SOLITUDE, SPIRITUAL BEINGS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract: Ancient Indian tradition extols solitariness. It considers solitariness as a necessary precondition for a spiritual well-being and enlightenment. Every aspirant should pass through the two stages of solitary life vanaprastha and saṃnyāsa in one's spiritual journey. Spiritual aspirants of the distant and recent past have imbibed the virtues of solitary life. The society even today regards them with the greatest respect and veneration. But what is the role of spiritual solitary beings to society? Do they have any responsibility to the society? Or being in solitude is an end-in-itself for them? It is a matter of discussion as whether the solitary being after liberation, should come back to society to help liberate the masses as well. This issue was discussed in early philosophical literature and by some recent spiritualists as well. I will try to explore this issue with inputs from traditional discussions and works of spiritualists like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi and others. I will try to address this issue by taking note of current happenings in Indian society.

Introduction

Ancient Indian tradition extols solitariness. It considers solitariness as a necessary precondition for a spiritual well-being and enlightenment. Spiritual aspirants of the distant and recent past have imbibed the virtues of solitary life. But what is the role of spiritual solitary beings to society? Do they have any responsibility to the society? Or being in solitude is an end-in-itself for them? The author will try to address this issue by taking note of current happenings in Indian society. This is the concern of the paper.

I. Solitude in Indian Tradition

In Indian context, philosophy and spirituality go together. And in spirituality, there is always a special attention given to solitariness and being in a solitary state. Solitariness can be taken as a state of being, in which the person, more often, intentionally withdraws himself or herself from the normal routines or everyday happenings of life. This way, it helps to reflect on ourselves, and it is one important step in the path to salvation.

Indian philosophers and spiritualists also recommend the place and time that is conducive to promote solitariness through which one can able to spend time for reflecting on oneself. I would like to give the explanation of Ramakrishna

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Paramhamsa (1836–1886), who takes the question of the need of the ambience and the surrounding for a given task. Ramakrishna was asked why one should go to temple, if God is everywhere. He replied that, just as the cow's blood is all through the body, but, still for milk, we get it from its udder, similarly to feel the divine's presence, it will be conducive for us to go to the temple. Thus, to be in solitude, the Indian spiritualists claimed that mentally can one be in solitude, if he is physically in solitude as well.

Indian tradition gives utmost importance to the physical solitude, which they take as a prerequisite for mental calmness. The Indian tradition mentions different phases of life and it includes the stages of *vanaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa* along with *brahmacarya* and *gṛhastha*. These four stages form the path of an aspirant towards his life's ultimate purpose of attaining liberation. The due process is to go through the four stages so one can attain liberation. But it is not mandatory for all to undergo these four stages, some saintly and spiritually resolved people can go from *brahmacarya* to *saṃnyāsa* without passing through *gṛhastha* or *vanaprastha*. Adi Shankaracharya (788 – 820 CE) is a classic case for this. Otherwise, for other normal human beings, *saṃnyāsa* is the last stage after passing through the other stages of life. The idea that one should pass through all stages is only if they pass through all the stages, then during the *saṃnyāsa* stage they will be matured and will not be distracted towards any material gains like name, fame, wealth or accede to their biological needs like sex. That is, every person should pass through the *gṛhastha* stage before entering the *saṃnyāsa* stage, because if one bypasses the *gṛhastha* stage, there are more chances for him to lose track of his spiritual path because of carnal desires and sexual pleasures.

The four stages in life as exemplified in the ancient Indian tradition are the *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vanaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa*. The tradition established these four stages of life to get the four sets of values – namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*, called as *puruṣārtha*. There is no one-to-one correspondence with the four stages of life and the four sets of values, though there are some restrictions to enjoy some values only in certain stages of life. For instance, at *brahmacarya* stage, a person cannot go for values like *artha* and *kāma*. At this stage, he is oriented towards *dharma* and the ways of gaining knowledge. This is a preparatory stage for him and after successful completion of one's *brahmacarya* stage, one can go to the *gṛhastha* stage, where he can legitimately enjoy the other values like *artha* and *kāma*. And after that, to go for the other *puruṣārtha*, namely *mokṣa*, he has to prepare himself and be an earnest seeker of *mokṣa*, for which, the *vanaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa* will be conducive to him. Thus, we can see that *artha* and *kāma* are also meant as *puruṣārtha* but could be legitimately enjoyed only in *gṛhastha* stage. The main concern for Hindu philosophy is trying to achieve *mokṣa*, either direct going from *brahmacarya* stage or going through the *gṛhastha* stage to *vanaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa*. As mentioned earlier, there is difference of opinion among different schools of philosophical thought on when a person can aspire for *saṃnyāsa* stage.

Donald Davis talks about *puruṣārtha* as not exclusive to Hindus; rather it is Indic in nature. He also observes there is no sufficiently detailed exposition of the relationship among *puruṣārtha*; the first three are anthropological, whereas the last one is

theological. There is some agreement with the first three *puruṣārtha* among Hindu, Buddhists and Jains, but not in the fourth one.(Davis, 2004) The fourth one, which is considered as the important one in the Indian tradition, be it in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions, differ in their perspective on the relation of the fourth stage with other three stages. Some sections believe that for the fourth stage, the other three stages are impediments. Some other sections believe the other three stages are not obstructions, but, rather, they contribute positively in realizing the fourth stage. As mentioned, thinkers like Davis and others, point out the first three stages are anthropological in nature, describing how people are, whereas the last stage is theological in nature, instructing the people, how they should be. (Davis, 2004)

Though there are differences in understanding, we can well say there are four stages of life recognized by classical Indian tradition. The third and fourth stage are for contemplating on life's puzzling questions related to nature of the reality, the human's relationship with the divine and achieving liberation, which is beyond the cycles of birth and death. In Indian philosophical tradition, except the school of *Cārvāka*, the purpose of humans in this world is to achieve liberation, which again is described variously by different schools of thought ranging from pure negation to eternal bliss.

Viewing from the perspective of the aspirant for *mokṣa*, we have seen that they need the physical solitude for the mental solitariness. Only if they have the mental solitariness, they will be able to reflect on one's inner self. Sankara says in his work *Bhajagovindam*, "from company of good people to solitude; from solitude to disinterestedness; from disinterestedness to mental calmness; and from mental calmness to liberation". Thus, Hindu tradition considers solitude as one of the paramount features in one's spiritual journey. It considers solitariness for spiritual reasons as one of the important phases of one's life. It treats those who go in solitude in their early age with utmost respect and even revere them as divine beings. This tradition has been continuing in the Hindu system from the ancient past till present. The list of Indian saints and seers gives us a picture of the respect and reverence these people have from the Indian masses.

II. The Nature of Spiritual Beings

A major question remains here, that is, whether being in solitude is a means for spiritual salvation? Or is it an end-in-itself? That is, a spiritual aspirant takes to solitude to gain salvation. The issue is, after attaining salvation, how the realized person is to deal with this world? Does he remain in solitude after realizing the supreme reality or should he go back to the world? Realizing the supreme implies the triviality of the ephemeral world. Once, liberation of whatever sort is achieved, then what makes him to come back to the world? Thus, the question is whether the solitariness of the spiritual aspirant is a means or an end state in itself. Before, realizing, as an aspirant, he goes to solitude for the spiritual quest. After realizing, he stays in solitude, as there is nothing better for him to achieve rather than enjoying the state of bliss he attained through his process of spiritual progress. In a sense, he just waits for his bodily form to wither away to be with the divine as an integral part of it.

So, the solitary being after liberation is a serious challenge for the Indian spiritualists and philosophers. On one side, there is nothing further for them to know, for them to realize as they are already realized souls and there is nothing for them to work for or to aspire for. For this, the Hindu *spiritualism*, specifically *advaitic* system has been criticized vehemently that there is no social responsibility for the Indian spiritualists and there is neither any moral botheration for them. How are they, then, to contribute to the society? If they have any further desire which drives them to work for, then it means they are not realized soul. If they don't work, then they are no way contributing to the social welfare. This was taken as a philosophical discussion in the Indian tradition and thinkers were speculating on the nature of the enlightened persons.

III. Spirituality and Morality

These types of discussion had led to some thinkers to view that Indian mystics are amoral to the core. They are not bound by any moral considerations both at the individual level and at the social level. Katz remarks,

> Scholars from John McKenzie Hindu Ethics (Oxford, 1922) and Albert Schweitzer Indian Thought and Its Development (New York, 1936) to Arthur Danto Mysticism and Morality (New York, 1972) have seen it as a uniformly world-denying faith that, among its other 'errors', is indifferent to moral endeavour. Hinduism is, Schweitzer wrote, a religion in which ' world and life negation occupies a predominant position... mysticism of identity, whether Indian or European, is not ethical either in origin or in nature and cannot become so'. (Katz, 1992)

But Katz maintains that it may not be fair to say that Indian mystical tradition, in fact, all mystical traditions are indifferent to morality. He says,

> As an historical observation, it is difficult to find any major mystical figures, or mystical traditions, that can be said to preach moral indifference; and certainly, none preach immorality. (I am allowing here for the range of different understandings of morality that exist across religious traditions from Judaism and Christianity to Hinduism and Taoism, and whose variety, of course, is not in any way confined to the mystical practitioners of these traditions.) (Katz, 1992)

Katz admits that one cannot find a sophisticated moral theory in the mystic tradition as one finds in western philosophical traditions. But he opines the morality these mystical tradition shows is akin to a Kantian style of morality, where the moral worthiness of an action is maintained by the disinterestedness in the consequence and performed by an autonomous free-will.

One cannot find a sophisticated ethical theory in the Indian mystic tradition, for that matter, even in Indian philosophical tradition. Indian philosophical tradition is known for its intricate analysis in the issues of epistemology and metaphysics. But one finds there is lacuna in the ethical discussion as it is found in the western tradition. For, except the *Cārvāka* materialists, all other schools in Indian philosophy

shared the same worldview of being in bondage and the means to get oneself away from the cycle of birth and death. So, a theoretical exposition of ethics was uncalled for. Katz remarks,

> *mokṣa (liberation) is primarily a metaphysical rather than an ethical state and that Hinduism, as Buddhism which is its heir in this and many other respects, does not understand morality as an autonomous sphere of human activity but rather as an integral part of a more general epistemological and ontological structure.* (Katz, 1992)

The discussion on whether the liberated souls should come back to society was not only a philosophical discussion, but also an existential question for the spiritualists themselves. This question was resolved in two ways, which can be taken as two ways of understanding responsibility.

One of the ways is the liberated beings after their liberation remains in solitude and whoever wants to get their guidance; they will come on their own and get the benefit from those liberated beings. In the Indian tradition, we come across umpteen references of king getting counsel from these types of sages and saints, who live in forest. The counseling shall include both private and public affairs of the king. The king may get advice from the sages to resolve certain crisis his kingdom faces, or to get him out from some family misfortunes, or to get initiated into spiritual path or to get his son start his education or even a general piece of advice in the matters of personality development. The liberated solitary beings do not come out of their shell rather they remain in forest or some secluded place where they live the life with bare minimum.

The other way is the liberated beings, after their liberation, shall voluntarily venture out to the society at large and benefit the people by removing them from their ignorance. This position perhaps could have been later developed to make sense of how the liberated soul shall spend his life till his death and as a way to actively engage them in the social welfare. Though, it is given to scrutiny and criticism, still we can say the early Hindu tradition was more favoring the solitary aspects. Perhaps that is the reason we have thinkers like Mckenzie and others picturing the Indian spiritual tradition as being indifferent to morality. But, the later philosophers from *non-adavitic* traditions like Ramanjucharya (1017-1137), Madhvacharya (1238-1317), Chaitanya (1486-1533), along with a whole gamut of tamil *Nayanmars* and *Alwars* were engaged in social reformation. And with the emerging of *bakthi* and *sufi* saints and their traditions in the whole North India, the picture changed. There is the tendency of the saints and sages to venture out and give people the divine gospels and spread the message of love, peace and harmony. There is also a philosophical reason as the idea of liberation changed remarkably from the non-dualistic approach to dualist and qualified monist approach.

For the non-dualists there is no difference between the individual and supreme reality and all this world and worldly suffering are because of one's ignorance as the world by itself is illusory. If the true knowledge comes in, then there is no more ignorance and there is no more bondage. Whereas in the later dualist and bakthi cult,

the liberation is achieved by constantly serving the divine and the divine is embodied in the masses. Serving the masses is serving the divine. This shift in philosophical position of liberation perhaps might be one reason the solitary beings come back to society and take their responsibility of social obligation.

Even in the present day *advaitic* tradition, there is the orthodox set which considers that the liberated persons are supposed to be in solitude, and it is for the people to look for them. In fact, that marks the authenticity of the liberated souls. So, being in solitude is the mark of a truly liberated person, specifically amongst the advaitic, that is, non-dualist traditions.

IV. Spirituality and Morality in Recent Indian Context

Even in the present-day times, the polarity continues and a classic case in recent times is the life of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda is the direct disciple (maybe the most favorite disciple) of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna is considered to be an incarnation of God and revered much by the Indian public. From childhood onwards he was showing an extreme sense of devotion to Goddess Kali and this was continuing all through his age and his life itself is praised as a life of pure devotion to God. He was illiterate. He got married and his wife is also revered as the spiritual mother, Ma Sarada Devi. Though this account is often found in popular literature about Ramakrishna, there are writers who have written about his abnormal behavior in the name of tantric traditions and practices, his homoeroticisms, and his bisexual attitudes. And there are also writings as how Vivekananda did not even believe Ramakrishna as an incarnation; how Vivekananda despised many of the activities of Ramakrishna and how he projected Ramakrishna to the outside world as an incarnation. Vivekananda projected Ramakrishna as the best of all incarnations and as the savior of mankind and as the practicing advaitin in order to fulfill his religious mission of establishing a form of Hindu religious monastic setup with social upliftment. "This official portrait of Ramakrsna does not stress his more prominent devotion to the goddess Kali and his practice of Tantra, which is part of a strategy by Vivekananda to present an ideal image of the Master that is only partly true and to redefine his otherness to a wider audience that might not understand some of his strange behavior". (Olson, 1998) (For more on this issue, see Carl Oslon's Vivekanada and Ramakrishna: face to face, Narasingha Sil's Vivekananda's Ramakrishna: An untold story of mythmaking and propaganda)

We set aside the image of Ramakrishna and his failed or successful tantric practices. Our concern is the nature of his solitude, which made Gadhadhara as Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and the nature of solitude which Vivekananda underwent to come out as Swami Vivekananda from Narendranath Dutta. Doubtless Vivekananda was deeply influenced by Ramakrishna, be it psychological or spiritual or whatever the reasons may be. I will take in the face value that they both are spiritually oriented persons. And the Hindus revere them as God-incarnations. The concern for me is there is solitariness in both Gadhadhara and Narendranath, after which they became as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

What is of concern for us here, how after becoming Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, did they understand their role in society. There is a sharp contrast, between the two. Ramakrishna portrayed himself as an isolated, out of the world person without much of social obligation keeping the characteristic classical way of giving advice and counsel whoever comes to him. But Vivekananda was dynamic with a definite plan and ventured out to reach the public. In that sense, Ramakrishna remained in solitude even after his realization, whereas Vivekananda comes back to this phenomenal, empirical, ephemeral world.

Ramakrishna never vouched for this sort of social work or social service. Ramakrishna felt that, one should first seek God and then think of the world. The world with its many complexities is only secondary to Ramakrishna, the first and foremost for him is God. Narasingh Sil remarks about this anti-social stance of Ramakrishna thus:

> *He also preached against scholarship and social activism. He thought Pandit Isvarcandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), the famous scholar and social critic, was merely wasting his time trying to reform society. He forbade his devotee and patron Sambhucaran Mallik to spend money for community development. He advised another devotee that "it is not good to be involved in too many projects." He admonished his devotees: You people talk of doing good for the world. Is the world a small place? And who the hell are you to do good to the world? Meet Him by means of spiritual discipline. Realize Him if He gives you the strength, then you can do good to everybody; otherwise not* (Sil, 1993)

Being spiritual and with divinity is his first and in fact his only priority. And this is not something strange in the Hindu spirituality, particularly with the Advaitic spirituality, which is one of the dominant traditions in the Hindu religious thought. There are so many mystics in the late 19th century who subscribe to the same principles of spiritual solitude. The spiritual change from Venkatarama Iyer to Ramana Maharishi is one such classic example for our point of discussion. Ramana Maharishi (December 30, 1879 – April 14, 1950) who became one of the greatest seers in the south India vouched for the classical advaitic ideology recommending a solitary life for the path of liberation. He hardly speaks, leave alone any social action. Similar to Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharishi, there are as well modern-day spiritualists like Jiddu Krishnamurthy (1895-1986), Rajneesh (1931-1990) and others who were either directly or indirectly subscribing to one or the other forms of social inactivism. Of course, the latter two cannot be brought under the traditional conception of saints or sages or even spiritualists, but, to some extent, they had their own phase of solitariness for the sake of realizing the truth and ultimately came out with their own understanding of the pathless path to salvation.

Against these types of spiritualists, there is the other band of the sort of Swami Vivekananda. As mentioned earlier, Swami Vivekananda was the direct disciple of Ramkarishna, and it is indeed a curious tale to see how the Master and Disciple had two extreme positions. Vivekananda's social activism is too much that one even quest ion his passion for spirituality. Sil writes, "It is important to bear in mind that

Narendranath did not seem much inclined to spiritualism, mysticism, or devotionalism when he first encountered the Paramaharhsa. He was frankly opposed to the saint's prescription for total inaction and passive surrender to Jagajjanani" (Sil, 1993) Vivekananda has even remarked that tears, momentary trance, the divine love are sometimes hypocritical. He chalked out his plans for the social upliftment of the Indian society and communicated that to his fellow disciples.

> *He wrote to Ramakrsnananda on March 19, 1894: At Cape Comorin sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock-I hit upon a plan: We are so many Sannyasins wandering about and teaching people metaphysics-it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva use to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion'? That these poor people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance .... Suppose some distinguished Sannyasins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all.* (Sil, 1993)

Thus, we can see the Ramakrishna mission was, if not more at least equally, giving importance to social service as for the case of spiritual salvation. It is more like Vivekananda's mission in Ramakrishna's name, something like Plato's ideas in Socratic Dialogues. But we can see a shift in the stance in the role of the spiritual aspirant here. The spiritual aspirant shall forfeit his solitary state and try to venture out to the society for their upliftment.

A philosophical rationale for such type of an activity was also forthcoming when the spiritualists understood that solitariness need not refer to its literal meaning. While, there was much emphasis on being in literal solitude before and after the liberation, it gradually changed to being in solitude in a metaphorical sense. This shift in the stance, gives one the leverage that one can engage in social and worldly affairs without being disturbed by it. So, a spiritual aspirant should necessarily be in solitude, but that need not be taken in its literal meaning of going to forest or some isolated places, but even within the world. Ramakrishna sometimes used solitariness in its literal sense. He says,

> A man must practice some spiritual discipline in order to be able to lead a detached life in the world. It is necessary for him to spend some time in solitude—be it a year, six months, three months, or even one month. In that solitude he should fix his mind on God and pray with a longing heart for love of God. He should also say to himself: 'There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for two days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realize Him?' (Ramakrishna's Quotes on Solitude)

But, at the same time, the metaphorical meaning of solitude is also acknowledged. Within one's household, one can be in solitude. Ramana Maharishi says, "Renunciation is always in the mind, not in going to forests or solitary places or giving up one's duties. The main thing is to see that the mind does not turn outward but inward." (Ramana Maharishi Quotes and Sayings)

V. Spirituality in Present Years

I will come to the last phase of my discussion to see how this shift in understanding the nature of solitariness and the role of spiritually solitary beings is found here. India as a country is never dearth of spiritually 'enlightened' people. One can always see a spiritual preceptor in almost all the major cities and even in rural places. Swallow way back in 1982 writes about the cult of Indian gurus, which remains true even today, maybe more than what he said about them. He says,

> *GURU cults are an increasingly prominent feature of Indian religious life today, especially in the towns and cities, and among the urban middle classes. Many of these gurus are actually worshipped by their followers, who believe that they have magical powers; and in most cults the devotional element is strong. Since independence there seem to be more gurus in India; more of them have a more than local following; their followings are growing rapidly, and the cults are receiving more publicity, which reflects their discernible impact on the Indian scene.* (Swallow, 1982)

Our concern with these spiritual gurus in the last phase of our discussion is how they project themselves as guru. I will take few cases of the current so-called Guru's, who had been caught for one or the other wrong reasons. Premananda (1951-2011), Nithyananda (1978-), and many similar spiritual gurus were caught for their alleged wrongdoings and they were in custody. It is too difficult to immediately conclude that these gurus are convict. However, given the court judgements and pending cases, one can safely say that their spiritual claims are given to doubt. Almost all these godmen had a solitary life in the early stages of life and according to their biography, after some remarkable events in their life, they become 'enlightened' and come up as divine incarnations with a new name. From Rajasekaran to Nithyananda, from SathyanarayanaRaju to Satya Sai baba, there is not only a change in their name, but as they claim, there is also a change in their personality, a personality characterized by divine interventions, which makes them to be ultimately divine incarnations.

As laymen, we do not have their type of experiences through which they claim for their divinity. Is there any better way to judge their claims? I suggest that one way is to see the riches they had amassed in the name of simplicity and the contradictions between what they preach and what they practice. The word *Acharya* stands for the person who is exemplary in his or her conduct. A typical spiritual solitary being like Ramana Maharishi and Ramakrishna can be criticized for being indifferent to morality. But they cannot be pointed for exploitation of the masses. One can hardly find a contradiction in what they preach and what they practice. But, perhaps, what is happening nowadays in the Indian Scenario is there is a clear case of exploitation. There is a large gap between what the pseudo- spiritualists preach and what they practice. The case of Nithyanada is that he was preaching the traditional moral traits of celibacy, truthfulness, non-violence and other moral qualities and now got caught in sex scandal. Exploiting women in the name of spiritual liberation, trying to encourage anti-social activities, plundering public wealth, and other similar activities,

all in the name of spiritual emancipation. If there are serious allegations of such criminal and scandalous actions against them, how can one think of them as authentic spiritual acharyas? What is the 'enlightment', they achieved? What is the meaning of solitary life, they were leading at first?

When solitariness was taken as a means to achieve the spiritual progress, now, at least in some cases, it is taken as a means to achieve material progress – name, fame, wealth and power. Earlier and modern-day sages came out of their solitude after liberation, with the sole purpose of redeeming the public. Now, certain so-called Sadhus come out of solitude, so to exploit the public. Thus, being in solitude was taken as means for spiritual progress, but for somebody it is being considered for non-spiritual prosperity. The status of solitariness always remains the same in Indian tradition - as a means for progress, but progress in which sphere has taken a remarkable change over time for these Sadhus!
Should the real spiritualists be held responsible for the mushrooming of the pseudo-spiritualists? Should not the real mystics have a responsibility towards the society? Can't they be blamed for not doing their duty, that is, to enlighten the masses? Are they not culpable in shying away from their responsibility by being in solitude? Let I try to answer these questions.

VI. Spiritual Beings and Social Responsibility

General discussions about moral responsibility are understood in four different ways that includes responsible agency, retrospective responsibility, prospective responsibility and responsibility as virtue. (Williams, 2009) To think of solitary spiritual beings as indifferent to moral sphere is too difficult to take. Can we accept spiritualists like Ramakrishna display a sort of eccentrism, whose commonness can well be found with cases of psychopath? Herbert Fingarette 'On Responsibility' (1967) argues that psychopaths cannot be held responsible, because they are no more a candidate for moral responsibility. On the same logic, can we also put the spiritualists and the mystics as those who cannot be held morally responsible? I don't think on any count that such a proposition can be admitted. They cannot be blamed for not acting according to our demands of moral responsibility. But for sure, they are to our level of mental sanity, perhaps, more than that, in considering pain and suffering of others.

In the philosophical discourse, the four different ways of understanding moral responsibility can be brought as answers to two important questions – "what is it to be responsible?", the answer to this question may deal with moral agency and assign the retrospective responsibilities, that may include praise or blame. The next question is "What is a person responsible for?" And the deliberations of answers to this question may lead to prospective responsibility and talking of responsibility as virtue. (Williams, 2009) There is no exclusiveness to questions 1 and 2 as retrospective responsibility is associated with prospective responsibility as well.

We understand prospective responsibility in terms of one's duties. For instance, we can say X is responsible for cleaning the room; Y is responsible for watering the plants. Similarly, we can also assign prospective responsibility for organizations and

firms. Z is responsible for framing the rules. In these instances, "the term singles out the duties, or "area of responsibility," that somebody has by virtue of their role." (Williams, 2009)

To think of assigning some duties to the spiritualists or solitary beings as a prospective responsibility is to make them obligated to certain duties. And any fail or success in such a duty, results in blame or praise in the retrospective responsibility. They cannot be blamed or held responsible for the growth of pseudo-spiritualists, because of their life in solitude. Neither, we can demand them to be liable for corrective measures. It may not be fair on our part to point at those types of solitary beings as either performing or shying away from their responsibilities. They are not taking an escapist stance towards the moral responsibility, but they try to transcend that at a spiritual level. After all, in the purely spiritual sense, they hardly bother about our wants and concerns.

In that case, we can think of responsibility as a virtue. "Responsibility represents a virtue that people (and organizations) may exhibit in one area of their conduct, or perhaps exemplify in their entire lives." (Williams, 2009). Understanding the moral responsibility of the spiritualists in this sense, we can think of the spiritualists as capable of shouldering more commitments towards the society and the people. They in fact, do not need neither blame nor praise as true spiritualists they may be least bothered about our labels to them. But, at the same time, they by themselves will know the right course of action to do in a given situation. "We will not need to hold her responsible, because we can depend on her holding herself responsible." (Williams, 2009)

Conclusion

The continuing growth of pseudo-spiritualists makes us wonder about the purpose of solitariness as a spiritual step in one's life. This is not to suggest the entire Indian tradition of extolling solitariness and spiritual orientation is wrong or misconceived. Neither this is to suggest there are no real spiritual aspirants or no liberated souls. There might be. We as lay persons cannot be in a better position to judge who is genuine and who is not. We cannot hold them responsible for the mushrooming of pseudo-spiritualists. The real spiritualists on their own come out of their solitude and are in the society to serve as exemplars for spiritual beings. They will make themselves responsible and take the right course of action. Swami Vivekananda or Ramana Maharishi 'knew' what they need to do.

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