

SACRED SCRIPTURES OF FAITH TRADITIONS

Dr M.D. Thomas

This number of Fellowship brings together the Scriptures of 15 Faith Traditions – Aagam (Jain), Avesta (Zoroastrian/Parsi), Avtaar Banee (Nirankari), Baha'I Scriptures (Baha'i), Bhagvat Gita (Hindu), The Bible (Christian), The Teachings of Confucius (C o n f u c i a n / C h i n e s e) , Dhammapad (Buddhist), Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh), The Quran (Muslim), The Teachings of Tao (Taoist/Chinese), The Teachings of Shinto (Shinto/Shintoist/ Japanese), Torah (Jewish), The Upanishads (Hindu) and The Vedas (Hindu). Their being together is indeed a celebration of fellowship.

Sacred Scriptures are the 'voice' of the Divine. They spring from a higher source. They unfold the divine mystery. They glow with superior insights. They contain spiritual messages for human lives. They are indeed a spiritual treasure. They serve as lighthouses of life. They reveal and give away eternal truths. They inform and enlighten the human mind. They awaken and motivate the hearts. They enthuse and transform lives. They re-create and strengthen the human spirits. They take the humans beyond the material limits. They introduce the humans to the eternal. They give to the humans a sense of direction and meaning in life. They initiate the humans towards a dynamic and evolving life. They are ever-whispering consciences of the human society. They are 'good news' to every one.

Sacred Scriptures are the 'written word' of the Divine. Several great men and women, at different times and situations, were endowed with exceptional experiences of the divine. Scriptures are humble articulations of those experiences. Human authors recorded them. Divine inspiration prompted them, as well. These written messages of God were conditioned by historical factors. Human language limited them, too. All the same, they are unfathomable reservoirs of perennial knowledge. They are preserved and are faithfully handed over to the following generations. Nevertheless, they need to be interpreted and applied to the time and context in hand. The messages they stand for are certainly much richer than the virtual expressions of them. The God of the Scriptures is greater than the Scriptures themselves. The implications of the written words surpass the written Scriptures.

Sacred Scriptures are the 'unwritten word' of the Divine. Word is God (Nad Brahma). Word is eternal. Word is revelation. The written word has limits. Divine revelation cannot be completely written. The real divine revelation remains always beyond the written word. It is beyond the capacity of human language. That is why Mahatma Kabeer exclaims 'Akath kehaanee prem kee, kachoo kehee na jaay; Goonge keree sarkaraa, baith muskaaye'. The story of love (the divine) is 'indescribable'. The written

Scriptures are only ‘symbols’ of the divine revelation. Moreover, traditions are oral in their basic forms. They evolve from the wombs of particular ethnic cultures. They were the lived realities of different peoples, before they were recorded and handed over. The reading of these Scriptures today necessitates going beyond the written words. The implications of their messages awaken the readers to apply the message to the live stories of the peoples, here and now. The written words of the Scriptures are an eternal invitation to reach out to the unwritten and instant promptings of the divine.

Sacred Scriptures are the common heritage of the human society. They assemble the invaluable spiritual treasures of the human society. They have a universal significance, even individually. They are addressed to the whole human society. They derive from a common source. They exist on a shared foundation. They are the collective property of the human community. No one community can monopolize any one of them. Narrowly interpreting any of them is nothing less than a crime against the all-inclusive divine message they highlight. The real holiness of the Holy Books is to be searched for in their inner capacity for universal application. Their wider appeal emerges from their ability to crisscross the other in a mutually inclusive manner. They need to go beyond the narrow confines of their respective origin. They belong to each other. They exist together. They are complementary to each other. Together they give a sense of completion to the sacred world of the Religious Scriptures. Together they empower the human sensibilities, to the fullest volume. A spirit of togetherness is their identity as the joint heritage of the human race.

Sacred Scriptures have to be inter-related with each other. They are collections of divine wisdom, in different dimensions. All dimensions attempt to give expression to the whole truth, in their own ways. To consider them self-contained islands would be too naive. To dare to go independently like parallel lines would be too arrogant, too. There is no denying the fact that each one of them has ample spiritual substance for a complete human living. Each one of them is a sure way to the divine, too. All the same, they aren’t complete, independent of one another. No one unit in the created world can reach that stage. It is unspiritual and unwise to think so, as well. They are complementary to each other. Together they articulate the ‘divine wisdom, par excellence’. Together they incarnate the divine in all its dimensions.

Sacred Scriptures have to move towards a culture of multi-scriptural networking. They have to be brought to a scheme of comparative study and understanding. Inter-scriptural exchanges have to be fostered. Commonalities are to be searched for. Special characteristics are to be identified and promoted, as well. This will be an enriching process of faith. This will make the concept of life much broader. Narrow perceptions and supersations can be got rid of. Extremist positions, like fundamentalism, fanaticism, communalism and terrorism, can be avoided. Religion and spirituality will become more meaningful for the day-to-day life. Thinking globally and acting locally

will become possible. Scriptures will then be instrumental in pursuing divine knowledge in a dialogical way. A pluralistic perspective will do justice to the multi-dimensional texture of modern life, too. Asia, and specially India, direly needs such an inter-textual approach to the Sacred Scriptures of the society. An honest attempt to re-read and re-understand one's own Sacred Scripture is the first step to this multi-scriptural approach to life. The culture of multi-scriptural faith-perspective will ensure a joint pilgrimage towards the Divine.

Dr M.D. Thomas

Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies

Floor 1, A 128, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075

Tel.: 09810535378 (p), 08847925378 (p), 011-45575378 (o)

Email: mdthomas53@gmail.com (p), ihps2014@gmail.com (o)

Website: www.mdthomas.in (p), www.ihpsindia.org (o)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdthomas53>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mdthomas53>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MDTHOMAS>