



A Multidisciplinary Approach to Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend"

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Abstract

Human interests and passions in spirituality, philosophy and religion have remained intact; materialism has not superseded these concepts. Human mind consists of vital thoughts. Spiritual insight and rational philosophy have led humans to intellectual landscape and contributed to the progress of thought. Many great thinkers and scholars like Sri Tyagaraja Swamy have expressed their opinions interpreting their preconceived notions of spirituality through religious views. This article strives to juxtapose Indian and Western thought processes making it an interdisciplinary research representing the concept of spiritual philosophy. The methodology followed throughout the research article is MLA Handbook 9th edition.

A Multidisciplinary research takes place when a research work is done in different disciplines on a common problem or research question. In this approach, a researcher shares research goals and works on the same problem, but looks at it from the perspective of his or her own discipline.

A Multidisciplinary research refers to how two or more disciplines contribute to understanding and defining what learning is. Some researchers have referred to this kind of research as Parallel concepts like cousins. This approach illustrates the depth of the integration of disciplines. Very often multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary researches are used as synonyms describing the aim to cross boundaries between disciplines.

The world has undergone a tremendous amount of change in its outward material aspects, scientific approach, cultural transformation and many such innovations in various fields; yet there has not been a metamorphosis in its

inner spiritual faith. Joy and grief; success and defeat; pains and fears have been a consistent part of human life irrespective of the drastic changes and progression over the centuries. Human interests and passions in spirituality, philosophy and religion have remained intact; materialism has not superseded these concepts. Human mind consists of vital thoughts. Spiritual insight and rational philosophy have led humans to intellectual landscape and contributed to the progress of thought. Many great thinkers and scholars like Sri Tyagaraja Swamy have expressed their opinions interpreting their preconceived notions of spirituality through religious views. This article strives to juxtapose Indian and Western thought processes making it an interdisciplinary research representing the concept of spiritual philosophy.

Indian philosophical speculations have been formulated several centuries ago. Indian traditions of thought insist upon absolute devotion with completeness in any sense of the term. Indebtedness to the past as well as their contribution to the progress of thought is inevitable. The objective of this paper is to narrate Indian and Western views within the focus of the regenerative aspects of spiritual philosophy. The analogies and parallels between the two thought systems are not to be blended. As the philosophical speculations of India were formulated much earlier. Richard White in his book, *Spiritual Philosophers From Schopenhauer to Irigaray* observes that spiritual philosophy is an integral part of our lives which gets adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life.

"Spiritual philosophy is a combination of beliefs, ideas, and practices that focus on harmonizing the flow of energy between our mind, body, and soul. This in turn nurtures and supports our emotional wellbeing thus enabling us to create a meaningful life" (Garnsworthy 30). Phoebe Garnsworthy is an Australian writer who enriches and inspires through her books. All her writings, both fiction and non-fiction comprise the vitality of ancient spiritual philosophy and mystical delights.

"Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual," said Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. India had its own understanding of spiritual, philosophical, religious and ideological view points. India's spiritual growth is an autonomous one. Certain religious and divine thoughts put forth by the Western thinkers indeed resemble the doctrines that flourished in India. At times, they go hand in hand. Indian thought system is apparently an independent venture with a human mind having similar views. Though there are no solid evidence of that. The philosophical

concepts and spiritual thinking of India have truly influenced the Western world in several ways. "No religious movement has ever come into existence without developing as it's support a philosophic content," (25) remarked Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

Sri Tyagaraja Swamy (4 May 1767 – 6 January 1847) was a vocalist and composer of Carnatic music. He was a productive and highly inspirational singer and connoisseur who played a vital role in the development of classical music tradition in India. Sri Tyagaraja along with his contemporaries, Shyama Shastri and Muthuswami Dikshitar are referred to as the Trinity of Carnatic music.

Thousands of devotional compositions in praise of Lord Rama were composed by Sri Tyagarajar. Born in Tiruvarur during the 18th century, Sri Tyagaraja Swamy witnessed the reigns of four kings of the Maratha dynasty. He was named Tyagaraja after the presiding deity of the temple at Thiruvarur, the place of his birth.

Sri Tyagaraja Swamy's maternal uncle was Giriraja Kavi. From whom he learned to play the veena from his childhood. Sri Tyagaraja found Naradeeyam, a book related to music and worshipped the Celestial Sage, Narada. A reference to this is present in his Krithi, "Vara Nārada." It was said that a hermit taught Sri Tyagaraja a mantra to invoke Narada. Once meditating on this mantra, Sri Tyagaraja perceived a vision of Narada and was blessed by the Sage. During his last phase of his life, Sri Tyagaraja took vows of Sannyasa. His last composition was "Giripai Nelakonna."

Sri Tyagaraja Swamy devoted himself to Lord Rama and led a life of austerity. He never systemized his myriad musical productions. It is said that most of his works were lost due to man-made and natural calamities. Sri Tyagarajar sat before the deity of Lord Rama as he sang his compositions; and his disciples made a note of those compositions on palm leaves. After his death, his disciples and their families procured the details. There is no definitive edition of Sri Tyagarajar's Kirtis. Sri Tyagaraja Swamy not only interpreted the past; but also wrote with the knowledge of the future. It is this quality that distinguishes him from his illustrious contemporaries.

Sri Tyagarajar was a pioneer of new musical concepts. The following lines depict the translated version of Sri Tyagaraja Swamy's Kritis: Psalm 174 and Psalm 164 from the book, *Sri Tyagaraja Swamy Keerthanaigal* edited and translated in Tamil by T.S.Parthasarathy.

(1)

Forgive my sins and subdue me O!

Is it not your pride to guard me

with mercy? The doer was

blinded by too much patience,

insertion etc. I despised the

Nithyakarmas. Acting like a

curse in front of onlookers and

pretending to be good,

never read history with the

people of your country who give

it to life except to spend time in

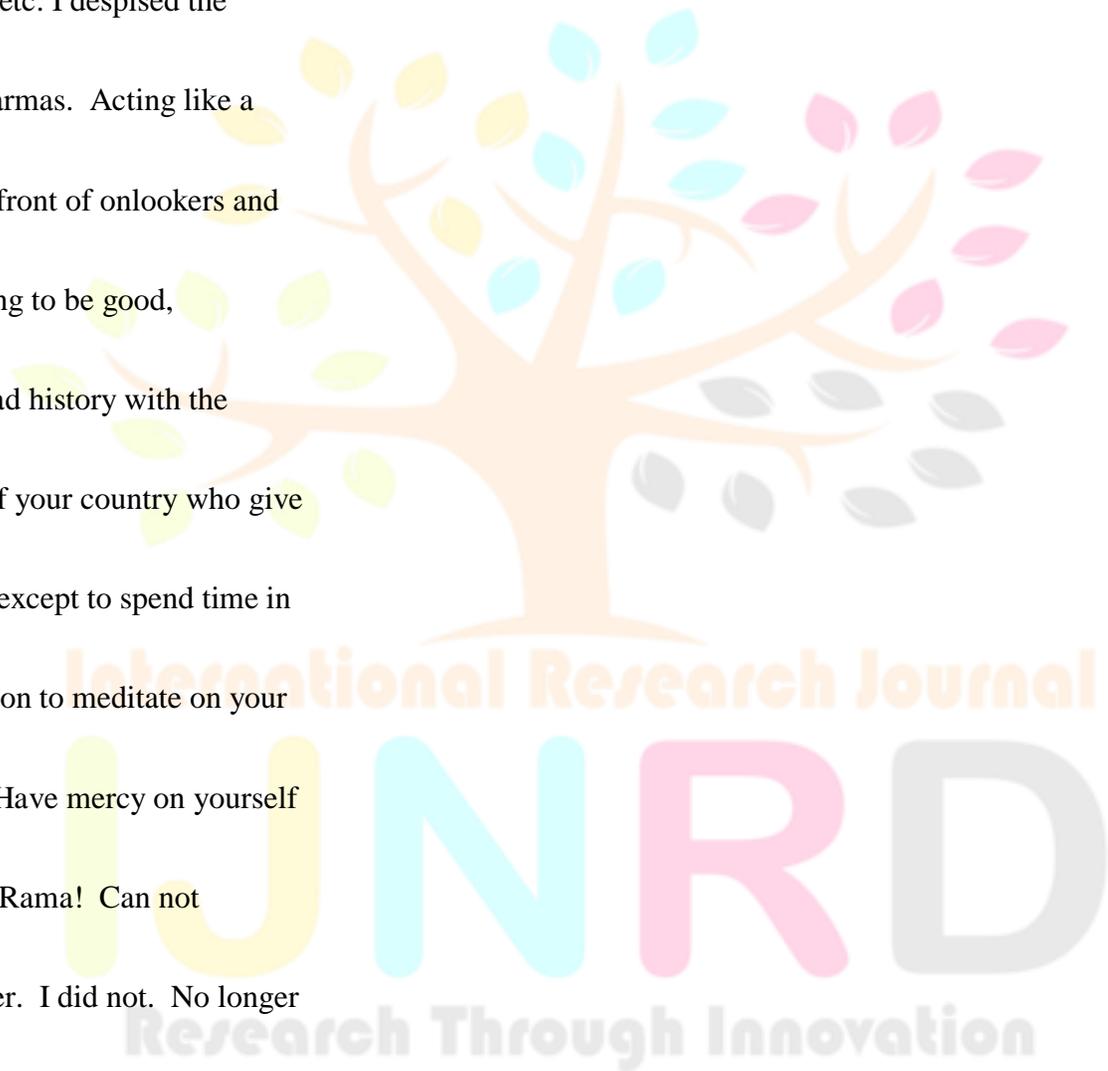
meditation to meditate on your

deeds. Have mercy on yourself

in vain, Rama! Can not

surrender. I did not. No longer

my rhythm.



(Psalm 164)

(2)

Don't stop! I will not rhythm the
 inconvenience. Father who
 received me yesterday! Doing
 the same things that you did to
 have mercy on me today and
 thinking that I do not think of
 anything else (do not deny your
 mercy). All those who
 appeared in front of me knew
 the abyssal realm and
 suppressed the senses without
 scattering. Assuming I am not
 the brave one to move your
 thoughts (do not leave mercy!)
 Cupid beautiful! 'Letting go
 and praising.

(Psalm 174)

The Psalms 164 & 174 from Sri *Tyagaraja Swamy Keerthanaigal* represent the devotional aspects of a worshipper, who thoroughly surrenders himself to God. He resorts to God seeking his mercy and blessings. The devotee wishes for the eternal mercy of God to be bestowed upon him. Not for one day in the past, but for the

present and future days to come in his life. The speaker seeks forgiveness from God for human misdeeds. Humans are accustomed to mistakes, nobody is perfect. Only God can mend and tame their ways depending on their good and bad deeds. Sri Tyagarajar insists on the Nitya karmas referring to the rituals/ duties to be performed everyday, failure of which leads to sin. "Nitya" is a Sanskrit word meaning "eternal" or "perpetual."

These Kritis also depict the internal quest and spritual insights of a devotee. The religious interpretations and conflict of views are portrayed by Sri Tyagarajar through these devotional compositions. As a worshipper, Sri Tyagaraja Swamy prays for the fair and divine mercy of God. The subject of devotion and spirituality has been treated in a calm and dispassionate way. These Kritis are an enlightening analysis of divinity that highlight the convictions of Indian philosophy and spirituality.

Spiritual philosophy is a kind of philosophy that incorporates religious themes. This ideology is also evident in the poems of the English poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins born in 1844 (3 years prior to Sri Tyagarajar's demise). Born in England, Hopkins was a Jesuit Priest. His works were published collectively until 1918. He wrote spiritually influential poems.

G.M.Hopkins is regarded as one of the religious poets of the Victorian period. Being raised in a prosperous family, he attended Balliol College, Oxford, where he studied Classics. In 1867, Hopkins entered a Jesuit novitiate near London. This led him to burn all of his poems until 1875.

Hopkins resumed writing after a shipwreck of Deutschland, a German ship. Many including five Franciscan nuns died. Hopkins' poems are conventional in themes. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" introduced Hopkins' "Sprung Rhythm." Usage of limitless number of unaccented syllables. Though not during his lifetime, Hopkins' poems were edited and published by his friend, poet Robert Bridges in 1918.

Hopkins developed new rhythmic effects, he employed compound and unusual word combinations. Several writers have appreciated Hopkins for his inventiveness and experimentation.

Hopkins' poem, "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend" starts with an epigraph in Latin. The lines come from Psalm 119 of the Latin translation of the Bible by St Jerome. These lines explicit the readers about the religious tone of the poem providing details regarding the setting.

Hopkins' "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend" highlights the clamouring of a devotee to God like a child demanding from parents.

"Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend

With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.

Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must

Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Though a genuine question, no answer is expected. The speaker shows his frustration towards God's favour towards the sinners whose ways prosper. Whereas his attempts end in failure. Is that the reward for having faith in God is the question raised by the devotee. He feels this is too unfair on God's part. He even starts to doubt the worsening of his situation in future and beseeches God to bestow his eternal mercy and glory upon him. He entreats God for perpetual delight and peace.

"Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,

How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost

Defeat, thwart me? "

It is apparent in these lines that the speaker does not want to disregard or offend God. As he refers to God as, "O thou my friend." He wants to assure God of his spiritual faith in him.

"Them; birds build – but not I build; no, but strain,

Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.

Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain."

In the concluding lines of 'Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend,' the speaker entreats God to give him the potential to achieve something in life by citing the example of a bird's nest that remains intact during hard winds. He implores God to imbibe him with eternal glory. He pleads God to give him productive and fruitful life by watering his roots meaning to instill spiritual thoughts in him.

By contemplating nature Hopkins indeed celebrates God's power and greatness.

The analysed Kritis: Psalms 164 and 174 along with Hopkins' poem, "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend" reinforce the concept of spritual philosophy projecting the idea that something glorious occurs when a being's physical body, will, intellect, action and inner soul are all brought into accordance with God's will; culminating in self-expression. Hopkins' poetic affirmations reveal his belief in the essential, inner quality of human spirituality.

Sri Tyagaraja Swamy's Kritis perfectly reflect upon the self-contained and self defining actions of humans, so as the poem of G.M.Hopkins written after sixty decades.

Spiritual striving is man's most essential aspect. At moments when humans attain the peak of their moral nature, they achieve something great. But that greatness necessarily fades without spritual faith and divine providence.

"The journey to God has an end, but the journey in God is endless" (Inayat Khan 39). Pir Zia Inayat Khan in his *Mingled Waters: Sufism and the Mystical Unity of Religions* conceptualizes spiritual philosophy encompassing the mystical quest and journey of human life through the constituents of Sufi-wisdom and Sufism in Islam. This book elucidates an account of the profound principles of Sufism as evidenced in a number of intellectual, literary, spiritual, historical convergences of spritual philosophy. *Mingled Waters* examines the prophetic traditions by exploring the inner teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the rivers of all the worlds, the same water flows, the water of divine revelation which evidently propounds the concept of spritual philosophy. As a symbolic representation of divine unity, the book, *Mingled Waters* peers into a handful of its sparkling drops in it's cover page.

Spiritual realisation and development is a passionate conviction that enriches the human soul and mind. Religion is not a barrier, but a bridge to strengthen human love and relationship. Religion is an outlet to examine and to reveal the divine nature of human soul. Human nature truly mirrors the overt richness and complexity of spritual philosophy.

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