities in the higher strata of religious hierarchy and in the same time are supposed to inform the laymen of the new guidelines and directives. Their work often reminds that of apparatchiks of the communist era as they have regular meetings and seminars held in Khorog, where *khalifa* receive and discuss recent instructions from the central office of Aga Khan and where they work together on standardization of the rituals that still have significant regional variations in Pamir. With those freshly acquired guidelines they return to their districts and inform laymen of recent political trends and up-to-date interpretations of religious dogmas. The local meetings are normally held on Thursdays inside the district *jama'at khana* ("house of meetings"), and are attended by everyone in the community including women and children.

The *jama'at khana* in Langar is, probably, the most elegant and impressive in the entire GBAO looking like a gingerbread cottage decorated with carved beams, frescoes, bas-reliefs and occasional sables hanging on the wall. It is really well-kept as local youth under Yodgur's son's command make it sure that it remains tidy. Those living in remoter villages that can't attend the gathering at district *jama'at khana* send there their delegates, who return home the next day and spread the word from the center to their fellow villagers. Generally speaking, these days Aga Khan's authority and his guidelines penetrate deeply into the every corner of GBAO through this hierarchical and highly effective network of *khalifas*, who represent the only source of trustable authority now, as they not only guide spiritual life of the villagers, but shape their social and economic activities too working as an effective conduit for implanting ideologies developed by that supra-government structure that the office of Aga Khan actually is these days. It would not be an exaggeration to say that *khalifas* took the role of the local government in Pamir.

Ismailism

Situation, when Ismailism in many ways substitutes the state in GBAO, is worthy of investigation and requires serious elaboration considering the fact that for the most part of its history it has been a sectarian clandestine movement that has been tightly associated with all kinds of anti-structural activities, and whose esoteric doctrine was supposed to be known to the initiates only. Ismailism traces its origin to the turbulent times of early Islam and has long and indeed often obscure history of being marginal yet powerful underground movement that challenged authorities as its structures were elusive enough to survive persecutions thanks to the fact that it recognized and encouraged practice of religious disguise. As far as its mission, Ismailism was more about keeping concealed wisdom for the benefit of the chosen ones than it was about supervising communities and guiding daily lives of its followers.

It was only from 909 to 1171, when Ismaili succeeded in setting up their own Fatimid Caliphate and from its capital in Cairo ruled over a large portion of Northern Africa and Middle East that they were involved in the large scale secular projects, while for the rest of the time they preferred clandestine existence, often being unscrupulous in methods, including assassinations and mimicry, that they applied for protecting their anti-structural identities. This earned them bad reputation both among Sunni Muslims that sometimes even painted them as Jewish *magi* that intend to corrupt Islam from within ⁶ and Christians that retold horror stories about the “The Old Man of the Mountain” that through his network of suicide attackers and spies holds in awe entire countries. During the so-called Alamut period (1090-1256) that followed the break-up of Fatimid Caliphate Nizari Ismaili indeed managed to put the fear of God into their neighbors by ruling independently over their network of interconnected mountain strongholds in Iran and Syria. Those days, however, were ended by Mongols in 1256, and for many centuries after the fall of Alamut Ismaili lived clandestine, yet largely peaceful lives, keeping their

⁶ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis. Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8.

esoteric knowledge and even their imams concealed. It was only in the 19th century that they decided to re-emerge, as in 1848 their forty-sixth imam and the first one to be known as Aga Khan, found refuge in Bombay under the protection of the British authorities in India.

In the world of global capitalism Ismailism discovered its own niche and proved to be very successful as its adherents not only managed to generate significant wealth, but converted it also into political capital by paying more attention to education and to establishing social connections than to armed struggle. Their renaissance resulted from the farsighted policy and global approach introduced by Aga Khan III that held the imamate for impressive 72 years from 1885 to 1957. He was succeeded by his son, a Harvard graduate, prince Shah Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV that from his secretariat located at Aiglemont outside Paris guided lives and minds of his followers in more than twenty-five countries of Asia, Africa, North America and Europe till 2025.

Judging by outward appearance and public speeches, modern Ismaili leaders have nothing in common with Alamut assassins as they since long become part of the British establishment and prefer post-modernism discourse advocating religious tolerance, market economy and human rights through their impressive network of institutions. AKDN as development arm of Ismailism is indeed engaged in many humanitarian initiatives as well as a wide range of purely commercial projects, its interests stretching from hospitality industry and insurance business to healthcare, rural development and awards in architecture. These well-publicized activities are indeed often driven by enlightenment and distinguished by high-level inclusiveness as Aga Khan strictly adheres to the principles of religious tolerance that imply enabling followers of other denominations benefit from Ismaili programs. This approach not only earns him recognition in Europe and North America, but improves also often hostile relationships between Ismaili and their Sunni neighbors, and as such makes life of his followers safer by integrating them into environments⁷.

⁷ Johan Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern: Globalisation and Identity in a Muslim Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 177.

One should not be totally blindfolded, however, by these fervent secular activities as in the search for the reasons lying behind Aga Khan recent penetration into the daily lives of his followers in GBAO a brief examination of its doctrine and the knowledge of its history can provide better clues. It may be suggested that all this post-modernist development “ballyhoo” is just yet another cloak that has been put on by Ismaili spiritual leaders to draw public attention away from their real aims as they had done it already several times throughout the history. The matter is Ismailism is a religion of wisdom and there is no reason to doubt that it remains as such in the information age, while the esoteric knowledge it claims to possess has always been kept unavailable to outsiders that were aimed to be distracted by all possible means. It is quite possibly that it is still the case now, and as such it is neither more nor less than protection of the knowledge that in reality defines politics of Aga Khan.

According to Ismaili doctrine, there exists open exoteric knowledge *zahir* that is given in the form of law to common people by the successive line of prophets, who aim at helping laymen to chose and follow the right path in life, and there exists also esoteric knowledge *batin* that is revealed through the prophet to its silent follower, the *Wasi-Imam*, who further entrusts with it a limited circle of his direct apprentices that he chooses in accordance with their capacity to be the bearers of such knowledge. The law defined by *zahir* is changing as every new epoch needs its own prophet, while *batin* remains the same always. *Batin*, however, can be understood only through elaborating on that ever-changing *zahir*. This process involves *Wasi-Imam*, who is entrusted by the previous prophet to represent unquestionable authority for those seeking and those allowed seeking for the current interpretation of *zahir* and thus the essence of eternal *batin*. He is, however, eventually replaced by the next prophet that appoints his own *Wasi-Imam*, and these cycles repeat until the final Resurrection *Qi'yama* comes that reveals all knowledge to everyone, both exoteric and esoteric.

As the direct descendant of the last Prophet Muhammad and the repository of the esoteric meaning, Ismaili Imam is in fact none other than that *seventh* Silent One that doesn't proclaim the law, but liberates the initiated ones by disclosing symbols. The idea of esoteric knowledge concealed in Koran and the need for its

interpretation through the perfect authority is something that distinguishes Shiah from Sunni in general, but Ismailism goes further and includes into its doctrine prophets and teachings of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and other ancient Iranian cults⁸. It also bears a lot of similarities with Sufism, as these two mystic teachings of Islam both combine mind and divine revelation under one roof, value concealed knowledge and apply poetic language for its expression, but as Ismailism doesn't recognize individual interpretations of the epiphanies and place all knowledge onto Imam shoulders endowing him with exclusive authority, for Ismaili he represents the entire microcosm being the repository of all meanings of the revelation. In other words, he is saving Gnosis and as such brings salvation to his followers, as salvation according to Ismaili teaching can be achieved only through learning of the meaning of life and the meaning of God.

Rural Gnostics

How then could it happen that this esoteric and clandestine cult that emphasizes importance of learning was adopted *en masse* in remote Pamir and how could it happen that its mystical and profound teachings that are supposed to be revealed only to the chosen ones elsewhere became so widespread here? In other words, how could it happen that keepers of wisdom take care of village administration at the fringes of Islamic world? It perhaps has something to do with the original beliefs of Pamiri people that are immanently confident too that the way to salvation goes through learning and that the meaning of life is none other than Gnosis. *God is knowledge; it is hidden in the book. God is respect, justice and freedom, and the Prophet is the one who has been told the knowledge of God.* Such opinions one can hear everywhere in Pamir and this native philosophy is something that made Ismailism teaching sound too much familiar to the people here and as such it was easy for them to adopt it. And then there is another point, and it is as much important.

⁸ Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Kegan Paul International, 1983), 97.

These people are not only knowledge-thirsty; they are also knowledge-loyal. While most of the original sources on Ismailism thought have been lost in Iran or elsewhere during turbulent events of the last millennium, many of the sacred books had been preserved in Badakshan⁹. Pamiri indeed happened to be both the best students and the best custodians and with this in mind it doesn't sound strange that they have been initiated into this elitist group of the adherents of the Gnostic Ismailism *en masse*. As we remember, *batin* is revealed only to those chosen according to their capacity to comprehend it and to carry it over to the people of next epoch, and the fact that the inhabitants of remote Pamir villages were let into its secrets proves, that these people are both capable of comprehending and preserving *batin*. This ability and their unique competence resulted from both history and geography of their land make them chosen for the special role of the keepers of wisdom that had been passed to them by the ancients. As custodians of knowledge, they both have more than deserved the care that Aga Khan is providing them now and require daily involvement and supervision by the one whose mission is to preserve *batin* for future generations.

Pamir is an anthropological open-air museum and a treasure box of culture diversity, a refuge area for the ethnic groups that since long disappeared from the world map. It is true, but it is only half of the truth. Not only people and their genes, but the philosophies and worldviews of the ancients were also carefully preserved by these responsible, diligent, inquisitive, inclusive and modest custodians of the past who preferred secluded yet harsh life among high-altitude deserts and dramatic gorges of the Roof of the World to the temptations of the royal courts. They were destined to become keepers of wisdom that has been concealed from the horrors of war at the Earth's most hidden corner, that is, at its roof.

"When Arab armies took over Pamir, its people adopted tolerant Ismailism that encourages learning and teaches the implicit knowledge known only to the initiates, because by assuming its aspects the magi, those protectors of the ancient wisdom, could save it. When marauding Afghans brought an intolerant breed of Sunni Islam too close to our borders and

⁹ Daftary, *The Ismailis. Their History and Doctrines*, 29.

threatened our survival, pirs of Pamir asked Russians to come and save them from extermination, because they saw them as people who could assist in protecting the knowledge". These words told in a private conversation in Khorog by an influential local businessman sound as if being borrowed from the new bestseller. Mysticism aside, however, modern Pamiri did inherit wealth of ancient spirituality and managed to preserve it largely intact in their secluded land thanks to their inclusiveness, love for learning and innate responsibility.

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PATRISTIC RESEARCH

Divine wisdom and human wisdom in *The Divine Names* by St. Dionysius the Areopagite

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Abstract: In the writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, where the right faith in God is reflected by Christian philosophy with the greatest clarity, we will fully understand the abyssal difference between divine wisdom and human wisdom. As it was revealed to St. Paul the Apostle, for every Christian believer, this difference is normative for the configuration of the relationship between Greek philosophy and true faith in God. Therefore, having the "demonstration of the Spirit and power" (I Cor. 2:4) - the only source of the preaching of the Truth "in weakness and fear and in much trembling" (I Cor. 2:3) – through the image of the divine names, we will understand how we can acquire godly wisdom through the "third way" of the working of our reason and mind.

Keywords: St. Dionysius the Areopagite, divine wisdom, human wisdom, faith, knowledge

Specifying that the interpretation of *The Divine Names* follows the work of the *Theological Teachings*, St. Dionysius emphasizes that we cannot say or think anything about the hidden and over and above being divinity apart from what has been spoken in a divine way in the Holy Scriptures, because <<not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstrations of the power granted by the Spirit>> to the scripture writers, a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or intellect.² Therefore, the

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² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, foreword, notes and translation collaborations by Paul Rorem, preface by Rene Roques, introductions by Jaroslav Pelikan, Jean Leclercq, and Karlfried Froehlich (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

difference between divine and human wisdom is one by nature. At the same time, however, it must be emphasized that the rational and understanding work of reason and mind is of man: body and soul, not merely body and soul. The difference between the two wisdoms can be understood only through faith in Christ, in whom the divine and human natures are united mysteriously, which makes possible the union of man with God by grace.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the knowledge of Him who is God Himself, which is only possible through the silent union of our rational and understanding power and work with the power and work of God. Christian faith is life in Christ. The knowledge of God is a living knowledge, a living in Christ: "(...) it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (...)" (Gal. 2, 20).³ The writings of St. Dionysius cannot be understood in any other way! First, his constant reference to the writings of the "theologians of God" excludes philosophizing "according to the world's ways." Then, we can notice that St. Dionysius refers to the *Theological Teachings*, or to *On the Angelic Endowments and Steps*, as elements without which the construction of the discourse on the divine names would not have been possible. We do not, then, have a "mechanism of explanation" of the divine names that would set up a direct interrogation of their relation to those they designate, but rather a "forward movement" into earlier writings that are anchored in the Scriptures in which the divine names are praised as the unions and distinctions that give rise to an understanding of God's work in us. Then, we can notice that St. Dionysius refers to the *Theological Teachings*, or to *On the Angelic Endowments and Steps*, as elements without which the construction of the discourse on the divine names would not have been possible. We do not, then, have a "mechanism of explanation" of the divine names that would set up a direct interrogation of their relation to those they designate, but rather a "forward movement" into earlier writings that are anchored in the Scriptures in which the divine names are praised as the unions and distinctions that give rise to an understanding of God's work in us. The "praises" are a product of how the human mind works by co-

Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Chapter One, 585 B.

³ All quotations from New Testament are according to E. Nestle, K. Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Greek-English New Testament*, 28th Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013).

laboring with God through the "according to Christ" philosophy; they are spiritual proofs by faith. Only by uniting rational and understanding power and working with Spirit-breathed power can the believer genuinely understand, for example, that One beyond understanding is incomprehensible to all understanding. No word negates his good beyond words (reason). This is philosophy "according to Christ" or godly wisdom! Only by uniting rational and understanding power and working with Spirit-breathed power can the believer truly understand; for example, One beyond understanding is incomprehensible to all understanding, and no word negates his good beyond word (reason). This is philosophy "according to Christ" or godly wisdom!⁴



This is a personal reading of the relationship between godly wisdom and human wisdom by "reading" the unions and distinctions involved in knowing God, as St. Dionysius explains them to us, to highlight the "third way"⁵ of the workings of our mind and reason as the way of acquiring godly wisdom. This "third way" is man's participation in the work of God, a work possible only "in Christ." It is not a question of a third kind of wisdom resulting from the combination of the other two but of specifying how man's return to God can be understood. This "third way" of the work of reason and mind is preaching faith in Christ.

Only in this way can spiritual things be spoken to spiritual people, those which fleshly people cannot understand. „Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no else's scrutiny" (I Cor. 2:14-15). Receiving not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (I Cor. 2:10), the spiritually minded, having the "mind of Christ," also have the "mind

⁴ The philosophical language of St. Dionysius is a touchstone for all philosophers, Christian or not. Fortunately, even today, meeting him in the "Areopagus" of his writings leads many to convert to Christianity. It is not the place and time of the encounter that we should be concerned with, but the type of encounter.

⁵ Not coincidentally, in the Platonic language of the Parmenides dialog, the "third way" is the mind's way of demanding the "overcoming" of the One-plural aporia. In pointing the way to the 'third way', Plato asserted the necessity of overcoming human logic.

of God," but only through the intercession of the Son of Man. "For what human beings know what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:11). Then we know that "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John I, 18). Still, we also know that "no one can say <<Jesus is Lord>>, except by the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 12:3). Therefore, neither purely humanly, nor purely divinely, but spiritually, through the work of the Holy Spirit, "in a third way," that is, only "in Christ," Who is God and Man, will the believer be able to know "the mind of God".



I will look at the relationship between divine wisdom and human wisdom in the light of the relationship between spiritual experience and philosophical knowledge, bearing in mind that in the knowledge of God it is always a question of the transfiguration of human reason and the human mind (becoming "seers" of God)⁶ and of the transfiguration of the senses, which become "echoes of wisdom".⁷ I will assume that ontologically there is no opposition between reason and faith, and that man's natural logic is not exhausted by the contradiction between the rational and the irrational (as it exists in human limits), and therefore that it is possible to understand the inconceivable,⁸ but which are expressible by linguistic terms/constructions such as "understanding as not understanding," "seeing as not seeing," "speaking as not speaking,"... In other words, a spiritual experience, as actual/real knowledge, does not presuppose the exclusion of reason,⁹ but it is overcome mysteriously, by faith, in a way that can be learned, directly or indirectly, only from Christ, the Son of God and Son of

⁶ The mind and reason have distinct works in the "fallen man", but not in the spiritual, where they have the same work, being transparent to each other.

⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter Seven, 868 C.

⁸ That is to say, realities that our fallen reason cannot understand by itself alone.

⁹ After the Fall from Heaven, to cover our "nakedness" - the turning of the mind away from God - we were given "skin clothing"; therefore, we were given the chance to be able to strip off our "old man" to become the "new man" - the turning to God. It is not reason "in itself" that is an obstacle to knowing God, but the inadequate use of reason in disobedience to God.

Man. Moreover, remember that He told us: "apart from my you can do nothing" (John 15:5)!

My thesis is that *The Divine Names* is about the spiritual judgment of human wisdom. This judgment is the divine illumination by the grace of human reasoning: the passage of reason and mind¹⁰ from the mode of human-logical work to that of divine-mystical work. This is not a "condemnation" but a transfiguration of reason through man's working together with God, a way in which it functions free from the fallen nature of the old man.¹¹

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The spiritual "judgment" of human wisdom is realized indirectly by St. Dionysius by the very way in which he transmits to us that he has learned from the divine Scriptures and the divine teachers, known now to our measure through the holy curtains of love of man shown in the Scriptures and the divine teachings. The "judgment" is one of Love! In this sense, St. Dionysius reminds us that we will reach a Christ-like state. Then we will share with the unfearing and immaterial mind in the gift of His spiritual light and union beyond the mind because "we shall be <<equal to angels and son of God being sons of the resurrection>>. That it was the truth of scripture affirms.¹² In the Transfiguration, we have to do with the revelation of the transfiguration of the Son of Man, the uncreated Light, through which we have presentified the union of man with God beyond the mind. St. Dionysius emphasizes that only minds of divine image, united with divine works, through the imitation of angelic minds, know in a way beyond knowledge the Good they desire. Of course, humanly, we know the intelligible and rational (νοερά καὶ λογικά) knowingly, and those subordinate to them in a sensuous (sensible) way;¹³ but we know that transfigured by spiritual knowledge,¹⁴ i.e., "in spirit and truth," reason, mind,

¹⁰ When reason becomes pure, the mind sees pure. Between the work of reason and the work of the mind, there is no distinction.

¹¹ The "praises" are nothing other than this "judgment", as a process, of human wisdom, a process in which the "surpassing" are modes of the "third way" of functioning of the human reason and mind. I have not insisted on the "process", but on its result, because my aim is only to emphasize the difference by nature of God's wisdom from man's.

¹² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter One, 591 D.

¹³ Ibid., 593 D.

¹⁴ Spiritual knowledge is not "produced" by man's reason, but it is only received, being enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the mystery

and senses are no longer distinguished according to their natural workings but, illumined by the ineffable Light, become one by the same, working in the light of spiritual knowledge.

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Paul's overruling understanding of God's wisdom, considered in radical opposition to human wisdom, is grounded in the conviction that "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" (I Cor. 1:25). The "God's foolishness" placed in such opposition to human wisdom, being characterized as "wiser" than the latter, is implied by the idea that wisdom "after the flesh" is not wisdom because from the beginning "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" (I Cor. 1:27). It must be emphasized, moreover, that St. Dionysius' reliance on the sayings of the Apostle Paul follows the latter's reliance on the sayings of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 29:14), that is, ultimately, on the sayings of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul reminds us: "For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?'" (I Cor. 1:19-20). It must be emphasized, moreover, that St. Dionysius' reliance on the sayings of the Apostle Paul follows the latter's reliance on the sayings of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 29:14) and, ultimately, on the sayings of the Holy Spirit. Referring to the admonition of St. Paul the Apostle - "See to it no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2, 8) -, keeping this admonition in mind, we understand, therefore, why St. Dionysius addresses his co-presbyter Timothy, in *On the Appointments of God*, thus: "And so, my friend, after the *Theological Representations*, I come now to an explication of the divine names, as far as is possible."¹⁵ St. Paul the Apostle's necessary warning of the possible robbery of the believer's mind by vain human wisdom was put into action by St. Dionysius. His writings can be considered as implementing the Pauline warning, the concretization of how to practice philosophy "according

of man's communion with God, through faith, which is the gift and true knowledge of Him. Let us never forget the words of the Savior: "Your faith has saved you!"....

¹⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter One, 585 B.

to Christ." As a philosopher before his conversion, St. Dionysius knew how to eliminate the dangers of philosophical thinking, and the kind of rationality involved in expressing certain truths of faith. So, it was with this in mind that he would address Timothy, who even though he was a man who philosophized "according to Christ," might also have been a philosopher converted to Christianity; there was, therefore, a danger of falling into heresy because his mind had been exercised in "bodily" philosophy (the use of Platonic philosophical language is a plausible explanation). By comparison with the crowds to whom St. Paul addresses himself, here we are dealing with the highest rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; a rank from which another "crowd", a learned one, that of the bishops, the one who should teach not only the crowds of believers, but also of unbelievers, about the philosophy "according to Christ", as St. Dionysius says: "And we shall incline sanctified ears to the explanation of the holy divine appointments, strengthening in the saints the holy ones, according to the divine tradition, and defending them from the derision and mockery of those uninitiated in them; moreover, those themselves, if there are such everywhere, by delivering them from such a struggle against them."¹⁶ *The Divine Names* it is about the way of teaching the true teaching, that is, of "walking in Him"; it is about being rooted and strengthened in the faith, as he was taught (cf. Col. II, 2). It is, therefore, the preservation and preaching of right Christian teaching, a teaching of philosophy "according to Christ" by which the believer is guarded from the possible robbery of his mind by "vain philosophy"; it is a "judgment" of human wisdom by "lovingly" transcending the human power of understanding Who God is. The avowed purpose of *On the Names of God* is to strengthen the holy in the holy, avoiding the danger of the stealing of the mind through "vain philosophy"; this is also visible in all his writings. St. Dionysius was always careful to distance himself from philosophical thinking "according to the ways of the world", but not by rejecting it directly, but indirectly, by preaching the Truth. We have clear proof of this in *Letter Seven*, where he says: "As far I am concerned I have never spoken against Greeks or any other. In my view, good man are satisfied to know and to proclaim as well as they can the truth itself as it really is (...). It is therefore superfluous for someone expounding the truth to enter into dispute with this one or that one for each says that his

¹⁶ Ibid.

own bit of money is the real thing when in fact what he has by a counterfeit copy of some part of the truth."¹⁷ Referring to the sophist Sophist Apophanes, who accused him of "parricide," as one who did not use in a godly way "things Greeks to attack the Greeks",¹⁸ the Saint says that it is more just for us to say to him that the Hellenes do not use godly things honestly for godly things, trying to drive away the worship of God through the wisdom of God; on the contrary, true philosophers ought to exalt themselves by the knowledge of the existences (created things), well called also by the godly Paul, the wisdom of God (cf. I Cor. 2:7), to the Creator of both existence and knowledge.

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It must be stated again that, after all, what can be said about the true knowledge of God cannot be told without faith in God. Thus, St. Paul's warning about Greek philosophy cannot be adequately understood outside that context. The writings of St. Dionysius can be understood only in that context, which is considered historical and spiritual. A complete understanding of the Areopagite's purpose depends, in the first place, on a proper understanding of the spiritual nature of St. Paul's warning concerning the care to be exercised by the educated believer in "those things which are without". Therefore, to avoid the theft of the believer's mind through Greek philosophy, it is necessary to convert the philosopher in us from Greek philosophy to philosophy "according to Christ"! Therefore, the philosopher Dionysius had to be Dionysius the Areopagite, and Dionysius the Areopagite could only be Dionysius, the philosopher present at the "judgment" in Areopagus. His writing must, first of all, be read as confessions of faith! Therefore, the meeting at the Areopagus judgment of St. Paul the Apostle with the philosopher Dionysius can be considered typological, a "rectifier " of the understanding of the opposition between divine and human wisdom and the relationship between Christianity and Greek philosophy.

Let's look at the problem of *The Divine Names* from the perspective of the relation between the One and the manifold. We realize that this problem was not a speculation of the mind of the philosopher Plato, but a problem of the things to which the human mind applies itself. Remembering what he said in his Theological

¹⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter Seven, To Polycarp, the Hierarch*, I.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II.

Teachings, St. Dionysius says of God that He is what He is, the One, the One, the unknowable, the super-being, the Good by itself, the triune unity, of a deity, of a goodness that can neither be said nor understood. The use of Platonic language was not necessary so much to express a truth of faith within the limits of humans as to distinguish clearly between the two types of wisdom: divine and human. Platonic philosophical language is the image of a human thought turned in on itself, which must be purified spiritually. Making use of what could be recovered by explaining the meanings of the names,¹⁹ which are naturally only specific indications of the truth of being by our soul; St. Dionysius shows that the divine names have spiritual meanings that can be understood only by reason and mind transfigured by man's co-workings with God, that is, by the philosophy "according to Christ." Only "according to Christ" can we philosophize about divine things!

St. Dionysius the Areopagite is the disciple in the direct spiritual line of St. Paul, who will be developed in writing the message of the Apostle Paul on the danger of the autonomization of thought represented by Greek philosophy, especially by Platonism.²⁰ The correction that he makes to the thinking of the philosopher Clement²¹ on how to understand "models" as the beginning of existence, that is, not in the Platonic philosophical sense, but according to the Scripture. I have not shown you that you

¹⁹ Plato philosophized on naming, on the human "right correspondence of names", indicating the aporia into which the human mind enters in the attempt to know the essence of things. Moreover, Plato will not give any chance to a possible human knowledge of the "in-self", considering that it is not man but "God who is the measure of all things". The Platonic hypothesis, or "theoria of ideas", was strongly criticized by Aristotle because what for Plato was essential to the way in which he believed true knowledge was possible, namely the "participation" of the soul in the *ideai* (which were the true "being") was for the Stagirit an "empty metaphor". The fact that Plato intuited that only a "participation" of the soul/man (which for him is "immortal", but of course with a different meaning than in Christianity) in the *ideai* (which had being through something beyond them, through the Good, also nicknamed "the *Idea* of *ideas*", which was unknown, but which could not, paradoxically, "not be") could bring true knowledge in man should not be ignored! In fact, only Neoplatonists would identify the Platonic One and the Platonic Good with the God!

²⁰ What we call "Neoplatonism" is nothing other than what has flourished as a result of disregarding St. Paul's warning about the role of human reason in the knowledge of God.

²¹ Perhaps even Clement, the future bishop of Rome.

should walk after them, but that by a like knowledge of them, you may go up to the cause of all, just as we are, says St. Dionysius; that is revealing in this sense. In his writings, St. Dionysius the Areopagite abolishes the historical distance by the spiritual one. They become canonical for all those who will have tried to "pass"/transform Platonic philosophy into theology: "Now it may well be that Clement, the philosopher, use the term <<exemplar>> in relation with the most important things among being but his discourse does not proceed according to the proper, perfect, and simple naming."²² This statement signifies that St. Dionysius tells us that "patterns" are not to be understood in the Platonic philosophical sense, but as reasons of being that are unitively pre-existent in God, which theology calls predestination and divine and good wills, which distinguish and produce existences. Here is a clear exemplification of how to purify a mind that could be "robbed" of human wisdom by "vain philosophy." So, between godly and human wisdom, there is an abyssal difference. "Let no one deceive himself. If any man among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him be foolish so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this foolish world is foolishness in the sight of God" (I Cor. 3:19), says the Apostle Paul, for "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25). The glorifying of the divine names is the call that had to be heard by the "sanctified ears" of those who needed to distinguish between holy and human wisdom, between the philosophy "according to Christ" and that "according to the world's wisdom." In order not to go astray in understanding the divine and ungodly word as the things which are seen, it was necessary to praise the foolishness of God by exalting what is shown in it contrary to reason and absurd; this is the only way to overcome the imprisonment of mind and reason in the bodily senses, which results from the likeness of the divine to the human. In *The Divine Names*, we have to do with this experience of the depths of the mystery of the knowledge of God through Christian wisdom, which is the "third way" of working our reason and mind. For "not in the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but in the proving of the power of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:4) shall we truly know praising „to the good and eternal Life for being wise, for being

²² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter Fife, 824 D.

principle of wisdom, the subsistence of all wisdom, for transcending all wisdom and all understanding."²³

In conclusion, knowing where "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (Col. 2:3), "this is the sort of language we must use about God, for he is praised for all things according with their proportion to him as their Cause. But again, the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind, when the mind turns away all of the things, even from itself, and when it is made one with the dazzling rays, being there and there, enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom."²⁴

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²³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter Seven, 865 B.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 872 A - 872 B.

CRITICAL REVIEW

Critical Review

Contemplative Spirituality and Philosophical Dimensions of Hope

Dan Chițoiu¹

Dr. Ivan Platovnjak, Dr. Tone Svetelj. *Listening and Dialoguing with the World: A Philosophical and Theological-Spiritual Vision*. Slovenia: University of Ljubljana Press, 2024.²

Keywords: dialogue, listening, atheism, transhumanism

In an era of fragmentation, polarization, and a crisis of meaning, *Listening and Dialoguing with the World* presents a bold, integrative vision for navigating contemporary philosophical, spiritual, and ethical dilemmas. This remarkable monograph not only introduces new insights into the intersection of philosophy and theology but also invites readers—whether believers, doubters, or seekers—on a journey toward wholeness guided by dialogue, contemplation, and hope.

At first glance, the book presents both an aesthetic and intellectual invitation. The cover image—a man gazing toward the horizon where earth and heaven meet—is a visual metaphor for the human condition: the traveler whose quest leads to the convergence of reason and faith. This image resonates deeply with the book's central premise: that human beings are not merely rational thinkers or spiritual beings but integrated wholes who seek truth, meaning, and connection.

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² <https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-JUGEHX4L>

Structured into eight thematically rich chapters, the book explores a broad intellectual terrain—anatheism, transhumanism, contemplative spirituality, and the philosophical dimensions of hope and time—through the lens of both critical philosophy and Christian thought. Each chapter serves as a ‘station’ in a spiritual-philosophical pilgrimage, raising probing questions about human nature, the divine, and the future of society.

One of the book’s strengths is its fearless engagement with the crisis of Western thought. In the chapter on anatheism, the authors diagnose the decline of traditional religious belief and the emergence of a spirituality separate from institutional religion. Yet, rather than lamenting this shift, they view it as a *kairos* moment—a chance to rediscover Christianity not as dogma or division but as a mature, loving faith grounded in justice and mercy. The call is not to retreat into certainties but to embrace mystery, relationships, and the transcendental dimensions of life.

In contrast, the chapter on transhumanism offers a sobering critique of the technocratic drive to transcend the body’s limitations. While acknowledging the promises of scientific progress, the authors caution against the existential cost of erasing human vulnerability—an essential aspect of empathy, freedom, and spiritual receptivity. Can human transformation occur without grace? Can immortality be achieved through artificial intelligence? These questions are not merely theoretical; they are urgent ethical ones.

At the heart of the book is a radical proposal: active listening as the foundation of authentic dialogue and transformation. Against the backdrop of information overload and ideological division, the authors advocate a contemplative posture marked by humility, compassion, and openness. Listening is not a passive act but an existential stance—one that requires venturing beyond the ego and into the unknown, into silence, where truth can be heard rather than spoken.

The authors further illuminate this listening ethos from a Christian perspective, drawing on Scripture, tradition, and mystical theology. They argue that true contemplation is not escapism but engagement—a means to perceive God in all things: Scripture, nature, and daily life. *Lectio Divina*, mystical prayer, and

Ignatian reflection are presented as spiritual disciplines that train the soul to encounter the sacred in the ordinary.

One of the most compelling chapters addresses 'hope,' particularly in relation to time. Drawing from ancient Greek distinctions between 'chronos' (measured time) and 'kairos' (unique, unrepeatable time, the moment of opportunity), the book frames hope as the ability to fully engage with the present, remaining open to God's promises. Liturgical time, characterized by its cyclical remembrance and eschatological anticipation, becomes a sacred space where the eternal intersects with the temporal—where 'chronos' is transformed by 'kairos.' Hope, therefore, is not mere optimism but a spiritual virtue that emerges in the face of vulnerability and trust in the unseen.

The concluding chapter, 'From Either-Or to Both-And,' proposes a model for integration on all levels: personal, social, political, ecological, and spiritual. In contrast to binary and antagonistic thinking, the authors present a dialogical method that values tension without collapsing differences. They advocate for a synthesis of rational faith, lived experience, and communal participation. This holistic anthropology not only respects the dignity and uniqueness of individuals but also fosters coexistence through compassionate listening and mutual recognition.

Ultimately, *Listening and Dialoguing with the World* is not just a monograph; it serves as a roadmap for a new kind of engagement with the self, others, and the divine. It challenges the supremacy of naive rationalism, questions the utopias of technological salvation, and retrieves the forgotten treasures of Christian wisdom. It resonates with anyone who senses that something vital has been lost in the modern pursuit of progress and autonomy.

This work is intended for philosophers, theologians, educators, spiritual seekers, and anyone eager for a way of thinking—and living—that honors complexity, listens before speaking, and believes that love, justice, and mercy are not only possible but essential. In a fractured world, *Listening and Dialoguing with the World* serves as a vital invitation to integration, wholeness, and hope.

