



SPIRITUALITY

BY SADGURU JAGGI VASUDEV

More than a mere belief

The spiritual ethos in India is not about belief systems, it is about practices

Some time ago, I was speaking to a group of people in Nashville, Tennessee, and I was telling them a joke. In the joke, I just referred to God as 'Him'. Immediately a few ladies stood up and said, "Do you believe God is a man?" I knew where **this** was going, but I said, "See, I'm

only telling you a joke." "It doesn't matter. You said, 'Him'. Do you believe God is a man?" Now these women were arguing, "Why can't God be a woman?"

This problem only exists in the western world. In India we have a man God; we have a woman God; we have a cow God; we have a monkey

God; we have a snake God. We have flying ones, creeping ones and crawling ones, because we foresaw all the problems that may arise in future. It is a very wise culture. This culture has gone into the depths of the human being and looked at it as a science, created methods to evolve a person into his ultimate nature. It is not that other cultures have not looked at it, but no other culture has looked at it with the kind of depth and understanding as this culture has.

This is one culture, which has not crystallised any belief system as such. Each individual has the right to create his own God and relate to what is beyond him as he is capable of doing it. Because of this, you can worship it in stone form, in animal form, in bird form, in the form of a tree, or in a formless way, or not worship at all. There is no question of anyone being a heretic here, so there is no question



Even among the poorest peasants, the fundamental spiritual ethos is present. It has slowly seeped into every human being who is born here.



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of persecution. The culture does not prescribe any particular belief system as such. A certain gentleness had settled into the land and the culture; this was engineered by the enlightened ones in the past to ensure the basic skeleton of the culture can never be misused in the name of the Divine.

Individual people misuse many things, but it will never be empowered by the Divine or divine sanction. Whatever misuse anybody does in

this culture, is on his own. He cannot say, 'I am doing this because God said this. God is telling me this, God is telling me that.' Because of that, a certain gentleness flowered in this culture, but when it was treated as weakness by outside forces, the culture had to pay a price because it was mistaken as weakness and they were exploited.

One person who really gave the best compliment to this nation and culture is Mark Twain. When he vis-

ited India, he had a good guide who took him to many places, and he met many people. He said, "Anything that can ever be done either by man or God, has been done in this land." When it comes to an inner possibility, the way this culture has explored the possibility of how a human being can be, nowhere else this has been done.

Always, in this culture, God is not the highest goal, *mukthi* or liberation is. Liberation means freedom: freedom from prejudice, freedom from fear, freedom from lethargy, freedom from mortality, freedom from death, freedom from everything that is. If that focus is recreated or reinstated in the culture and everybody strives for that, physically and especially intellectually, then people can function effortlessly.

The spiritual ethos in India is not about belief systems, it is about systematic practices. This has sharpened the mind and body in a certain way, which is paying-off even now after 10 to 12 generations of extreme poverty. This is one of the reasons why while the rest of the world is struggling with the IT revolution, Indians go through it effortlessly.

It is very clear that if the amount of inequalities that exist in our society had existed in another country, there would have been large-scale violence and unrest. When I travel in Europe, where generations of people have known affluence, the level of mel-

MILESTONES

1700-1100 BC: Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, was written during this period

6th century BC: Prospering of the Charvaka school of philosophy

525 BC: The birth of Mahavira, who outlined the doctrines of Jainism

563 BC: The spreading of Buddhism in India

3rd century BC: Unification of the nation by Emperor Ashoka, who spread Buddhism across the country

400 BC-1000 AD: The golden age of Hinduism

52 AD: St Thomas the Apostle landed at Kodungallur, Kerala

644 AD: Malik Dinar and companions hit the Malabar coast with the message of Islam

788-820 AD: Adi Shankara, the founder of the Advaita school of thought, born in Kalady, Kerala

1469: Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, a monotheistic faith, born in Talwandi (Pakistan)

May 6, 1542: Jesuit missionary St Francis Xavier arrived in Goa to fetch souls for Roman Catholicism

1829: Sati banned by Sir William Bentick

1875: Arya Samaj, the reformist Hindu organisation, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati

1893 September 11: Swami Vivekananda addressed the Parliament of Religions at Chicago

1966: The International Society for Krishna Consciousness was founded by Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada



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ancholy and joylessness in people's faces is tragic. But when I walk into a tribal village here, in spite of their utter deprivation materially, you can see how joyful their faces are. Even if they are hungry and their children malnourished, these people still retain their balance—there is some sense of contentment.

That is because even the poorest peasant in this country, even if he does not know any formal spirituality, has the fundamental spiritual ethos in him. It has slowly seeped into every human being who is born here. This is also the reason why India is one of the least policed countries in the world—the per capita number of policemen in the country is much lower than in most countries.

If you take our freedom struggle for example, never before has any conqueror ever been forced out in a non-violent manner. It was only by using spirituality that Mahatma Gandhi managed to inspire millions of people to come out peacefully—through which we gained independence for this nation.

Only once in the history of humanity such a thing has happened, and without a basic spiritual flavour in the culture, it could not have been achieved. The spiritual ethos of the country is a fundamental reason why there have been no major violent

TRIVIA

Hindus constitute 13 per cent of the world's population. In India, 80.4 per cent of the population follow Hinduism

300 crore rupees is the estimated annual income of Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, the richest temple in the world. It is the second most visited place of worship after the Vatican

According to Hindu belief, believers should abstain from alcohol, onion, beef and garlic, as they are barriers to spiritual growth. Milk, curd, yoghurt and butter increase spiritual purity

The Attukal Pongala, a religious festival in Thiruvananthapuram district, is the biggest gathering of women in the world. Interestingly, men aren't allowed to participate in the festivities

2.2 million Bahais are there in India

Religious leader Sri Sathya Sai Baba has 6 million followers

Lord Vishnu, the deity of Thiruchirappally temple, has a Muslim consort, who is worshipped as Tuluka Nachiyar

Lord Ayyapa of Sabarimala is supposed to have two friends—a Muslim named Vavar, and St Sebastian, a Catholic saint

upheavals in this land. But, that part is beginning to wear off; time we took care of it.

Today, we have enough money, enough food, enough resources, enough technology to ensure that the whole population on the planet lives well. It is just that some key people have to make up their minds. If the powers that be are touched by genuine spirituality—a non-religious, non-denominational spiritual process, a scientific spiritual process—they can change the world in a very short time.

In these thousands of years of human history, the enlightened have always existed, in every generation, but they have always been a very small minority. Their work, their consciousness, their presence have definitely left its impact on humanity in so many ways. Still, the affairs of the world never came into their hands. They opened small windows for people to have a new vision, to have a new understanding, to have the wisdom of the beyond, but the doors of the world were never manned by them. It has never been so.

We would like to see in the future that the people who manage the affairs of the world are also enlightened. Making this happen is something Indian spirituality can do.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and founder of Isha Foundation.