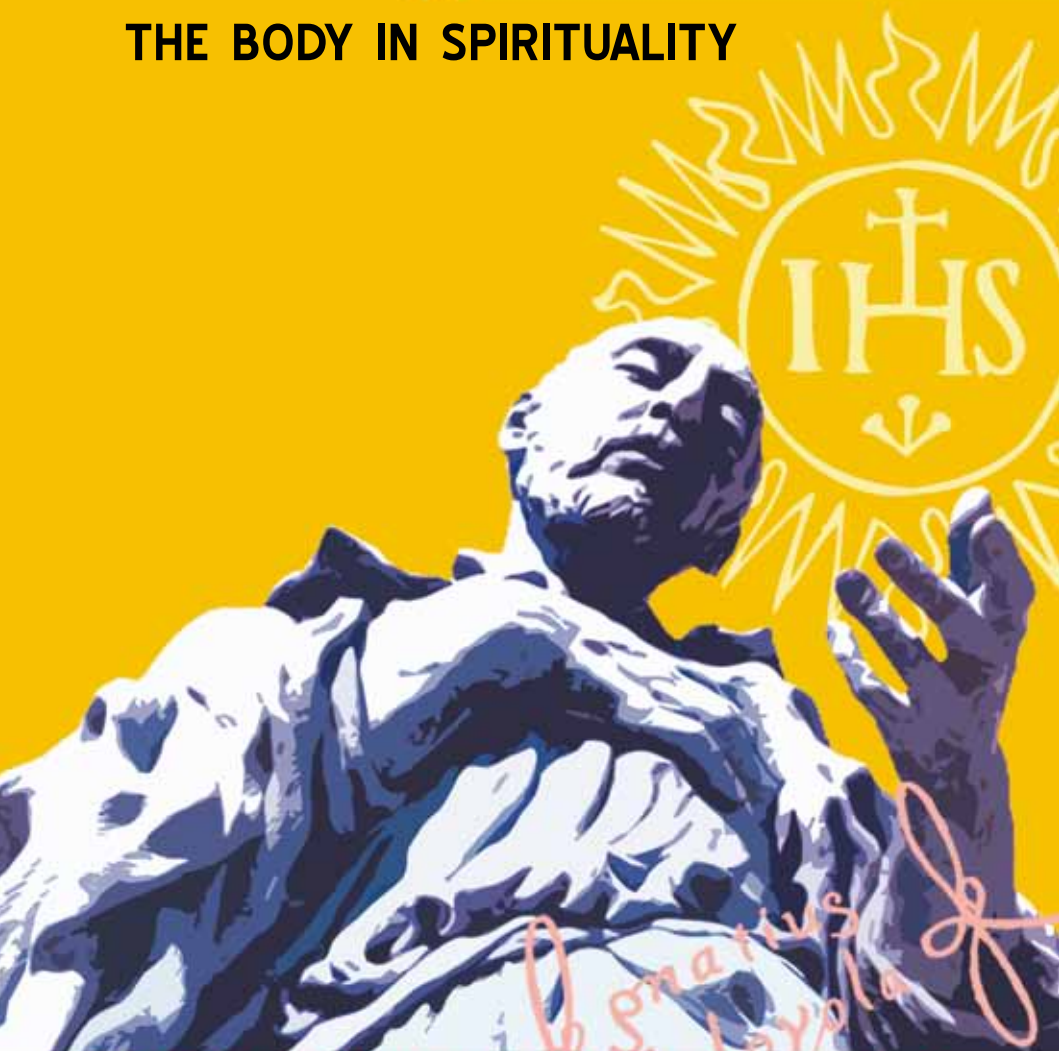


# ignis

Quarterly / No. 2011.4 / Vol. XLI No. IV

THE BODY IN SPIRITUALITY



**IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY: South Asia**

# Ignis – Ignatian Spirituality: South Asia

Quarterly / No. 2011.4 / Vol. XLI No.IV

GUJARAT SAHITYA PRAKASH

St. Xavier's Road, Anand - 388 001

Gujarat, India.

*Editor:* Michael Amaladoss, SJ

*Articles for publication to be sent to:*

The Editor, IGNIS

Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions,

Loyola College, Nungambakkam, Chennai - 600 034, India.

email: mamaladoss@hotmail.com

*For subscriptions write to:*

The Publisher, Ignis,

Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, St. Xavier's Road, Anand - 388 001 Gujarat, INDIA.

email: booksgsp@gmail.com

*1 Year Subscription:* ₹ 100.00 for India.

*3 Years Subscription:* ₹ 280.00 for India.

Pay by M O / DD in favor of 'Gujarat Sahitya Prakash', Anand / Bank transfer as below

A/C Name: GUJARAT SAHITYA PRAKASH

Name of the Bank: ICICI Bank, V.V. Nagar 388 120

Account No: 008501008925

IFS CODE: ICIC 0000085

After depositing money, kindly send email to above ID

*Annual Subscription:* US \$ 20 for Foreign Countries by electronic transfer

A/C Name: GUJARAT SAHITYA PRAKASH

Name of the Bank: INDIAN OVERSEAS BANK

Account No: 039901000001207

SWIFT CODE: IOBAINBB001

Address of the Bank: Station Road, Anand, 388 001

Gujarat, INDIA

Published by: Jerry Sequeira, SJ, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, St. Xavier's Road, Anand Gujarat-388 001

Printed by: Agnelo Vaz,SJ, Anand Press, Gamdi-Anand, Gujarat - 388 001.

# *Ignis*

## **THE BODY IN SPIRITUALITY**

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	From the Editor	2
2.	New Frontiers of Body Wisdom: InterPlay for Peace <i>Prashant Olalekar, S.J.</i>	5
3.	The Body: A sanctified Dwelling of the Divine <i>Ambrose Jeyaraj, S.J.</i>	27
4.	Ignatian Approach to the Body <i>John Joseph, S.J.</i>	40
5.	Women, Body and Spirituality <i>Metti Amirtham, SCC.</i>	47
6.	Dance Divine <i>Saju George, S.J.</i>	64
7.	The Body in Hinduism <i>Colette Poggi</i>	75

## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

You have in your hands the final issue of 2011. This issue focuses on the role of the body in spirituality. The very term 'spirituality' focuses on the 'spirit'. The spirit-body dichotomy leads to the idea that the body is opposed to the spirit. The body then has to be kept under control to allow the spirit to flourish. The body is further seen as somehow dirty. Some people can only think of sex and that too in a negative way when they think of the body. The body is meant to return to the earth, while the spirit will soar towards heaven. These ideas come actually from non-Christian sources. The fact that the Word became flesh gives the body a divine dimension. If God can take on a body, it must be good and holy, worthy of such a great honour. The Christian tradition also believes that the body will rise again and participate in the glory of the children of God. The body is actually the symbol and manifestation of the person. It is through the body that a person relates to the other and to the universe. The body is also a source of identity. We do not have a body. We are our bodies. The spirit-body interface is the source of energy that relates us to nature, to others and to the divine. The yogic tradition has thoroughly explored the bodily dimension of the humans in India and uses the body to reach out to the spirit. That is why in India we cannot think of spirituality without thinking of the body.

The different papers in this issue of **IGNIS** help us to understand a little the role of the body in spirituality. Renewed

interest in Ignatian spirituality has also enabled us to discover the important and positive role that the body played in the life and teaching of Ignatius. **Prashant** evokes the riches of Body Wisdom that has been discovered and used by a new movement called InterPlay. The dynamism of the body finds expression in dance and play. It is a source of healing and wholeness. It makes us relate to the universe, the others and God. It leads us to joy and fullness. I am sure that after reading his presentation many would be attracted to join his movement, especially because it also reaches out to the underprivileged and the differently able. **Ambrose** shows us how Ignatius learnt to value his body through his experience. The body has an essential role in prayer and discernment. Imagination and emotion characterize Ignatian spirituality more than reason. The Application of the senses can lead one to deep contemplation. The interplay of consolation and desolation in discernment involve the body too and the senses. The overemphasis on mind and meditation may have deprived us of the creative and integrative role of the body. Properly attended to the body can become the dwelling place of the divine.

Ambrose's approach to the body in St. Ignatius is beautifully complemented by **John Joseph**. A mystical approach to the body lead him to the vision of Ignatius at the river Cardoner near Manresa. We normally refer to the special insight into the Trinitarian mystery which he seems to have had in that vision. But we have reason to believe that it was an *advaitic* vision which leads him to find God in all things and all things in God. Creation and the body then become transparent to the divine. As a matter of fact, such a vision is not merely for the mystics but for everyone. The God of Ignatius is not the static distant Other, but the Spirit that moves everything. The body reaches out to this movement in a privileged way. **Metti Amirtham** makes a passionate plea, not only to recognize the role of the body in life and spirituality, but to see how crucial the body is for the spirituality of women. The fact that women's bodies are widely abused may prevent us from seeing how crucial the body is for their identity and life. The experience of the woman's body linked to the production of life presents an emotional and earthy,

caring and relational dimension to their spirituality that merely rational men cannot fathom. Only a woman can give a challenging expression to it.

But **Saju George** shows that even men, by dint of effort and commitment can reach out to an experience. Saju is a rare Jesuit who is a professional Bharathanatyam dancer. For him it is not mere entertainment, but *sadhana* that enables him to participate in the creative dancing of Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance. The body and the dance become mediations of an enriching dialogue experience that leads to integration and wholeness. Through dance one enters into cosmic harmony. In the final paper, **Colette Poggi**, gives us an authoritative overview of the role of the body in Hinduism. The Brahmins did look down on the body. It is the alternative Sharamanic, yogic, ayurvedic and tantric traditions the highlight the role of the body, breath and energy. The body has its own wisdom that is exploited by the Bhakti tradition for creative contemplation. Kashmiri Shaivism evokes the vibrating energy that embraces the body, the energy field, the spirit, the universe and integrates everything with the Absolute in advaitic union. I feel that Christian spirituality in India should eventually pay attention, not only to the body, but to the energy field. This could be the topic for another issue of IGNIS.

Many of you may not be aware that IGNIS is also available free on line. You can find it in the website of our publishers: [www.gspbooks.in](http://www.gspbooks.in) These days our Jesuit Curia in Rome is making efforts to make reviews like IGNIS freely available to Jesuits in the Third World. Our readers can feel free to draw the attention of their interested friends in India and abroad to the availability of IGNIS on line and to the website of Gujarat Sahitya Prakash. Past issues too are available.

May the papers in this issue help you to explore the hidden and ignored riches of your bodies and integrate them in a holistic communion with nature, the others and God. Wishing all of you the blessings of the Lord who became one with us in body,

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

# **NEW FRONTIERS OF BODY WISDOM: INTERPLAY FOR PEACE**

**Prashant Olalekar, S.J.**

*(Prashant Olalekar is active as spiritual-pastoral minister, based in Mumbai. He is active in the InterPlay movement helping people to discover their Body Wisdom. He had been Novice Master in Bombay province and has a PhD in spiritual theology.)*

## **Initial Exposures to Body Wisdom**

While doing doctoral studies on the spirituality of peace in California I was seeking for new avenues in holistic spirituality that would enrich my ministry as a Jesuit. At the first session of the opening retreat I was pleasantly surprised to note that the card that came up for me was 'Come Dance with Me', a quote from the Sufi poet Hafiz. This quote not only turned out to be the personal theme for my retreat but also the divine invitation to participate as a co-creator in the cosmic dance.

While sitting totally still, meditating in the garden overlooking the Silicon valley, I suddenly became aware of the millions of atoms energetically dancing in my whole body. Outside I was a silent witness to the sun setting in the distance and the pale moon rising on the canvas of the dimly lit sky. I thoroughly enjoyed and gratefully accepted this humbling experience of participating in the cosmic

dance, but I hardly imagined that it would literally sweep me off my feet.

The next week I was invited to attend the opening class of a course on *'Body Wisdom'*. While giving a 'full body' introduction in InterPlay style Cynthia Winton-Henry, a co-founder of InterPlay, began to express her intense grief both physically and vocally at the recent death of a friend. Finally she thanked God for this gift of an ancestor in heaven to intercede on her behalf. The spontaneous soul-stirring resurrection dance that followed was truly out of this world. The rest of the class was truly amazing and soon I found myself not only a part of the course but also availing of every opportunity to play, thanks to the generosity of Cynthia.

During an InterPlay retreat Phil Porter, the other cofounder of Interplay, was guiding me through a discernment process to choose the next step in the dance of life. He asked me to lie down and allow one hand to dance freely in the air. The critical Jesuit in me began to suspect how anything could be discerned in this crazy fashion but at the end I was filled with a deep sense of consolation. I felt a call to a radically new mission but desperately wanted some signs of confirmation. When Phil indicated the possibility of God calling me to be a peace bridge between USA and India it immediately hit me that this was the first sign. In prophetic mode I felt totally unworthy and unfit, only to be gradually reassured that if God had chosen me, He would see it through.

Such apparently random body-based encounters led to my doctoral thesis on *Shalom* and a quest for holistic peace: intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural and cosmic. Today, five years later, on witnessing the annual Intercultural Exchange for Global Peace (IEGP) programs involving the co-founders of InterPlay USA and Australia, I am amazed at how seeds of peace for a global peace movement are slowly but surely being sown far and wide.

## **InterPlay Unlocks Body Wisdom**

InterPlay was founded in 1989 by Cynthia and Phil in USA by integrating the wisdom of the body from cultures across the globe.

InterPlay is a global social movement dedicated to ease, connection, human sustainability and play. It is basically a spiritual practice to unlock our body wisdom. “Inter” because it provides a shift from our individualistic tendencies to our innate desires to be whole people, leading wholesome lives in connection with each other and the whole universe. Just as the Buddhists would say “To be is to inter-be” because of our interconnectedness, so also one could say “To play is to InterPlay.”

InterPlay is about “play” – a creative process for personal and communitarian transformation. This play is very different from the competitive, consumerist and commercial type of play modeled by sports stars. Instead of revolving around winning or losing, Interplay functions within a win-win framework thus fostering collaboration and co-creation. It advocates playing for fun rather than profit, playing for peace rather than indulging in games of war. The songs and movements are unlike the choreographed performances of Bollywood idols. Through InterPlay one discovers that play and dance, song and drama are not the monopoly of only the privileged elite but are the birthright of everyone who has been freely gifted with a body. People of all ages and sizes including those with various disabilities and illnesses can reap its rich benefits. Like yoga, InterPlay aims at integration but it does not entail any intricate poses or intense discipline. Through spontaneity and improvisation the dormant inner child is awakened thus stimulating the natural urge to be playful and creative. To enter into the spirit of InterPlay one needs to get into the shoes of St Ignatius who felt that ‘God was dealing with him as a school teacher deals with a child.’<sup>1</sup> Jesus rightly said that unless we become like little children we will not enter the kingdom of God. (Mt. 18:3) The unalloyed joy of childlike play is akin to heavenly bliss.

InterPlay is a communitarian spiritual practice that integrates body, mind, heart and spirit into one harmonious whole. Through

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmananda R. Divarkar, *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Ignatius of Loyola*, (Rome, 1983), no. 27.

powerful, practical ideas and a system of simple practices rooted in movement, storytelling, song and stillness, we gain access to our own “body wisdom”- what works best for us, what kindles our life passion and mission. Starting with simple body movements the process leads step-by-step to give greater expression to the energy locked up within. Improvised movement is a major part of InterPlay. When the body moves freely, self-consciousness gives way to self-awareness – an awareness of each part of the body and its relation to the wider body of the universe. One develops the art of letting go and finding, or rather being found by, the God of surprises in all things. An InterPlayer is an improviser who loves to play with the joys and sorrows of life by surrendering to the cosmic flow.

### **Movement Meditation: Unique Approach to InterPlay**

Based on my experiences and studies in Integrated Spirituality, I have developed a unique approach called ‘Movement Meditation’ which integrates InterPlay with eastern traditions. Mindfulness, yogic deep relaxation, creative visualization and emphasis on the cosmic dimension enhance the meditative effect with groups.

In Movement Meditation the focus is on awareness in movement and stillness thus ensuring we become contemplative even in movement. Simple techniques of awareness of breath, sound, and bodily sensations, lead to greater centering and heightened sensitivity to inner movements. Appropriate physical movements when combined with other static forms of meditation can make the whole experience more meaningful and rewarding. The prayer experience is deepened through embodiment so that we learn to walk on earth, smell the flowers, breathe the fresh air, sip the water, and taste the food mindfully in daily life. We acquire the art of being present in the sacrament of the moment. We can thus relish the extraordinary in the ordinary which is the true encounter with the divine.

Experience shows that Movement Meditation serves to ground InterPlay more firmly by deepening insights evoked by forms that

may appear mere fun and even childish on the surface. For instance, in an adaptation of the InterPlay form called 'Walk Stop Run', the participants are guided to imagine that they are birds, trees, fish and animals. The various movements are interspersed with prolonged moments of stillness. Participants often share their surprise at the absence of distractions and the ease with which they can be in the present moment. Some are transported momentarily into another world. They experience a strong sense of oneness with the universe and feel an integral part of the cosmic dance of life. Stimulating the creative imagination tends to give the awareness a mystical quality of its own.

Movement Meditation, like InterPlay, is not a therapy but can be very therapeutic. I have witnessed several amazing healings from diseases like cancer, back pain and depression. When done in intercultural global communities this can also be a small but significant tool for the healing of a wounded world.

### **Converging Traditions on Wisdom of Dance and Play**

Explorations into InterPlay and Movement Meditation have provided entry points to the elements of dance and play that are so deeply rooted in our Indian culture. When I was reluctant to introduce InterPlay in India as it may be seen as another foreign import, a friend of mine retorted, "Dance is so much a part of Indian culture that it can be called a dancing culture. At common festivals people dance on the streets with gay abandon and popular movies are spiced up with dance at frequent intervals. The problem is that we have lost touch with our roots."

In searching for these roots I discovered links with the rich Indian tradition of *Nataraja*, who dances the cosmos into being. During the dance of *Shiva Nataraja*, who is worshipped in the South Indian Hindu tradition as the Lord of the dancers, in a divine movement of integration the dancer becomes the cosmic dancer and the dance. "The place of the dance is the center of the universe - in the heart of every human being. Shiva dances the world out of delight, out of the joy in the dance itself, out of the overflow of his energies..."

He is the dancer, he is the dance, and what the dance dances is he himself.”<sup>2</sup>

A modern nuclear physicist, Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics*, “links the energy-based world view of modern physics with the symbol of the cosmic dance found in eastern mysticism and in Indian and Chinese philosophy”.<sup>3</sup>

The ideas of rhythm and dance naturally come to mind when one tries to imagine the flow of energy going through the patterns that make up the particle world. Modern physics has shown us that movement and rhythm are essential properties of matter; that all matter, whether here on earth or in outer space, is involved in a continual cosmic dance. The Eastern mystics have a dynamic view of the universe similar to that of modern physics, and consequently it is not surprising that they too, have used the image of the dance to convey their intuition of nature.<sup>4</sup>

In our globalised world one notices an amazing convergence of science and spirituality, east and west urging us to go beyond conventional boundaries. For those with a contemplative outlook the whole of creation is one interconnected reality in which there is the fascinating interplay of matter and spirit. The growing ecological, scientific and spiritual awareness calls us to approach other creatures as companions or co-pilgrims on the journey. InterPlay and Movement Meditation foster the awareness that we are called to be co-creators in a dancing cosmos.

Eminent Christian theologians like Moltmann and Panikkar view the Trinity as engaged in eternal *perichoresis* or a permanent dance of love and peace to which we are invited and empowered to join. Francis Gonsalves, a creative Indian theologian, advocates the experiential and embodied trinitarian symbol of the *naach/nu*

---

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1989), 305.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>4</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), pp. 228-229.

(tribal dance of S. Gujarat) which involves the whole community with bodies intertwined singing and dancing in close communion with nature.<sup>5</sup> For the IEGP program this year the InterPlay pilgrims were thrilled to participate in the *naach/nu* thus getting a taste of tribal solidarity and cosmic communion.

The refrain of the haunting hymn ‘Lord of the Dance’, which we used to sing in the novitiate, came alive:

Dance then, wherever you may be  
I am the *Lord of the Dance*, said He!  
And I’ll lead you all, wherever you may be  
And I’ll lead you all in the Dance, said He.

Reflecting on the relational image of the Trinity as dance La Cugna says, “No one ‘leads’ in the divine dance: there exists only the eternal moment of giving and receiving. The ecstatic, relational actions of the persons of the Trinity toward one another constitute the unity.”<sup>6</sup> During the InterPlay form ‘Lead and Follow’ there comes a stage when one is not sure who is leading and who is following. As the partners reach this stage called ‘ecstatic following’ there seems to be another mysterious force, the Spirit, that comes into play. “To understand God as Spirit is to know oneself as invited into the dance between the Father and Son.”<sup>7</sup> This is a common experience in InterPlay. “The scientist and religious teacher Arthur Peacocke suggests that a fitting image for the Creator Spirit would be that of a choreographer of an unfinished dance, ingeniously improvising steps for a piece that requires the creativity of the dancers to complete.”<sup>8</sup> Can we not consider the interplay between the Creator and humans as an improvised dance sequence in which the leading

---

<sup>5</sup> Francis Gonsalves, *God of Our Soil: Towards Subaltern Trinitarian Theology*, (ISPCK/Views: Delhi, 2010), p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women*, (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001), p. 239.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel O’Leary, *Begin with the Heart: Recovering a Sacramental Vision*, (Dublin: The Columbia Press, 2008), p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Johnson A., *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 58.

and following is an experience of the mutual sharing of lover and beloved similar to that suggested in the Contemplation to Attain Love? (Sp. Ex. 231).

In *New Seeds of Contemplation* the great prophet and mystic Thomas Merton invites us:

To hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance ...when we see the migrating birds ... when we see children in a moment when they are really children ... For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. ...Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.<sup>9</sup>

Refusing to respond to this call we can adopt the hardhearted stance of the scribes and Pharisees instead whom Jesus chastises:

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’” (Mt 11:16-17)

God’s creation has been portrayed not only as dance but also as play in various ancient traditions. For instance, in the Old Testament the creation of the world has the character of play, giving joy and delight to God and humans. The book of Proverbs speaking about God creating heaven and earth through his daughter Wisdom (Sophia) evokes a delightful mood of play: “I was at God’s side... delighting God day after day, Ever at play in God’s presence, At play everywhere in God’s world.” (Proverbs 8:30-31)

In the Indian tradition we are familiar with the concept of ‘leela’, which literally means ‘play’. Leela has a richer connotation indicating divine play which involves the play of creation, destruction and re-creation. Leela is simple and spontaneous, childlike and charming, delightful and disarming, the play of God – all qualities that are the stuff of InterPlay.

---

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 296-7.

Anthony de Mello's beautiful wisdom story on play is very enlightening in this context:

*The Master once referred to the Hindu notion that all creation is "leela" — God's play — and the universe is his playground. The aim of spirituality, he claimed, is to make all life play. This seemed too frivolous for a puritanical visitor. "Is there no room then for work?" "Of course there is. But work becomes spiritual only when it is transformed into play."<sup>10</sup>*

Hugo Rahner in "Man at Play" asserts that "The dance is a sacral form of play because it is, first and foremost, an attempt to imitate in the form of gesture and rhythm something of that free-soaring motion which God as creative principle has imparted to the cosmos."<sup>11</sup> Referring to the mystical idea of divine play, which was alive among the Greek Fathers of the Church, he says that "...we speak of the playing of God, who through this creative pouring out of himself makes it possible for the creature to understand him in the wonderful play of his works."<sup>12</sup>

He infers that since God plays, man too must be a creature who plays.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to show that "in the game of grace Christ has actually become the playmate of man".<sup>14</sup> He also confirms the conception "of a playing Church signifying the body of all those who have found gladness in Christ"<sup>15</sup> and "liturgy as a divine game".<sup>16</sup>

## **Blocks to Body Wisdom**

While I was celebrating Mass in a church in the USA, the choir was

---

<sup>10</sup> Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom*, (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1992), p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play*, (London: Burns and Oates), p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

singing the psalm with full gusto: “Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.” (Ps. 149:3) Though my body was throbbing with the pulsating rhythm my feet remained immobile. On the one hand my body was itching to move to glorify God but on the other hand it would look crazy to move on the altar. Behind one of the pillars at the back of the church I noticed a man’s arms swaying wildly to the lilting music. Immediately after the Mass, I hurriedly went to meet this strange man only to discover that he was mentally challenged. Woe to the rest of us who refused to move and behaved as though we were physically challenged.

There are blocks and biases to free movement of the body not only at worship but also in many other areas of life because it makes us vulnerable. When we move freely our true self is revealed as the body does not lie. Play can reveal whether we are competitive or cooperative, coercive or compassionate. Cynthia who has taught InterPlay for 25 years, including at a multid denominational seminary, says: “Death is a scary word. But...*Play. Body. Dance. Feel. Touch.*”<sup>17</sup> are also words that scare us to death because like the reality of death they call us to let go and let God take over. Those who dare to dance and play with childlike abandon are labeled as crazy by those who have lost touch with their inner child. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche aptly puts it: “... and those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

Resistance to freedom of movement and the sensuality of the body confirm that much of our spirituality is still plagued by the evil of body-spirit dualism. Thanks to the post-Vatican II renewal there have been several significant attempts to develop spiritualities which are more integrated and holistic. However, centuries of patriarchal conditioning and dualistic thinking cannot be deleted overnight.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia Winton-Henry with Phil Porter, *What the Body Wants*, (Canada: Northstone Publishing, 2004), p. 21.

Like education in most places, theology and spirituality too tend to emphasize head-level knowledge. Due to the socialization process, whether religious or secular, we have been accustomed to look at our bodies with suspicion. We have been trained to trust the mind and distrust the body. The mind is considered as separate from the body and superior to it. The ongoing conflict between our bodies and minds results in a lot of stress.

Our unbalanced lifestyle, unhealthy work habits and consumption of junk food are indicators of our negative attitude to the body. No wonder our bodies protest through pains and illnesses and may eventually break down. Lack of respect and reverence for the body can lead to abuse of self, others and creation too. Our approach not only to our own bodies but also to other human bodies and the body of the universe is one of dominance and violence. Is it not strange that our spiritual explorations may result in searching for God in all things except in our body, our true home, which remains largely unexplored territory?

### **InterPlay Builds Up the Body of Christ**

Devaluing or degrading the body is an insult to the incarnation. By giving importance to the human body InterPlay takes the incarnation seriously. Jesus is the Word made Flesh. (see Jn.1:14) He is the enfleshed, embodied sacrament of God. In Jesus Christ the human and divine are inseparably interconnected. In His person we see the harmonious interplay of the human and the divine. In Jesus, God fully embraced humanity. He took on human flesh indicating its sanctity. Jesus chose to be remembered through the eucharistic embrace of his body and blood. Not only were Jesus' birth and death full body experiences but even his resurrection was a bodily experience. One of the most evocative images of church is the Body of Christ. Embodiment is so central to our faith that when we honor the bodies of the poor by feeding and clothing them we are honoring Jesus. (see Mt. 25:31-46)

InterPlay reminds us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, created in the image and likeness of God. The body is treated as a friend

to be embraced and not a foe to be fought against. Trusting and befriending the body serves to make us more fruitful sacraments for God's greater glory. Stressful living gives way to a lifestyle of graceful and grateful giving.

InterPlay helps to build joyful communities because it bonds people together in simple yet amazing ways. It breaks through individualistic tendencies and fosters collaboration and equality. It is a creative tool to promote active participation, healthy interaction, and interdependence among all members of the Church, the Body of Christ, thus making it less hierarchical and more egalitarian. It also helps to cultivate a playful spirit in the family, the domestic church, so that we can say "The family that plays together stays together". Through InterPlay the domestic family is widened to embrace the human family and even reaches far beyond to cosmic communion.

### **Links with Ignatian Spirituality**

Key meditations from the Spiritual Exercises like the 'Principle and Foundation' and 'Contemplation to Attain Love' can be reinterpreted from the perspective of divine play. Hugo Rahner's comment gives us a basic insight for reinterpreting meditations like the 'Kingdom', 'Two Standards', and 'Three Kinds of Humility' from the countercultural perspective of play. "For the fundamental rule of the divine game is "he who loses, wins"; and it was set down by the Spanish mystic and Jesuit lay-brother, Alphonsus Rodriguez, in the treatise both child-like and profound, on "God's play with the soul."<sup>18</sup>

In the Second Week St. Ignatius introduces the Application of Senses as the final period of prayer to deepen the other prayer exercises thus demonstrating the key importance of embodied prayer. Ignatius pays special attention to bodily positions in prayer and suggests that the retreatant choose what is most suitable. Body prayer exercises like 'walking meditation' and the 'one hand dance'

---

<sup>18</sup> Hugo Rahner, p. 56.

can greatly enhance discernment as they enable information from deep within to spring forth. While our minds are usually preoccupied with reasons to justify our choices, bodily signs often tell a different story. Like eastern awareness exercises meditative movements are excellent ways to calm the mind. Since this helps for centering, the retreatant is able to easily get into the scene being contemplated and the vividness and effect of the Ignatian contemplation is much greater.

Together with reflections for the head and imagination to feed the heart, embodying the contemplations will provide holistic nurturance for the whole person. Judicious use of appropriate movements and sounds followed by prolonged stillness within the contemplation exercise itself can help the retreatant enter the scene more wholeheartedly and fully. In retreats I have asked participants to stand in twos facing their partners with hands outstretched in the form of a cross. They are free to groan, mourn, yell, and shout but are forbidden to make even the slightest movement for five minutes. At the national workshop for Ignatian spirituality coordinators and others one of the participants had a profound experience:

Being in that crucified position with a partner brought a sense of solidarity with the entire gamut of human suffering. It put me in touch with my deepest pain and the pain of the other, with my own helplessness and powerlessness. With total surrender I felt my ego dissolving. Tears rolled and rolled and rolled. I cried for the victims and perpetrators of injustice. I cried for you and me together. Something moved through me and in me and with me in that silent act of solidarity.

After a brief sharing the participants were asked to change the way they stretch their hands, to take various other cruciform shapes, and to move about in playful ways to the accompaniment of background music. She goes on to add:

While playing with the cross I felt the exhilarating joy in suffering. I felt carried and cared for by the Creator through it all. With the freedom to change positions there was no longer any pain. I felt so blessed to play with my cross. I have discovered in an embodied

way that playing with the cross opens the door to the resurrection in the ongoing dance of life.

Movement Meditation can open up powerful pathways to the divine mystery thus increasing the transformative impact on the retreatant.

In the Spiritual Exercises the image of Christ is pivotal. Roy Thottam SJ in a mesmerizing masterpiece of art depicts the androgynous face of Christ by playing with masculine and feminine contours together with other symbols of yin and yang like loaves and fishes, light and shadow, the masculine embracing the feminine and vice versa. This holistic portrait of Christ can be effectively presented in contemplations thus acknowledging and fostering the interplay of masculine and feminine energies in all of life. If the Christ we seek has a masculine/feminine face we will enter a new era of collaboration with the laity, especially women, and thus become peacemakers in a patriarchal world of violence. Going way beyond the personal figure of Christ his cosmic dimensions can also be included especially in the fourth week. Viewing ourselves as co-creators with the cosmic Christ could have a decisive impact on our commitment to save our planet that is hurtling towards self-destruction.

“Every person becomes the image of the God they adore,” is a perceptive insight of Thomas Merton.<sup>19</sup> In a thought provoking article David Fleming points out that when we seek to find God in all things it is important to take note of the kind of God we seek.<sup>20</sup> What will happen if we seek for a playful God or rather if we allow ourselves to be found by a playful God? In his lovely poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire” Gerard Manley Hopkins has captured beautifully the image of the playful Christ.

---

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, [mail@inwardoutward.org](mailto:mail@inwardoutward.org)

<sup>20</sup> David L. Fleming, S.J. “Finding a Busy God”, in David L. Fleming, S.J. (ed), *A Spirituality For Contemporary Life: The Jesuit Heritage Today*, (St. Louis: Review for Religious, 1991), p. 24.

I say more: the just man justices;  
 Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —  
 Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
 To the Father through the features of men's faces.<sup>21</sup>

In response to Christ's invitation "Come play with me" while playing with about ten thousand people in the past five years we have been dazzled by the Christ who plays in ten thousand faces. I am still trying to come to grips with the transfigured Christ I have seen especially in the faces of abused women and the implications for the future thrust of my Jesuit mission to the least.

God as worker was one of Ignatius' favorite images. He understood God not only present but at work in all things. In the Kingdom meditation the eternal king extends an invitation: "Therefore, whoever wishes to join with me in this enterprise must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory." (Sp Ex. no 95) The aspect of labor is also mentioned several times in the Spiritual Exercises (Sp. Ex. nos. 107, 116, 224).

A paradoxical painting of the face of the crucified Jesus with an almost playful smile by Hildegard Hendrichs has the caption inviting the observer "Come play with me".<sup>22</sup> It would make for a fascinating study to reinterpret Ignatius' call 'to labor with Christ' from the perspective of play. The novel implications of this paradigm shift for the identity, community and mission of Jesuits in our globalized world enslaved to Mammon by a neo-capitalist work ethic would also be well worth considering. Jesuits often stand out due to their individual brilliance but can come across as poor team players. The 'win-win' approach of InterPlay, if systematically and regularly embodied by practice, could transform the face of Jesuit companionship and community.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/as-kingfishers-catch-fire/>

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Pohl, "Dei Verbum Meets Homo Ludens: Bibliodrama in South-East Asia", *The Way*, 47, 3 (2008), p. 73.

Lay collaborators are showing a keen interest in imbibing Ignatian Spirituality and co-facilitating workshops and retreats too. The encouraging feedback from groups like the Kerala scholastics and other priests and religious to a holistic Ignatian retreat called 'Prophetic Play and Mystical Movement: Spiritual Exercises for Our Times' is an incentive to dive deeper. Donald Miranda SJ, the Novice Master of Patna Province, who found his Ignatian horizons expanding at one of these retreats, shares:

The guided meditations, using *InterPlay*, and shared liturgies, accompanied by appropriate and deeply moving music, opened my body to explore newer ways of embracing Ignatius' ideal of *finding God in all things and all things in God*. The body as the *principle and foundation*, and therefore the starting point for this exploration of interconnectedness and interrelatedness, is a discovery I wish to carry forward in the *Mind-Body-Spirit* continuum encapsulated by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises* as *Application of Senses*.

Shorter Movement Meditation sessions for JIGSA and JEPASA Coordinators, Vidyajyoti theologians, Ahmedabad collegians, ISI Bangalore staff, and students have also met with a positive response.

The various playful exposures for the InterPlayers can be viewed as adapted mini-versions of the Ignatian experiments held for novices.

- Hospital Experiment: cancer patients, multiple sclerosis, abused women, physically differently abled, people with mentally ill, deaf and mute children, children with AIDS.
- Mission Experiment: tribals in Talasari and South Gujarat
- Pilgrimage Experiment: tribals in Dedhiapada and multi-faith shrines in Varanasi
- Catechism Experiment: Confirmation students

These were followed by prayer and reflection to integrate and deepen the experience.

## Playing with the Poor for Global Peace

An insightful woman religious from Philadelphia, who showed the links between Catholic Social Teaching and the UN Millennium Development Goals, once asked an Anglican priest,

“What is the greatest problem facing humanity today?”

Pat came the reply, “Extreme poverty.”

She said, “Correct.”

Then she asked him what the greatest threat to our planet was today.

He promptly replied again, “Extreme poverty.”

She said once more, “Correct.”

When she asked him what the only antidote for both of these would be he said,

“The redistribution of wealth.”

This time she said, “Incorrect. The correct answer is *GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS*.”

At the domestic, national, international and cosmic levels we are witnessing an unprecedented upsurge of violence and rapidly increasing disparity between rich and poor. Never before are we more desperately seeking for peace in the domestic as well as global family. Thanks to the IEGP programmes we are discovering the interconnected dimensions of holistic peace that include the intrapersonal and interpersonal, structural and cosmic. InterPlay is gradually emerging as a powerful tool to build global partnerships for peace and justice with the long-term goal of eradicating poverty. Playful interaction between the rich and the poor is a small but significant step to forge lasting relationships resulting in changes of consciousness and structures.

For instance, when Cynthia and her team visited a BJP-dominated area of Dahisar slums in 2008 we were a bit apprehensive. After a session the poor female activists, who were used to viewing TV images of Americans as warmongers, spontaneously remarked, “We were amazed to see how peaceful and peace-loving Americans

can be.” Playing together for peace with people from vastly different cultures and building bridges across narrow boundaries of gender, caste, creed, and country is one of the precious gifts of the IEGP project. This has stimulated networks and peace partnerships with USA and Aussie InterPlayers. Trish Watts, the co-founder of InterPlay Australia, in a CD inspired by her trip to India, sings of a new found sense of freedom: “I danced with freedom in India. She wrapped her arms around me and she said, ‘Live your life!’”

This year the focus of the peace exchange was on a pilgrimage which included dancing with the tribals of Dedhiapada to the drumbeat of India and pulsing with its interreligious heartbeat at the various shrines in Varanasi. Jaime and Ligia da Fonseca, a married couple on the InterPlay India team, who organized this phase of the peace pilgrimage, share a heartfelt experience:

Together we all began connecting in Mumbai with InterPlayers of different backgrounds (from U.S., Australia & India) . . . playing, storytelling, singing, dancing, reflecting, remaining still, and connecting... a dance that flows into community life. While playing with the tribals in Dedhiapada (S. Gujarat) we flowed into their community dance and life. What a unique experience to realize that their life is all about giving and receiving – with care for creation, connecting with each other and with the Beyond. Carrying this passionate culture in our heart we flowed on to Varanasi to experience the ‘heart of India’ that craves for the Divine.

The peace pilgrimage turned out to be a beautiful opportunity to engage in the triple dialogue advocated by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) with cultures, religions, and the poor. At every step of the way we were constantly confronted by the challenges of ‘globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization’.

Experience shows that marginalized groups like the tribals revel in InterPlay because they are much more in touch with their bodies and closer to nature than urbanized folks. When it comes to any dialogue involving words invariably we are at an advantage because of our privileged economic and educational resources. However,

playing with the poor is a totally different game. On the level of the body there is a much better chance of establishing connection as equals. Play is a fantastic leveler of the unbalanced power equation. InterPlay can be explored as a providential pedagogy for empowering the poor since the most precious resource that the poor have been blessed with is their bodies. It is a privilege to learn from the poor and discover the rare pristine beauty in the impoverished face of Christ. Playing with the poor brings abundant blessings of peace with the rare gift of mutual empowerment.

### **New Frontiers and New Nations**

Pope Benedict XVI gave a clarion call to the Jesuits at GC 35 to build bridges and explore new frontiers in order “to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach.”<sup>23</sup> GC 35 made a creative response appropriate to the changing context of our times: “‘Nations’ beyond geographical definitions await us, ‘nations’ that today include those who are poor and displaced, those who are profoundly lonely, those who ignore God’s existence and those who use God as an instrument for political purposes. There are new ‘nations’ and we have been sent to them.”<sup>24</sup>

Together with international networks, InterPlay has helped to build significant bridges with people of other faiths and cultures. Thanks to the initiatives of committed lay collaborators InterPlay India is now decisively moving towards exploring new frontiers and new nations with specific target groups from the marginalized like tribals, abused women and poor people with physical and mental disabilities.

Besides the enthusiastic response to InterPlay from marginalized groups there has been encouraging feedback from the diverse groups of teachers and students, therapists and activists, married couples and doctors, religious and corporate personnel, from

---

<sup>23</sup> GC 35, D.1, no. 6.

<sup>24</sup> GC 35, D. 2, no. 22.

various parts of India and abroad who are hungering for new forms of spiritual practice to meet the challenges of our times. Any genuine attempt to pursue a holistic body wisdom practice opens us to interconnections with the wider cosmic body. It is leading us to embrace the new frontier of the exploited earth and offer our humble contribution of sowing seeds “to co-create a universe interplaying for peace”, the vision of InterPlay India.

Jaime and Ligia da Fonseca, who have dedicated their lives to Church ministry, initiated InterPlay for students of St. Stanislaus High School as a part of the spirituality component of the Jesuit Certificate Program (JCP). At a workshop one of the boys with a mystical radiance on his face exclaimed: “I felt my soul was searching for my body.” Another amazing pearl of body wisdom from a 12-year old: “My heart tells me what the most loving thing to do in a situation is.”

Hazel Fernandes too has given up an attractive corporate managerial job and committed herself to the mission of InterPlay India as an Ignatian lay collaborator. As a major part of her option for the poor she feels moved to play with marginalized groups like commercial sex workers. This calls to mind the first ministry of St. Ignatius in Rome which was at the House of St. Martha, a daring lay collaborative venture to rehabilitate penitent prostitutes.

While it has been a source of great consolation to explore new frontiers of body wisdom it has also been gratifying to note that I am part of a glorious Jesuit tradition on dance. In contrast to those who think that the only way to pray is by bowing or kneeling there are several Jesuit dancers and dance enthusiasts worldwide who believe that to be truly contemplative in action calls for using one’s whole body in worship and work for the greater glory of God. In the Yearbook of the Society of Jesus 2008 William O’Malley informs us that “of the ten French books on the history and theory of dance published between 1658 and 1760, five were by Jesuits.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., “The Cultural Mission of the Society of Jesus”,

The French Jesuits developed a modern system of education that gave a prominent place to performing arts, particularly to dance, that was widely adopted by other colleges in Europe. Jesuits have contributed to the rich history of the performing arts by being teachers, choreographers, innovators and dancers. One cannot forget the amusing incident of a limping Ignatius doing a Basque dance to dispel the depression of one of his serious-minded former disciples.<sup>26</sup> This little known Jesuit tradition of finding God in dance ignites a spark of motivation to continue kindling fires of peace through InterPlay at a time of depressing violence.

The Jesuit General Fr. Adolfo Nicolas SJ at an international conference on 23 April 2010 on “Networking Jesuit Higher Education for the Globalizing World” in Mexico City mentioned the novel findings of a noted Japanese researcher. In a book on Neurobiology and Education the researcher claimed that his study showed that Chinese rural children had better developed brains than the children of Tokyo as the former learnt by playing. What would happen if Jesuits whether in education or social action, pastoral ministry or formation, were to adopt a more playful approach to life? If Ignatian spirituality were reinterpreted from the countercultural perspective of play would it ignite Jesuits to kindle fires of peace? Would adopting a playful pedagogy in giving the Spiritual Exercises attract genuine seekers and transform them to become contemplative in action in a globalised world? Experiments and research in this area will open up new frontiers for Jesuit ministry enabling us to explore new nations with greater courage and compassion.

Harriet Platts from USA, one of the InterPlay pilgrims, referring to the youtube on InterPlay with the physically challenged at Cheshire Home and the children from the slums of Dahisar

---

*JESUITS: Yearbook of the Society of Jesus 2008*, (Rome: General Curia, 2007), p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> Hedwig Lewis SJ, *With Jubilant Hearts*, (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2005), p. 24.

(Through Dance Jesuit Connects with the Poor in India, <http://www.nationaljesuitnews.com>) poignantly expresses solidarity with the spirit of new frontiers and new nations:

I found myself with tears pooling in my eyes.

Tears of wishing I could be along there...

Tears of gratitude for those whom you're having an opportunity to serve...

Tears for new modes and ways to be 'play/grace-missionaries'...

Tears of joy and hope for what is springing forth because you're willing to step forward and say YES...

Please know my heart is with you as you continue to play in grace and freedom in India!!!

# **THE BODY: A SANCTIFIED DWELLING OF THE DIVINE**

## **Towards an Ignatian understanding of the Body**

**Ambrose Jeyaraj, S.J.**

*(Ambrose Jeyaraj is the Secretary for the Jesuit Conference of South Asia Secretariat for Ignatian spirituality. He is based in De Nobili College, Pune, where he has started a Centre for Ignatian Spirituality. At the moment, the Centre is offering annual programmes in Ignatian spirituality and other lectures. He has a PhD in spirituality, has been Novice Master In Andhra province and teaches theology in Jnanadeepa, Pune) Vidyapeeth, Pune.)*

### **1. Introduction**

We live in a world where the body is celebrated: over emphasis on the fitness of the body, a culture of the fashion show, spending extravagantly on one's body. We can say that the body is adored. At the same time, spirituality in the past often considered the body as subordinate to the mind and the spirit. It has to be disciplined through fasting and penances. How did Ignatius view the body? He considered the human person in a more holistic manner. From his own experience, he was aware that the person is a confluence of emotions, thoughts, desires, body and bodily needs, culture and cultural influences, past, present and the future. Ignatian

anthropology has the following characteristics: (a) Human person is a three dimensional being – body, psyche and spirit. The self is the centre of the person. (b). Within these dimensions lie many facets, namely memory (cognitive, affective and visual), cognition (perceiving, thinking, understanding), body, affects, desires, goals, will, behaviours, values, convictions, needs, attitudes, convictions, experiences, relationships, images, rooted desires, imaginations, familial, cultural, social and political backgrounds etc. (c). Human experience – including the experience of God – is the merging point of all these facets of human living: hence the mystery dimension of being human. (d). Affects are directly experienced in the body. Its symptoms are felt in the body. (e). Human desire is fundamental to Spiritual Life. (f). The human is called to be a pilgrim, one who is in continuous journey. (g). The human is open to the transcendent. (h). The human person is capable of being transformed by love. In this paper, I explore the way Ignatius understands the body by studying his writings and some writings of his companions.

## ***2. Body as Companion in the Spiritual Journey***

The history of spirituality reveals that the body was often considered as a hindrance to the experience of God. The dualistic understanding of person [body and soul], which considered body as subordinated to the soul, was prevalent down the centuries and “asceticism came to be seen as a higher form of life than marriage and practices of bodily mortification took on great importance.”<sup>1</sup> Gnosticism was perhaps the culmination of that mode of thinking and was condemned by the Church. Though “mainline Christianity” never considered the body as evil, throughout the middle ages and in the late medieval spiritualities up to Vatican II,<sup>2</sup> the body was

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan A Ross, p.95.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II sees person as union of the body and the spirit and says that one must not despise one’s bodily life [GS 14]. It also underlines the importance of the body in the liturgy and prayer – use of the vernaculars and of music which necessarily involves the bodily senses in the participation of the Eucharist [Cf. *Sacrosanctum Consilium*].

considered as a suspect in spiritual life and consequently religious life was considered superior to married life. Thus Christianity modeled abnegation, mortification and penances.<sup>3</sup>

Ignatius grew in faith to consider the body as a friend and companion in the spiritual journey. He does not outright condemn the body and the bodily senses. It is true that the theme 'abnegation' is prominent in Ignatian spirituality. The purpose of the Exercises is the 'conquest of the self' [The Spiritual Exercises (SE) 21, 87] and the condition with which one grows in spiritual life is the shedding of self love, self will and self interest [SE 189].<sup>4</sup> Ignatius speaks about 'selfishness' or 'self centeredness' as hindering the growth of a person. At the same time, Ignatius slowly grew in respecting the role of body in his spiritual life. This growth had a journey and that is one of the reasons why Ignatius always called himself a pilgrim.

In the initial years of his life, Ignatius had identified himself with his body idolizing it and its senses [Autobiography (AB) 1]. The partial shattering of his body at Pamplona, and his resistance to de-idolize his body [AB 2], gripped by the fear of his body being disintegrated (death) [AB 3] shattered this partial identity of himself. A human person is not just one's body, but also spirit. Therefore he begins to observe the various movements of the spirit [AB 6-12].

Thus, in the beginning of this new journey, Ignatius considered the body as an enemy to his spiritual growth. Hence, he did great penances, fasting and mortifications. He began to fast in excess, allowing his hair and nails to grow [AB 19, 27]. Though he was

---

<sup>3</sup> Susan A Ross, pp: 94-96.

<sup>4</sup> Though today some directors of the Exercises would feel that this 'language of self' is one sided and inconsistent with the holistic ethos of spirituality, saying that the SE does not speak about self respect, self-esteem or self worth. At the same time Ignatian experts do agree that these terms are due to the modern psychology and that the absence of these words are more due to the fact that language of this sort did not exist in the 16th century than that Ignatius was promoting low self esteem. Cf. Michael Ivens, S.J., and Joseph A. Munitiz, S.J.,(Ed.), p. 104.

doing penance, Ignatius still was centered only on one dimension – the body. In the very process, Ignatius slowly discovers that it is not the body per se which is evil. The body is created by God and hence he discovers that the objects of the desires of his senses made him a slave. From here there is a shift in his horizon. He begins to understand himself as larger than his body. The body is only one dimension and the senses are important means for affective prayer. “He gave up those extremes he had formerly practiced and he now cut his nails and his hair” [AB 29]. A spiritual journey that began with the idolisation of the body, entered into the zone of dislike towards one’s body and finally discovered that the body is not evil but a friend and companion in his pilgrimage.

### ***3. Fine-tuning of the Body: Rules on Penance [SE 80-87] and on Food [SE 210-217]***

Today people from all walks of life – whether it be parents’ advice to the children, or the advice of the doctors to the patients - would agree that if one wants to achieve one’s goal in life – be it study or health - one has to discipline one’s body. We are not talking about getting slimmer in order to sell or promote one’s body – for that is selfishness. Gluttony (over feeding one’s body, which is considered one of the seven vices in Christian spirituality), for example, besides making the person physically sick, affects not only one’s inner freedom and makes one a slave to one’s likes and dislikes, but also makes one insensitive to the needs of the persons around – be it family members or others with whom one eats.

Ignatius was very much aware that the fine tuning of one’s body always fine tunes one’s mind; and the fine tuning of one’s body and mind fine tunes one’s spirit; and the fine tuning of the entire person means that the person is fine tuned to the whisperings of the Spirit. The evil spirit enters into the person through making the person “imagine the delights and pleasures of the senses, in order to hold them fast and plunge them deeper into their sins and vices.”<sup>5</sup> The

---

<sup>5</sup> SE 314.2 (bold letters are mine).

need for food in order to survive provokes the fear in the organism and the fear in turn activates the imagination (objects of satisfaction) which searches not food but pleasure.<sup>6</sup> Therefore Ignatius by giving these rules is not promoting fasting and penances for their own sake, for each set of these rules [SE 210-217, 313-344, 328-336, 337-344 & 352-370] is not given to all retreatants but according to the needs of the individual.<sup>7</sup> Ignatius admonishes both the one who gives up penances [SE 89.2] and indulges in over eating [SE 212.1, 216] and the one who does excessive penances and fasting thinking that the body can bear it [SE 89.4, 213]. The real fine tuning of the body that Ignatius<sup>8</sup> envisages is to fine tune the mind [SE 87.2, 217] and never to wound or harm the body [SE 84.2.3., 86.2]. The purpose of these rules in other words is to purify the motivation or the desire of the person who indulges in fasting or over eating. Hence the question is what is s/he searching or desiring in and through the food that s/he is eating or not eating or how much penance a person is doing or not doing?

Ignatius realizes that the purpose of asceticism is not to alienate the body nor the self for God, for this is counterproductive, in the sense that it still makes the person egocentric – he wants to do it for God. The purpose of these rules on the other hand is to prepare oneself so that God could do His work in and through the exercitant. That is why Da Camara in his memorial says: “I remember that once when I was speaking of a good religious [Friar Luis de Montoya (1497-1569), the then Provincial of Augustinians in Portugal] whom he knew and I said that he was a man of much prayer, the Father [Ignatius] altered my remark and said, “He is a man of much

---

<sup>6</sup> Personal notes taken from the Lecture, “*For the Greater Glory of God*” delivered by Pierre Jacob, S.J. on these rules at ‘A Jesuit Confluence: Ignatian PsychoSpirituality’, Sadhana Institute, Lonavala, on April 12, 2011.; Also cf. AB 27.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Directory*, Ch.38, no.1, as mentioned in the End note no. 110 of *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p.181.

<sup>8</sup> Ignatius does not use this word.

mortification.”<sup>9</sup> Hence the mortification has a purpose: it is to fine tune the body in order that the exercitant is able to be united in the Spirit. Fine tuning of the body enables the exercitant to be receptive to the power of grace.

#### **4. *Prayer of the Body: The Application of Senses [SE 121-126].***

In a world of spirituality, where the senses were considered a hindrance or even an enemy to spiritual growth, the body remained ambivalent and ambiguous and meditations and discursive prayers were considered superior means of union with God. The senses were considered a cause of distraction and hence one needs to follow the modesty of the senses.<sup>10</sup> The application of the senses is one of the methods of prayer, which Ignatius proposes to the exercitant. This method involves less reasoning and thinking. It is “not discursive, but merely rests in the sensible qualities of things, such as the sights, sounds, and the like, and finds in them enjoyment, delight and spiritual profit.”<sup>11</sup> It was an adaptation of the several traditions beginning with Origen (185-254) who stressed the importance of being able to hear the wisdom of God, St. Augustine (354-430) whose Confessions illuminated the importance of spiritual senses, and St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), who claims that through the spiritual senses one can overcome sin.<sup>12</sup> It is a prayer of the senses, used at the end of the day and matter for this prayer is also different from other prayers.<sup>13</sup>

We are our bodies and we have our bodies. One can have access

---

<sup>9</sup> Goncalves da Camara, p.116 (no.195), (*brackets within the quote is added*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John H. Wright, S.J., pp: 771-775

<sup>11</sup> *Directory* of 1599, Ch.20, no.3, as quoted in the End note no. 66 of *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, pp: 163-164.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hugo Rahner, S.J., pp: 198-202.

<sup>13</sup> Ignatius never articulated what he meant by this method. Hence there is always uncertainty regarding the real meaning he intended through this method. Cf. Philip Endean, '*Aplicación de Sentidos*'.

to another through the mediation of one's body, be it gestures or language etc.<sup>14</sup> Ignatius had discovered that body reveals one's inner world; it could meaningfully express one's inner affects of devotion and reverence for the Lord. Thus, body and senses are an important medium through which the exercitant could express his faith. They become an effective mode of expressing one's desire and love for the Lord. By introducing this method of prayer during the important moments of the retreat,<sup>15</sup> Ignatius expects the retreatant to use the senses as a medium through which s/he experiences the divine.

The body, for Ignatius, is the locus of human experience, including the experience of God. The body is the locus of sin as well as the means of salvation too. It is in and through one's body that a person responds to grace. In this context we can see how on important prayer moments, Ignatius asks the retreatant to enter into the mystery of heavenly places and have a direct dialogue with the divine persons and beg for what one desires. In other words, Ignatius sees the embodied-person as one who is capable of entering into the divine milieu and has a loving conversation with the divine persons<sup>16</sup> (colloquies) in a "way as a friend speaks to another" [SE 54]. Thus, not only is the embodied spirit (person) capable of being in front of the divine persons, but s/he also stands in front of the divine persons in and through his/her body and senses.

The body is associated with prayer. Is there a prayer of the body?<sup>17</sup> All through the SE Ignatius proposes prayers of the body depending on the purpose of the particular exercises. Thus for example the body prays through tears<sup>18</sup>, through appropriate postures<sup>19</sup>, through experiencing oneself as being in chains [SE 74], taking a few steps away from the place of prayer with reverence [SE 75], making

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John O'Donnell, .S.J. p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SE 65-70, 121-126, 129, 132-134, 204, 208, 209, 226, 227.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. SE 54, 62-63, 64, 147-148, 156, 164, 199, 225.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Denys Gorce, p. 2377.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. SE 55, 87, 195.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. SE 76, 239, 252.

appropriate changes in the room regarding light [79], through not seeing or laughing [SE 80-81], through penances [SE 82-87] and through an appropriate manner of eating [210-217]. Thus Ignatian mysticism does not incline the exercitant away from the senses and the world,<sup>20</sup> for Ignatius knows that the exercitant is a body-person and that s/he has to make all his choices in and through his body.

### ***5. Body and It's Health: An Important Factor to be Part of the Body of the Society***

The body is one of the important dimensions of being human. Life is lived in and through body. Our fundamental identity also is related to our body. In the Constitutions, the word 'body' is related to the body of the person, the body of the Society, the body the Church, and the Body of Christ.<sup>21</sup> The self-perception of one's body is reflected in one's view of the Society, of the Church and of the world. Thus, for example, Ignatius wants the body to be healthy and effective. This is clearly expressed by Ignatius, when he speaks about the bodily impediments of the one who joins the Society [Cons 44, 185, 186]; and in the context of being obedient to the infirmarian - one who takes care of the body [Cons 89]. Ignatius also sees the importance of healthy body to carry on the labour which is required in our way of proceeding [Cons 216]. He also gives an entire chapter on the needed care one has to take for physical fitness [Cons 292-306]. Again when he speaks of the qualities of the General, Ignatius stresses that health, age, physical strength and even appearance are all important factors in serving the Lord [Cons 731, 769]. In SE Ignatius uses 21 different kinds of affects that directly touch the dimension of the body. Thus Ignatius respects the human body and recognizes the importance of good health, not only in one's spiritual journey but also in one's service.

---

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Ryan, p.51.

<sup>21</sup> The reverence and respect that Ignatius had for body is witnessed in his reverence for the Body of the Lord in the Eucharist. He had a special devotion to the Eucharist (Body and Blood of the Lord). The Spiritual diary reveals this reverential love for the Eucharist. His waiting for many months before he celebrated the Eucharist also reveals this love.

Ignatius was very much concerned about the health and wellbeing of his companions.<sup>22</sup> Since “Rome is unhealthy, especially for foreigners, he was afraid that they would suffer from frequent and serious sickness”.<sup>23</sup> So he bought a villa house at Rome.<sup>24</sup> Ignatius took great care of all of his companions’ health<sup>25</sup> and would dispense all the rules, only for the reasons of health, says Da Camara. For example Andre des Freux, who joined the Society in 1541 “wore silk clothes for the whole of his novitiate,”<sup>26</sup> a dispensation given by Ignatius on account of his ill health.<sup>27</sup>

Again “our Father used to order all the members of the Society who arrived in Rome for the first time to take some exercise in the fresh air of Rome every morning before sunrise, so that the local climate, which is harmful to the foreigners, should not harm them”<sup>28</sup> and Da Camara continues by saying that when he stopped doing the above mentioned exercises after “two or three days” and when Ignatius came to know about this, Ignatius reprimanded him and “imposed” on him some penances.<sup>29</sup>

## ***6. The Body Experiences and Expresses Human Emotions***

“Of all the creatures on the earth, the humans are the most emotional.”<sup>30</sup> One experiences a wide variety of feelings with different intensity. Born in a warrior society, Ignatius had an overweening ambition, a remorseless will, a passionate indulgence in unrestrained emotion, a readiness to kill anyone in combat with passion and in cold blood

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Da Camara in his book narrates many incidents where we see Ignatius’ love for the sick. Cf. Goncalves da Camara, Remembering Inigo.

<sup>23</sup> Goncalves da Camara, p. 83 (no.135)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibid., p.53 (no.88).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 26 (no.39).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Goncalves da Camara, p. 65 (no.109).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Richard S. Lazarus & Bernice N. Lazarus, p.3

and to have rebellious communities destroyed.<sup>31</sup> He was aware of the different types of affects in him, for example the feelings like pride,<sup>32</sup> contempt [SE 146, 167], indignation and hate [AB 15], vainglory [AB 1, 2] etc.; the existential feelings like shame, grief, anxiety [SE 76, 315], loneliness, depression [AB 24], guilt [AB 22-23]: and emotions that are oriented towards God, like consolation, contrition, and desolation and emotions that are related to his own inner desires etc. Human emotions are responses to the reality and they are experienced and expressed in one's body. One experiences joy and jumps and another experiences anger and hits or yet another experiences sadness and cries. In other words, the body is the carrier of human emotions, which influence all one's choices and behaviours. That is why, Ignatius stresses that the retreatant must be aware of his emotions, the interior movements that stir him to action [SE 176]. The very purpose of the SE is to order one's affects [SE 1, 21]. If the retreatant is not affected or moved interiorly, Ignatius asks the director to put plenty of questions, to verify if the person is making the Exercises properly [SE 6].

“Feelings are the life of the body just as thinking is the life of the mind” says Alexander Lowen.<sup>33</sup> Feelings not only reveal the inner world, but also influences the way one relates to external reality. The word *sentir* is the Ignatian vocabulary for discernment, and signifies “felt knowledge.” Ignatius relies on affects to evaluate the authenticity of one's choices or the direction, towards which one is moving, as well as to assess and link inner and outer reality [SE 313-336]. In fact, for Ignatius affects are the ‘raw materials’ for discerning God's will. In other words, one's body is involved in one's discernment of God's will. Similarly confirmation of what is decided is perceived in the body. It is for this reason that Ignatius asks the retreatant to ask for the grace of different motions like shame, sorrow, contrition, tears, confusion, pain, sense of detestation, consolation, desolation, pity, mercy, joy, sorrow etc.

---

<sup>31</sup> James L, Connor, S.J. (Ed.), pp: 3-10.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. SE 50, 142, 146, 322.

<sup>33</sup> Will Jones, LPC, Book Review: *The Spirituality of the Body* by Alexander Lowen,

## **7. Conclusion**

Every understanding of the body has an implicit anthropology. The way one understands one's body reveals one's implicit understanding of who a person is. Ignatius understands a person as one who is an incarnated transcendent in journey. He always saw himself as a pilgrim, one who was on a journey. Interestingly, in the Autobiography he used the word 'pilgrim' 78 times to refer to himself. It is this attitude that makes him free to move further in his spiritual journey. In other words he sees a person as an embodied spirit. In this understanding of person there is a convergence of many of his experiences. A person is created in the image and likeness of God and at the same time, the person is incarnated. He is historically rooted and limited by his body. Being incarnated is the very nature of being human, both to a saint and a sinner. Hence being incarnated is not the same as being evil. This historical rootedness, if one is not careful, has the possibility of camouflaging the image of God in the person, and thus it can even hinder and block a person from being conscious of being in the image and likeness of God. The incarnatedness is expressed ultimately in the death of the organism. Thus, in the human, there is a fear of being incarnated and s/he wants to break this limit.

Contrastingly, one of the characteristics of being incarnated is longing and desiring, which is manifested in the innate desire for life (Cf. Gen 3:1-4) and desire to procreate (Cf. Gen 1:28). This longing and desiring is not object oriented, nor is it related to satisfying one's particular needs and wants. Though this longing is expressed in and through longing for limited objects and limiting needs, this longing is more profound than object related desires. The insatiable longing that the human person experiences ultimately reveals that one's yearnings are never quenched by any specific objects, and that the human desires and ultimately longs to be like Him, in whose image one is created. Thus the fear of being limited and the fear of being incarnated is balanced by the desire and longing for life everlasting. It is this dynamics of fear and desire that eventually carries life forward in an organism.

Thus the person experiences in himself a discrepancy between the willingness of the spirit and the weakness of the body and Jesus was aware of this fact [Mk 14:38]. Body is the metaphor for the dwelling of the Holy One or the Temple that will be rebuilt in three days [Jn 2:19]. Paul also addresses the 'body' as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" [1 Cor 6:19] and he uses the same metaphor of the body to express the relation between the community of believers and Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church [Rom 12:2; Col 1:18].<sup>34</sup> Ignatius was aware of the influences the body and senses have on one's choices in life. At the same time, his writings and his life, especially his concern for the sick, makes us realise that Ignatius understands the body as a sanctified space for the divine, who continuously labours in human history, human spirit and human body.

## Bibliography/References

BATAIRWA KUBUYA, Paulin, SX, "Body and Prayer: Comparing Taoist and Christian Methods of Meditation," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, Volume 45 (2008) Number 1, accessed in <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/content/body-and-prayer-comparing-taoist-and-christian-methods-meditation> on February 10, 2011.

CONNOR, James L., S.J., (Ed.), *The Dynamism of Desire*. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006.

DA CAMARA, Goncalves, *Remembering Inigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (The memorial of Luis Goncalves da Camara, (Trans.) By Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz, S.J., UK: Gracewing, 2005, (first published by The Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis in 2004).*

ENDEAN, Philip, 'Aplicación de Sentidos', in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, edited by José García de Castro and others (Bilbao: Mensajero, 2007), 184-192. (in Spanish), pp: 1-7, accessed in [www.theway.org.uk/endeandweb/sentidos.doc](http://www.theway.org.uk/endeandweb/sentidos.doc) on February 10, 2011.

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Pauline Batairwa Kubuya, SX, "Body and Prayer,

GORCE, Denys, « Corps » – Spiritualité et Hygiène, in Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Tome II, Paris: Beauchesne, 1953, pp: 2338-2378.

IVENS, Michael, S.J., and MUNITIZ, Joseph A., S.J.,(Ed.), Keeping in Touch: Posthumous papers on Ignatian Topics, Including Tributes by Various Authors, UK: Gracewing, 2007.

JONES, Will, LPC, Book Review: The Spirituality of the Body by Alexander Lowen, M.D. accessed at <http://www.pastoral-counseling.org/Articles/Body.htm> on February 10, 2011.

LAZARUS, Richard S. & LAZARUS Bernice N., Passion and Reason: Making sense of our Emotions, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

LOYOLA, Ignatius, Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms, Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.

LOYOLA, Ignatius, The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, A Translation and Commentary by George E.Ganss, S.J., Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash., 1993.

LOYOLA, Ignatius, Testament and Testimony: The Memoires of Ignatius of Loyola, (trans.) By Paramananda Divarkar, S.J., Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003.

O'DONNELL, John S.J., "The Trinitarian Vision of Ignatius Loyola in Contemporary Theological Perspective", Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, Vol. XVI, 1985:1 (48), pp: 25-76.

RAHNER, Hugo, S.J., Ignatius the Theologian, (trans.) Michael Barry, NY: Herder and Herder, 1968.

ROSS, Susan A., "Body" in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, (Ed.) Michael Downey, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India., 1995, pp: 93-100.

RYAN, Thomas, Prayer of Heart and Body, NY: Paulist Press, 1995.

WRIGHT, John H., S.J., "Prayer", in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, pp: 764 -775.

# **IGNATIAN APPROACH TO THE BODY**

## **The Place of Bodily Senses in Ignatian spirituality**

**John Joseph, SJ**

*(John Joseph is Novice Master of the Andhra province. He has been an Instructor of Tertians, after an earlier stint as Novice Master.)*

In the history of spirituality, whether Christian or non-Christian, there have been various ways of understanding the body. Two main conceptions of the body, represented by Greek and Christian anthropologies, have influenced very much the human approach towards body all along history. The Greek conception is more or less an extreme dualism of body and soul. Consequently those who are influenced by this philosophy treat the body as something evil. The Bible, on the other hand, views a human being as a substantial unity, using terms such as flesh, soul and breath of life to designate the whole person. Though Christian spirituality evolves from the Bible we find different schools of spirituality and a spectrum of approaches towards bodily senses. And also in the context of the misuse of, obsession with and extreme adulation of the human body which are prevalent in modern consumerist culture it is good to remind ourselves as Jesuits of the Ignatian way of approaching our body.

## Evolution in the Ignatian Attitude towards Bodily Senses

A person's spirituality arises out of the person's divine experience. It is expressed through certain concepts of God, of human nature and of the world. And also it leads to certain fundamental attitudes which are habitual and which flow into the person's day-to-day life. This gives rise to principles to live by.

Ignatian spirituality arose from his mystical experiences of God, especially when he was at Manresa. In his *Autobiography* Ignatius recounts many mystical experiences. The object on which these focused varied considerably: insights into Trinity, Christ's humanity in the Eucharist, the way the world was created, vision of Mary. All these divine illuminations confirmed him in his faith and formed his spiritual life. Among these mystical experiences the one that stands out is the one that is known as "the sublime illumination" at the river Cardoner.

As he was sitting beside the road with his face turned towards the river, in a flash the eyes of his understanding began to be opened. His mind was flooded with so sublime an illumination that everything seemed new to him; he felt himself transformed, as it were, interiorly into an entirely new man. He never revealed exactly the content of the illumination. But it seems to have been a profound encounter with God as He really is so that all creation was seen in a new light and acquired a new meaning and relevance for him. This experience enabled him to find God in all things. This grace of finding God in all things would evolve as one of the central characteristics of his spirituality.

Ignatius has transmitted his profound understanding of Christian faith into his *Spiritual Exercises*, which opens with the *Principle and Foundation* – a masterly synthesis of all that God had communicated to him. Ignatius saw everything as coming from and returning to God. At the heart of this movement of creation and redemption is the Word of God made flesh and crucified.

From his Manresan experience Ignatius was able to understand the value of bodily experiences and their place in one's spiritual journey towards God. In the first phase of his sojourn at Manresa, as he himself acknowledges, he was not yet skilled in the spiritual life. So we find his attitude towards his body exaggeratedly negative. In his eagerness to atone for his past sinful life and to subdue his body he took up severe penances and mortifications during his initial stage at Manresa. Thus under the powerful urge of his desire to reverse his former scale of values he sometimes overstepped the bounds of discretion.

In his later days at Manresa Ignatius seems to have realized some of the excesses into which he had fallen in the matter of penance. So he began to moderate his ascetical practices. He came to understand that a moderate regimen is good for bodily health and excessive rigour can be more dangerous than excessive indulgence. He also realized that the purpose of ascetical practices is to expel all desire that was not for the love of God and that too rigorous an asceticism impairs health and the full powers of perception and also weakens the capacity for love.

The practical wisdom regarding the value of the body in his spiritual pursuit, which he had gained from his mistakes, Ignatius made use of in his guidance of others, especially in his directions enshrined the *Spiritual Exercises* – in the method of the exercises, in the 'Annotations' and in the 'Additions'. He brings into line with the desired end as far as possible everything that affects consciousness – emotions, thoughts, imagination, senses, posture, the effects of the environment.

In the *Principle and Foundation* Ignatius stipulates his conviction by stating "It is for the human person that the other things on the face of the earth are created, as helps to this end (to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord)". Here "the other things" refers not only to the created things outside of us, human person, but also our personal make-up – body, mind, emotion, imagination, talents, qualities etc. As a norm for the use of things he wants a person "to use these things in *so far as* they help towards this end, and be free of them *as far as*

they stand in the way of it". Commenting on these words of Ignatius, Michael Ivens says, "The idea of creatures as 'helps to an end' serves to pin-point a basic principle of Ignatius' 'theology of the world'. In God's creative project, there is a unity of purpose, and the key to that purpose is God's project for humankind. In relation to the transcendent end of the human person, the world is not a neutral backdrop, still in itself an obstacle or embarrassment. Immediate reality in a sense is the raw material of our relationship with God; it is for the most part precisely in and through our commerce with this reality that our praise, reverence and service of God come about".<sup>1</sup> Of course, here the word 'use' does not refer only to physical use, but to the entire gamut of human responses to reality – interest, love, every kind of creativity, enjoyment.

### **Experience in relationship to Ignatian spirituality**

An Ignatian retreat is not a head trip, though the intellect is involved. It is first and foremost an experience, a lived and living experience. The retreatant is not asked to come face-to face with the objective face of the real, somewhere out there. He is urged to be present to reality or truth as a whole (bodied) person. Ignatian seems to resonate with A. N. Whitehead's remark: "The living organ of an experience is the living body as a whole".<sup>2</sup>

In proposing his points for exercises Ignatius includes in a significant way the five sense organs as avenues of communication with the external world. For example, in the exercise on the Incarnation Ignatius asks the retreatant to look along with the Trinity 'down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth' and also to listen to men and women swearing and blaspheming, to the Three Persons saying, "Let us work redemption of the human race" and to Mary saying, "Let it happen to me as you say".

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*. Herefordshire: Gracewings Publishing, 1998, p.30.

<sup>2</sup> A.N.Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1933, p. 225.

In the meditation on hell Ignatius invites the retreatant to smell 'the smoke, the sulphur, the filth, and corruption', to taste 'the bitterness of tears, sadness, and remorse of conscience', and to touch and 'feel the flames'. In the contemplation on the agony in Gethsemane he wants the retreatant to feel the sweating of blood, and in the contemplation on the crucified Jesus dryness of his thirsting lips. Thus the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting and touching are used in the exercises. Such application of the retreatant's bodily senses is expected to move him/her to a higher form of prayer, where the spiritual senses of the human heart are involved.

As one of the ways of praying Ignatius also gives an exercise on the five senses (SE 247). Here the subject matter is the retreatant himself/herself as sensate. The way he or she leads his/her life as sensate is examined in the light of a developing appreciation of this dimension of human existence, a perfect understanding of the fact that precisely as sensate a person is made for God's glory and praise.

### **For Making the Exercises Better**

As a help to make the Spiritual Exercises better Ignatius gives certain guidelines in the Annotations. In Annotation twenty he recommends withdrawal from the place of residence, from friends and acquaintances, from all those cares which absorb body, mind and heart for the person who wants to make much progress. Because Ignatius was aware that preoccupation with external things or activities would give the retreatant too little leisure to listen to God. Thus he ensures that the full power of the person is put to use in making the retreat.

As for the Additions, they are given as a way of mobilizing the whole person in search for the divine will. Since Ignatius has a comprehensive view of human person, the retreatant's body, imagination, mind, senses, feeling and will are all brought into play to reach the goal of the Exercises. All the human sources are harnessed to the work of God in the retreatant.

To enlist the cooperation of the bodily senses Ignatius advises the retreatant ‘to avoid laughing or saying anything to provoke laughter, and also to control the eyes’. (SE 79, 80) Though he proposes as part of penance ‘to chastise the body’ yet he cautions the retreatant that while inflicting pain on the body he/she should take care that ‘pain should be felt in the flesh and penetrate to the bone, so that the result is pain not illness’. (SE 85, 86)

To prepare the body for prayer the retreatant is told to stand a pace or two away from the place of prayer and to “make an act of profound reverence (SE 75). In Ignatius’ opinion the whole person must show reverence for the Divine Majesty.

In initiating the retreatant to different spiritual exercises Ignatius appeals to the spiritual faculties like memory, reflection, will and imagination. This broad appeal to the spiritual faculties does not imply that he forgets the body. He gives advice about eating, sleeping, and what time of day or night certain exercises are to be made. He makes recommendation on one’s posture while in prayer (SE 76), when to close the shades of windows as to keep out the sunlight (SE 79) or go outside to feel its warmth (SE 229). There is even a prayer exercise that calls for taking a breath between each word of a prayer like ‘Our Father’ (SE 258).

None of these methods or recommendations for prayer may be peculiar to Ignatian spirituality. They are found in earlier schools of Christian and non-Christian spirituality. If anything is peculiar about the Ignatian mark on them, it is the freedom with which they may be employed or put aside. For him no direction is sacrosanct, unless it is of ‘whatever helps’. They are left to the director’s or retreatant’s discernment.

## **Conclusion**

As we can see, the Ignatian view of the world is quite distinctive. Unlike many ascetics of old he did not look upon it as something evil to be fled from and shunned as much as possible. Nor like St. Bernard did he consider it better to avoid creatures than to use

them. He is more practical in his outlook. For him everything is to be regarded and treated solely with reference to the purpose of one's life which is the glory of God.

He conceives human nature as something that needs chastening and training, but basically it is good and to be developed and put to work in the cause of Christ. If all creatures have their value, *a fortiori* human nature has. Bodily strength is not to be diminished by indiscreet austerities, but to be brought under control and made effective for the service of God.

Corresponding to the ideas that one conceives of God and the human being, will be one's ideal of perfection, that is, what one takes to be the completely right relation between God and the humans. The followers of St. Ignatius would be entirely submissive to their Creator and Supreme Lord. They would make God's will their own and seek to fulfil it in their life by those means that God prefers. To the divine liberality they would also respond with magnanimous liberality. Enrolled in the apostolic campaign with Christ, they would endeavour to associate themselves as closely as possible with their great Leader, to work with Him as effectively as possible, and to imitate Him in all respects, especially in bearing poverty and humiliation nobly. Thus, in everything they would strive to love and serve the Divine Majesty as persons gifted with bodily senses.

# WOMEN, BODY AND SPIRITUALITY

**Metti Amirtham, SCC**

*(Metti Amirtham is a sister of the Holy Cross of Chavenaux. She has a PhD in Christian studies. She lectures around the country in theological institutes on feminist theology among other topics. Her doctoral thesis has been published both in India and in the USA as Women in India: Negotiating Body, Reclaiming Agency. She writes a regular column in the New Leader. She writes also in Tamil.)*

Right from my age of reason in religious life, I have been hearing of spiritualities, as seen, experienced and written down from male perspectives. Ignatian spirituality, Salesian spirituality, Carmelite spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, Benedictine spirituality, and the list goes on in the market of spirituality in the Catholic Church. If people desire to follow religious life they have to choose one of these and make it part of their lives as their spirituality. Although these spiritualities are excellent in themselves pointing to a particular way of life, they all come from men. Well, what is wrong if they come from men? Certainly, there is nothing wrong. But, definitely there is something missing. My concern here is to explore how women understand spirituality. Do they have something special about their spirituality? If they have, what would it be like?

In my search for a passionate, life-giving and empowering spirituality which would be something unique from women, in the

first part of this paper I look into Christian history to see where women stand with regard to their spirituality. And in the second part, I move on to present my findings regarding female spirituality. I have based these reflections on the lives of early desert (church) mothers, the daily lives of women with whom I am involved and my own experience as a woman during these past years.

## **The Greco-Roman Understanding of Women**

Christianity was greatly influenced by Greco-Roman thought and inherited from it many of its presuppositions. Platonic thought dictated a distinction between the body and the soul. While they considered the soul rational and good, taking part in those qualities which represented the divine, the body was something profane and inferior. Since women were always associated with bodies, being a woman implied inferiority. Women had been strategically discriminated against on the basis of their bodies. Since the female body was seen as weaker, the female soul was also treated as weaker. According to Aristotle, 'women were unable to reason sufficiently and therefore participated less in the divine.' Opposing this, the Platonists and Stoics held the view that though it was more difficult for women to become virtuous, they shared a common humanity with men. Given proper training, they could become just as morally upright. Despite this debate on the state of the female soul, both the views see women as being farther away from perfection than men. In fact, Greco-Roman thought interpreted gender through a theory of monosexuality. This theory envisioned a spectrum of masculinity and femininity, in which the *telos* (end) was male. Virtue was identified with the male pole and vice with the female. Men were the standard for humanity. In effect the early Christian writers and spiritual fathers were influenced by Greco-Roman monosexuality.

## **Revisiting Gendered "Texts"**

While Greco-Roman philosophers often spoke to an all-male audience, Christian philosophers and writers like Augustine and John Chrysostom, spoke as bishops in front of congregations,

which included many women. Even male ascetics could not escape encountering women who sought their counsel. As a result, many of the early Christian leaders addressed the status of women in their writings. There is a wealth of writing on the female gender from the fourth century onwards. These texts present a large diversity of views. However, texts from a few influential Church Fathers demonstrate that, despite the diversity, there were common beliefs. According to them, spirituality aimed at a complete gender transformation from woman to man. The female was revered only to the extent that she renounced being a woman. To the males of the time, the female body was the most alien body of all. The virgin had to deny her femininity in view of the danger of sexual sin.

For medieval women, practicing sexual abstinence was also an attempt to gain control over their bodies and their spirituality. Medieval Christianity negatively influenced the attitudes toward gender roles, sexuality and spirituality. In addition, medieval discussions of the conjugal debt were “padded” in ways that are detrimental to women. Women were instructed to dress up so that their husbands’ attentions would not stray. Similarly they were not allowed to fast without their husbands’ permission because this could diminish their sexual appeal. Such requirements and prohibitions made considerable inroads into the woman’s spirituality, creating special problems for married women who aspired to greater piety and even sanctity.

During the High Middle Ages (1050-1250), church authorities began to lift traditional bans on sex during penitential periods. At first glance, lifting these restrictions may appear to have benefited women, but in reality it did not do so. I want to cite here a brutal example from a confessors’ manual of this period, which discusses the question of payment of the conjugal debt by a woman who had given birth. According to medieval religious doctrine, a woman was required to receive a purifying rite in the church following childbirth, before she could have sex again. The manual advises that the woman go to church immediately, soon after she gives birth, to get purified so that she will be available to have sex with her

husband as soon as possible. This horrible solution shows how anxious the church was becoming about channeling the sex drive and containing the body of the women within its institutions and regulations.

Added to that, medieval men believed women to be more susceptible to material and fleshly experiences, which they viewed as a sign of weakness. According to them, the excessive unruliness of the body was perceived as feminine. Since women are associated with menstruation, their bodies seep and are uncontrollable. The theologians of the medieval period saw women as more likely to be inhabited by evil spirits. Thus, the efforts to consolidate masculine identity through emphasis on rationality lapses into irrational obsession. This sheds light on Christianity's attitudes toward the female body and its desire to control it in an ascetical way.

### **Transformation or Negation?**

Treating dominant males as generically and normatively 'human' has made women largely invisible to themselves. It has prevented women from exploring self-consciously and self-critically their own distinct experience as women. Macrina, a fourth-century ascetic, was a sister of Gregory of Nyssa, a prolific fourth-century Cappadocian father. In his letter to the monk Olympius, Gregory wrote in detail about the life of his sister. After referring to her as a woman, he questioned himself: "if indeed she should be styled woman for I do not know whether it is fitting to designate her by her sex, who so surpassed her sex." How did Macrina surpass her sex? Is Gregory's hesitation to call his sister "woman" indicative of a belief in the inferiority of women? Was Gregory implying that it was necessary to overcome her gender in order to acquire success in ascesis? Though it is obvious that Gregory adored and admired his sister, his reverence for her appears to be at the cost of her femininity.

Like Macrina, Amma Sarah, (one of the desert mothers) also refers to her own gender transformation: "According to nature I am a

woman, but not according to my thoughts.” It was said concerning her that for sixty years she lived beside a river and never lifted her eyes to look at it. These are indeed only samples that speak to us powerfully about women who had to forego their womanhood in order to attain spirituality.

### **Alienated Within**

Even at its most inclusive, the early church was primarily androcentric. The fact that the Church dared to give women equal status was indeed countercultural at the time. All the same, women became equal to men only by becoming men. The belief in masculine superiority was not only maintained but strengthened.

The move to virginity and widowhood by female ascetics may represent a fleeing from femaleness towards maleness. Even if it is done for autonomy, the rejection of traditional feminine roles is a rejection of femininity. Female ascetics, who had rejected these traditional roles, were managed by men and complimented by being called “men.” Sometimes they even dressed like men. Even today, much of the progressive developments in (masculine) spirituality, has led women to get disconnected from their intrinsic and essential feminine qualities by suppressing womanly spiritual and emotional self-realization.

### **Unifying rather than Fragmenting**

All the world religions, and Christianity in particular, suggest that there is only one spiritual way – the male way. They have failed to see that everything in this sublunary world comes in pairs. They have disregarded the ultimate duality of this relative world. They have also failed to identify that human consciousness is fundamentally divided into two: a female half and a male half. So they have been ignoring the fact that besides the male approach which rules with the ‘violence’ of knowledge, there is another, a more hidden, softer approach to God, which is the female way. Annie Golding (Australian Catholic Activist), already in her 1904

Australian Catholic Congress paper “The evolution of women and their possibilities,” pointed out:

The world [has] suffered through want of the dual influence. Only the masculine was cultivated. In all lands property, military glory, and lust for power were the highest ideals. The humanising influences – sentiment, family, love and other domestic virtues – were relegated to an inferior place.

Postmodernism has brought to light the hidden traits of consciousness in our culture. In a special way, French post-structuralists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, have done a wonderful job in bringing these voices of minority to the surface and making them heard. Since these voices of the minority were not speaking the Greek language of our academic discourse, people ignore them. But today we know that they are there. And if one wants to understand life, God and spirituality, one must carefully listen to this hidden voice of femininity speaking from the other side of the dualism. For it is in the blending of both that one will find completion.

These preliminary remarks have a bearing upon spirituality, that is to say, that there is i) a more hidden and a subliminal approach to spirituality that has remained un verbalized and unacknowledged by Christianity. ii) In order to understand female spirituality as much as we can, we have to define clearly, what is distinct to women.

One cannot ignore the fact that women had culturally inherited from the start a more masculine view. Hence, some women have definitely a male approach to the world that may be the result of their training or upbringing in the context of patriarchal conditionings. Women’s experience is formed by class, religion, race and differing cultures. From this perspective there can be no single or normative spirituality among women, but a plethora of spiritualities. However, what cannot be denied is that there is a particularity and uniqueness about the ways and means through which women experience and respond to God.

## The Female Way

The female is more in contact with her own body than the male is. This is because her rapport with life is less with the mind than with her biological self and her feelings. Moreover, a woman is not in need of understanding life with her mind. The female way is to contact life not with the mind, but with her body. That way the connection is more directly established. For the woman knows that when there is love, safety, belonging and tenderness in life, that life itself will give the answers. There is no need for understanding.

Because of her reproductive function, the center of woman's existence is her body. Female existence is more physical than mental. Most of the energies of the female are not wasted in thinking, system building or philosophizing, but are aimed at nestling. Most of her time is devoted to direct human relationships either with her family or with her close friends. The woman knows with intuition that we belong to a whole that will take care of us. The male asks: 'Yeah, but how do you know?' 'My heart knows', the woman answers.

Some might even consider this to be a disparagement and blame the culture, which has made her so and even to the extent of making her a physical and sexual object. There is some truth in this, but it is only a partial truth. Like man, woman is an amalgam of the physical, the mental, the soulful and the spiritual. She is not only the body. But because of her reproductive function, the physical preponderates in her being and awareness of being, while in man the mental tends to dominate consciousness. However, the degree differs from person to person and from culture to culture.

I am also aware that being centered on the body also has a disadvantage when speaking of mental health, enlightenment and spirituality. When the physical elements dominate in consciousness, a human being runs the risk of being swept away by its instinctive feelings and emotions. Emotions sometimes may be disruptive, irrational and hostile to the self and so they cannot be taken as they are. Hence they need to be filtered with the help of rationality. If the emotional preponderates, the self might be swept away and

may disintegrate. In this respect, male consciousness has greater advantages. Therefore, female consciousness seeks very often shelter and support from the male, precisely because of his greater ability to filter out emotions with the help of rationality.

Nevertheless, in order to live a healthy and fruitful spiritual life, one has to be centered on the body. In this respect, the female is one step ahead, because spirituality and mental health can only blossom when the self is firmly rooted in its physicality. We can only transcend to higher levels of realization if all the levels of our being are embraced and none is excluded from our love. This is the reason spirituality demands that we embrace our bodily needs and its sexuality. The world religions and Christianity in particular, have failed to acknowledge the fact that spirituality is about integrating all levels of existence. This begins with the most simple: we have to begin with accepting our body.

Therefore, the female is definitely in the lead in this respect. For most women the body and its needs cannot be questioned, except those who are deranged and psychologically wounded who condemn their body as the source of evil. The body is so much a part of their being that negative thoughts about their body and their sexuality are always negative thoughts about their selves. They consider their body to be the epiphany of the divine. Their tender feelings about their body are deeply religious. When Vedanta says 'this world is Brahman' a woman understands this to mean 'this body of mine is Brahman.'

In her bodily existence and in her sexuality the female is receptive. Her consciousness is not out to conquer or to dominate. It is out to welcome and embrace. When she feels at home, when she feels at ease, without a trace of fear, the woman embraces life as if she would embrace her lover. As far as spirituality is concerned, this passivity and receptivity of hers is a great advantage over the male tendency to conquer life with the knowledge of his consciousness. The female unconscious attitude is that God is not in need of understanding. He or she is in need of accepting. If we empty ourselves of our self, God will enter into our lives. This is what a woman feels in her soul.

All it needs is to accept the divine quality of life. Her prayers and thanksgivings will be an outpouring of love and gratitude from her body. The object of her devotion, be it a statue, a crucifix, the god to whom she prays or simply the little light on her windowpane, this object will serve as the object of her love. With her love, she connects life. To this love, she submits herself.

This is the female way of bhakti yoga, the spirituality of devotion. This is a path of joy, of love and celebration. It is the chanting in the streets, in the church, temple and the mosque. This kind of spirituality is especially apt for those people who have a feeling relationship with life, rather than a relationship of understanding. The joy of life is in loving. It needs to be expressed in thanksgivings and celebrations. This love of life shakes your knees, makes your body move rhythmically and makes you prostrate before the object of worship. Bhakti yoga is one of the main roads of mysticism, especially for female mystics. In their love, she and God fuse together.

For women, spirituality comes from their bodies. It values life, creativity, empathy, receptivity, diversity and the natural cycles that ensure constant change. It values the ordinary daily rhythms of living. Above all, as with the nature of a woman's body, the most valued and important focal point and the source of all power and life are hidden deep within. For this very reason, Women's spirituality brings a very different perspective from that of all the mainstream spiritualities.

### **Jesus: Celebrating Body**

Women are less concerned about Jesus who is made into an object of worship. Rather they are concerned with the broader categories of his humanity or personhood. Jesus had a healthy and positive attitude towards the body which led him to exalt the worth and dignity of his body as well as the body of others.

- The works of healing, which formed so large an element in His public ministry, are the standing proof of this attitude of Jesus

to the physical life of man. His whole ministry consisted in restoring a human being to his / her wholeness especially to bodily health (Mk 5:29; Lk 6:18).

- Wherever and whenever life was denied, broken and betrayed, Jesus took a daring step to offer life to human beings (Cf. Mt 9: 18-26; Lk 8:40-58; Mk 5:21-43; Jn 11:1-45). There are incidents where we see Jesus healing persons who were attacked by demons and restoring them back to normal human and dignified life (Cf. Lk 6:18 ;8:26-36 ;9:37-42 ;9:38-43; Mt:17:14-17 ). He always recognized and appreciated in the other, the value and worth of human beings and gives esteem to their physical nature. He never sought to ignore or belittle what belongs to a human being's natural life. The fourth Gospel explicitly speaks about his option for life. He has come not to destroy, but to give life to others, that they might have it abundantly (Jn 10:10).
- He went beyond the purity laws of Judaism concerning the body(Mk 7:1-23) in order to heal the human person (Mt 9:18-22). The presence of leprosy, whether in a person, clothing or a house, was polluting (Cf. Lev 13:14). And Jesus allowed the lepers to come close to him and cured them. He lets himself be touched by sick people (Lk 6:19); he especially allowed himself to be touched by a woman suffering from a haemorrhage (Mt 9:18-22), though menstruation made a woman unclean for seven days and her impurity was highly contagious (Lev 15:25-30) according to the Jews. By eating with the tax collectors and sinners (Mt 9: 10-13) he not only went beyond the purity laws but also esteemed the worth of the human person. Contact with a dead body made a person unclean (Num 19:11f). But Jesus touches the body of the son of the widow of Nain and gives life not only to him but to the widow as well (Lk :11-17).
- Jesus was not only concerned about the spiritual needs of the people but he was concerned about their bodily needs and so feeds the hungry by multiplying loaves for them (Mk 6:35-44 ; Jn 6:5-13).

- In a society where the birth of a woman is being treated as a curse & unclean, Jesus upholds the dignity of a woman's body. He warns the men-folk who looked at woman's body as a sexual object, by saying; "I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).
- Jesus enjoyed every bit of his life on earth. In fact, He was a very joyful and free person. He has given importance to the bodily needs like hunger. And that's why even his opponents accused him saying, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Mt 11:19).
- Jesus speaks of his body as the temple of God (Jn 2:20-22).
- Jesus offers his own body and blood to the community of his disciples ( Mt 26:26-30 ; Jn 6:51-58).

## **Towards Embodied Spirituality**

Spirituality is a living reality in the daily lives of women, and it is closely integrated into their body. This spirituality struggles against all forms of patriarchal oppression and celebrates women's strength and power, which challenges stereotypical images of women, defined by gentility, obedience and subservience. This enables them to be motivated to inquire what their womanhood really means, what it means to have a female body, and what the particular hungers, joys, pains, and satisfactions of a woman's life are.

Hence, the kind of spirituality which women are interested in and proposing is grounded in the body and its senses. How could it be otherwise? The very ground of our being is the body. The human body is revelatory: by its means, people express themselves and encounter others. The Divine can be encountered only through the body—even if the ways in which one might seek that encounter today will be different. However, the body is not an impediment to the spiritual life, but it enables one to be more spiritual and positive towards life. In this sense, spirituality becomes more than

a matter of theory or idea: it becomes located in the specific and the physical.

A part of our cultural heritage is the belief that the mind is superior to the body. This leads to the intellectualization of spirituality and the reduction of the body to a machine. Such a division of mind and body is not natural, and leads to a fall from grace. Grace unites spirit and matter because grace is the divine spirit acting within the body. It integrates body and soul, inner and outer worlds, and contemplation and action. An embodied spirituality is that which affirms people's experiences with their bodies in the daily living of life and takes them close to their creator and to all God's creations.

We are born into a state of grace from which we fall as we try to conform to external expectations that come from our parents and circumstances. That is why, our moments of worship, liturgical celebrations and even our other spiritual practices often look or become dry. Some might even say, "we use all five senses in worship: seeing colour and shape and movement; hearing music and the rhythm of words; tasting bread and wine; touching another's hand at the exchange of peace or touching holy water; smelling the unique fragrance of incense or of flowers. We use our bodies by standing, moving, bowing or making the sign of the cross. Then how can it be a dry worship?" But how far are we conscious of our body while doing all these? Are we not like stiff-necked people, trying to stand and sit straight during our worship? And even in our Eucharist celebrated according to Indian style, from the beginning till the end we comfortably sit in the same posture except to change the position of our legs.

Even today in formation, living extremely austere lifestyles and refraining from sensual pleasures are taught as means to achieve spiritual and religious goals. Often one who is austere or pretends to be austere with her/his body is considered more holy than the one who celebrates the body. People who celebrate their body and sexuality are mostly looked at with suspicion and doubt. This becomes 'the talk of the town' too. Hence, very often the fear of

public condemnation and criticism lead many to enter into cautious and secretive behaviours concerning their body.

Spirituality cannot be so much a gaze toward heaven or a life of austerity here on earth. Rather it should be a celebration of the body, a celebration of the energy of life, the joy of living and the quest for wholeness. According to me, it is the mind, with its emphasis on knowledge and reason that is secular whereas the body is sacred. God has created the human body in his own image and likeness. He has sanctified the human body when he came to the earth and took one himself. To worship with our bodies is to honour the body of Christ too.

## **Ending Dualism**

Celebrating the body starts with befriending the body. To negate or neglect the body is a dis-empowering spirituality. To befriend it or to esteem it is to acknowledge the gift the creator has given us and to appreciate and treat our feelings and instincts as normal. Thus body spirituality not only focuses on the body and celebrates it but also makes one to become increasingly human. In becoming increasingly human one learns, in the midst of all of life, to live more vulnerably, more freely, more lovingly, more honestly and authentically, and thus to live as a more integrated or whole person in relation to God, oneself, and other persons.

St. Irenaeus, a church leader in the second century said that “the glory of God is a person fully alive.” I wonder if St. Irenaeus’ notion of a fully alive person is in fact a person who is able to explore, develop and live out their humanity in terms of both the body and the spirit.

The unity of body and soul promotes life, erases artificial boundaries and rejects all that prevents flourishing, thus enabling a boundless openness to life. The Spirit is encountered as the creator of multiple levels of mutuality, in full respect of difference and diversity. The Spirit can be experienced as crossing the boundaries of sexual and racial difference. This challenges the very notion of a hegemonic and universal norm in human experience and Christian understanding.

## Reclaiming Body and Spirituality

One cannot dismiss or separate women's physicality from her spirituality. They like to seek to reclaim the body as a central component in their understanding of self, community, and spirituality. However, often women hate their bodies because of the abuses being done to their bodies. Often a woman's body is regarded as lustful, dangerous and sinful, both in the Christian and in the Indian traditions. Women are instructed that their spirituality lies in sacrificing themselves even to the extent of negating their bodily needs and losing their very selves. They have imbibed what the patriarchal church and the society has been teaching on spirituality. As a result they do anything for their children, their beloved, or their families, etc. Many of them give their love freely to others but not to themselves. They sometimes even deny their own beauty, intelligence and bodily abilities.

Lilian Calles Barger investigates in her book *Eve's Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body* (2003) the tension women experience between their bodies and their desire for a spiritual life. She responds with the possibility of viewing women as something other than perennially split between body and soul. This paradigm, offered through the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, provides insight into how women ought to live in the world and very much in their own skin. Women struggling with a body/soul tension and those interested in the social and spiritual meaning of the female body will find liberation, if they begin to empower their body.

Specifically, when women reimagine and develop a spiritual practice, it will honour their embodied selves as persons - women. Women really have to come to a point of "getting" who they truly are. Hence, in order to elevate their self-esteem women need to start seeing the true divinity within and allow their inner light to shine. Women have to *allow* themselves to access the authentic power and charm that is already right inside their body. Spirituality is ultimately to transform oneself from the inside out, through authentic self-appreciation and self-love.

## **Immense Power Within**

There is so much of power and energies that lie dormant within the body of women that needs to be reclaimed by women themselves. Women should begin consciously to access their power from their body and from bodily functions. For instance, there is immense power in menstruation, but often women are made to feel guilty or ashamed of it. Menstruation is the very act of the body that teaches us the cycles of nature. One of the great regrets of many women's life is that they never draw on the gifts and powers that that is inherent in their menses. Many women begin to appreciate very late, what these events bring to them. There is immense power in women's creation/creativity. Instead of celebrating the passage of birth giving, it turns out to be painful and dis-empowering for many women. Breastfeeding is a sacred moment, which connects the mother and the child and builds their bond stronger. Yet, in real life, women are made to feel bashful and self-conscious over this act. Women must regain the immense power of menopause too. Women have been able to move through an incredible passage of womanhood with support and the knowledge that the journey of their body was bringing them depth and wisdom. Through all these ways, women must explore the depths of their womanhood. The postmenopausal women must become the wise ones that have for so long been missing in our culture. They must become the guardians at the gates of the Mysteries of the Sacred Feminine. They must guard their bodily learning and pass it on to future generations of women and men in a quiet, ordinary and assertive way.

## **Exploring the Divine Feminine**

Modern culture has its own bias against the body and women. But, what women need are freedom, independence and power without compromising their own values. Women's need for freedom is the need to express their woman selves. Women's need for independence is their need to be virginal one-in-themselves. Women's need for power is the need for personal power, not power over.

Women have to reclaim their selves, not that of a God from a male perspective but from their own perspectives. In this process, women need to address the healing of the physical body and of the emotional and psychic wounding that they have endured in their lives. Women must explore the many faces of the Divine Feminine; not just those of the Mother and the whore to which we have been culturally limited. We need to express Hathor<sup>1</sup>: to adorn ourselves, to dance; Cybele<sup>2</sup>: to express ourselves rhythmically; Freya<sup>3</sup>: to be in our pleasure for our own sakes; Kali<sup>4</sup>: to express our anger and outrage and not be afraid to cut out the dross; Diana<sup>5</sup>: to be wild, unruly, and to take our places in the natural world; Lilith<sup>6</sup>: to express our raw sexuality.... to name just a few.

## Conclusion

---

<sup>1</sup> Hathor is an Ancient Egyptian goddess who personified the principles of love, beauty, music, motherhood and joy.

<sup>2</sup> Cybele was a Phrygian form of the Earth Mother or Great Mother. As with Greek Gaia (the “Earth”), or her Minoan equivalent Rhea, Cybele embodies the fertile Earth. She is a goddess of caverns and mountains, walls and fortresses, nature, and wild animals (especially lions and bees). In Rome, Cybele was known as Magna Mater (Great Mother).

<sup>3</sup> In Norse mythology, Freya is a goddess of love and fertility, and the most beautiful and propitious of the goddesses. She is the patron goddess of crops and birth, the symbol of sensuality and was called upon in matters of love. She loves music, spring and flowers, and is particularly fond of the fairies.

<sup>4</sup> Kali, in the Indian tradition is the divine mother and fierce destroyer of evil.

<sup>5</sup> In Roman mythology, Diana was the goddess of the hunt, moon and birthing. Diana is being associated with wild animals and woodland, having the power to talk to and control animals. She was equated with the Greek goddess Artemis, though she had an independent origin in Italy. Diana was worshiped in ancient Roman religion and is revered in Roman Neopaganism and Stregheria. Diana was known to be the virgin goddess and looked after virgins and women. She was one of the three maiden goddesses, Diana, Minerva and Vesta, who swore never to marry.

<sup>6</sup> Lilith is a character in Jewish mythology, found earliest in the Babylonian Talmud who is generally thought to be related to a class of female demons.

In 1995, Pope John Paul in his letter to Women stated with regret:

Unfortunately, we are heirs to a history, which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misinterpreted; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from being truly themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.

In a culture where spirituality is still explained, described and defined only from a male perspective, it is good to reflect spirituality from women's perspectives. The male perspective of spirituality has been not only detrimental to women's body but also to men's body. I have brought to light how women are alienated from their femaleness in the existing spirituality. This is the same situation with men as well. They too are alienated from their body and consider body and its needs are threats to their spirituality.

Spirituality is about wholeness/holiness/alignment with the emotional, intellectual, psychic and physical self. Although the perspective is women's, the spirituality is open to all genders. Hence, as women and men, we need to reclaim our body, if we want to live a healthy spiritual life. And in turn we can envision a world where we bring a way of 'being' that redresses the balance in a broken world.

# DANCE DIVINE

**Saju George, S.J.**

*(Saju George is an accomplished dancer in Bharatanatyam style. He has danced both in India and abroad. He has a PhD in dance from the University of Madras. He is in charge of a cultural centre, also teaching dance and training a troupe, in Kolkatha.)*

## **The Initial Steps**

I was born into a Syrian Catholic family in Kerala, and yet I was drawn to dance from childhood! It was unusual for a Christian boy to take to Indian classical dance. Today it is not so unusual. I wanted to dance like some of my class mates, boys and girls, who were classical dancers. From a young age, thanks to my schools, I came to know that there were various dance forms in India – folk, tribal, classical and so on. As a school student I cultivated the talent in me for dance, drama, music, and various sports. I danced withstanding the scorn and scoff of many of my friends; later, from my co-religious; and now from some orthodox circles. I am happy that now there is some sort of acceptance of a priest dancing. Thanks to my strong conviction and a passion for it, I have never stopped dancing.

Initially I started imitating my friends who danced in school fests. Since then Indian classical dances impressed me very much.

Especially the theatricality or the *abhinaya* of the Indian theatre arts are very unique, vibrant and captivating. I felt in me that there was a natural genuine liking for the Indian classical arts. Two of my Hindu friends were very good Kathakali dancers; and the supernaturalism of Kathakali of Kerala drew me to it. And I too started participating in school fests and I won many prizes. That was an encouragement to further explore the world of arts, specially dance and drama. I picked up some dancing from my elder sister. And there were some opportunities provided by our local church. Later on as a Jesuit I enjoyed the beauty of the different dances of India, including the tribal dances. My three years of study in the Jorasanko-Thakurbari (the Rabindra Bharati University's Fine Arts Campus), the house of Rabindranath Tagore, opened a wide world of Indian arts and culture.

It was as a Jesuit scholastic in Kolkata that I ventured into learning Indian classical dance rather systematically. Thanks to Natyacarya Guru Derrick Munro I developed a passion for dance under his training. He had a gentle way of instilling in me a love for dance that is soaked in Indian philosophy. Though he is an ardent Catholic, he is well-versed in Hinduism. Under his guidance I practiced Kuchipudi, the classical dance style of Andhra Pradesh. Then a few years later I got the opportunity to learn Bharatanatyam, the classical dance style that originated in Tamilnadu. Since then I realized that dance is a life-long *sadhana* – a spiritual path, yoga, involving the whole person. Both mental and physical strength, stamina and suppleness are a must to master dance. Thanks to my cultured religious superiors and teachers, I could immerse myself in dance and its spirituality rather easily. They taught me that dancing could be for 'the greater glory of God' and a way to serve God and humanity. And I experience it today in my apostolic endeavours.

As I began to draw deep from the depth of Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit humanism I started to incorporate the spirituality of Indian classical dance into my religious life. Dance has become a vibrant spiritual activity. After I started relishing dance the biblical spirituality comes alive more visibly and intimately. My biblical dances, used at times in Christian liturgy, are a witness to this fact.

Indian classical dance is an artistic narrative of one's inner journey into the depth of the Divine. It is a celebratory activity relishing Beauty.

### **The Spirituality of *Natya***

Indian classical dance is termed *Natya*. *Natya* is a harmony of dance, drama and music. (So henceforth I shall also use *Natya* to mean this composite nature of Indian dance). Sound is *Nada-Brahman* or God of sound, the cause of entire creation. The first sound of *Nada-Brahman* is *OM*, the eternal sound. Movement is of *Natya-Brahman* or God of dance. Lord Nataraja creates all from the 'drum of creation', as the Saivites believe. Movement and sound are the initial activities simultaneously performed by Nataraja. It is said that movement preceded sound, the action that produced the sound. Sound is wind; wind is air; air is Spirit. Every motion that springs forth from Brahman is a vibration. From one vibration is created many vibrations, as motion causes motion, so does life eventually gain momentum. The driving force behind all movement is the Spirit hovering over all.

We are not only formed of vibrations, we live, move and thrive in them; we are surrounded by them as a fish is surrounded by water. Our different moods, sentiments, inclinations, actions and all conditions of life depend upon certain vibrations, whether they be thoughts, emotions or feelings. Before humans start doing things for survival, they draw breath; they feel moved. Movement is the source and condition of life. The basic elements of dance are space, time, and human bodies; beautiful meaningful movements that evoke *rasa* or sentiments are the desired result of *natya* representation.

Our consciousness perceives movements. The soul perceives vibrations of feelings; the mind conceives vibrations of thoughts; the eyes see vibrations of appearing through physical objects. Our body expresses what it feels. Movement is the activity of consciousness, the cause of creation. Each movement differs only in its tone and rhythm due to greater or lesser degree of force behind it. *Natya* is free flowing body movements.

*Natya* trains us to be harmonious. All suffering, pain and trouble are due to lack of human integration and harmony in us. *Natya* today is largely entertainment oriented and theatre based, though in spirit it is for spiritual fulfillment, holistic wellness and healing. It gains for us great grace of peace and joy from God. The aspect of entertainment inherent in it is only the secondary aim.

### ***Natya* and Prayer**

Prayer and worship are universal activities regardless of caste, creed, color, race and language. The method of prayer and worship also vary from place to place and people to people. The postures and positions, gestures and genuflections also differ from culture to culture. Dancing is a way of prayer and worship. Dancing is a thrilling and unique way of praying with body and soul while at the same time injecting some fresh breath of life and spirit into one's life. Dancing is a combination of the symbolic enactment of rituals and gestures. In Hinduism *natya* was a part of temple rites and rituals, worship and processions. The uniqueness of Indian dance is that it is as much an art form as a part of religious worship with highly evolved devotional gestures. Elevating the soul on high is its main aim. Body, the basic medium of dance, pulsates to the promptings of the spirit.

Dance in many cultures is constituted as an essential part of religion and the way of life. Dancing for spiritual fulfillment is becoming popular in most cultures. Many cultures have incorporated body movements to express divine enactment of life promoting sacraments/rituals. Rites, entertainment, religious education and communication styles of doing are constantly evolving, and for this reason the dance styles seen are based on cultural variations. In Indian culture learning to dance is also acquiring a skill; once the skill is gained it becomes second nature and worshipping with steps becomes easy. St. Ignatius of Loyola was open to the use of different postures and gestures in prayer. So it is easier for a 'son of Ignatius' to pray while dancing. If for some of us 'singing once is equal to praying twice', dancing could double the effect! If you have

ever sincerely tried dancing in prayer, you will be compelled to do it again.

It is to be remembered here that humans have always communicated their religious sentiments in the language of gestures. To worship God in dance is biblical too. I have been motivated to dance by the dance in the Bible: Miriam's dance of thanksgiving before the Israelites as they were delivered in the Sea of Reeds (Exod. 15:20-22) and King David's dance of ecstasy before the Ark of the Covenant (II Sam; 6:14). The Psalms 149 and 150 are the best examples of dance as praise of God with the fullest expressions of joy. Dance divine is dance in the Divine.

### **The Mysticism of *Natya***

The most important aspect of *natya* is that it leads one gradually to a cosmic contemplation. Cosmic contemplation is mystical contemplation. It is one's abandonment and total surrender to the God of the universe in praise, in awe and wonder, and the rest is interior silence. The "Divine dwells in me and around me" should be the basic attitude to savour *natya*. The basic disposition should be a sincere desire to enter more deeply into the heart of God. The basic rhythm of the human heart is the dance of God. Real dance springs forth from one's felt need for divine delight. And dance is the outward communication of the inward communion with Divine. Hence, an unbroken and strict interior discipline is a basic requirement in pursuing *natya*. The iconography and iconology of Nataraja epitomize the mysticism of the cosmic *natya*. He is the still center with the ever vibrant periphery/circle. He dances eternally on the micro lotus of our heart and on the macro lotus of the cosmos. He excludes none, rather includes all, in His cosmic *natya*.

The mysticism of *natya* reveals the mystical dance within every atom; life's dance within each cell; the dance of blood in every vein; the dance of life in each and every breath; the divine dance within the Trinity and their dance within us; and God dancing through history and in everything - big and small, earthly and heavenly. There is the 'Nataraja effect' in all activities. The 'Risen Christ' is triumphant

in the dance of life. According to Swami Vivekananda, “Art is representing the beautiful, and there must be art in everything.” The artistic faculty inherent in us needs to be awakened and refined to experience it. Like prayer, it is an indwelling activity – fine tuning oneself to the indwelling of the Self in the self. The mysticism of *natya* is being present to the sensual as well as the super sensual here and now.

### ***Natya* is Communication**

*Natya* is a set of signs and symbols through which the dancers communicate what lies beyond ordinary speech. Many people think of art as something special for special people and apart from their daily lives, as a luxury, an occupation or hobby for impractical individuals. This is a grave mistake we make. We cannot live without art. It is a necessity, as breath is. It is said that if we cannot communicate we die of loneliness. Art is communication on the deepest and most lasting level. *Natya* is a sort of metaphor of life, narrating and communicating life powerfully.

*Natya* is the art of communication of an experience, an idea, a story, through body movements, by conscious and ordered patterns in time and space. However, *natya* cannot be defined in terms of words and languages. It is to be experienced by the total person, directly. Being three-dimensional, *natya* is perhaps the only art which has the capacity to incorporate the essential elements of the other sister arts like poetry in song, music, rhythm, gesture, posture and bodily movement to become a complete, integrated and unified work of art. It demands the *sadhana* of the whole self to acquire a command over it; and it requires a fine sense of imagination

All of us need to tell what is in our hearts, but most of us manage to say what we really mean only at a few high moments in our lifetime, and perhaps that only to intimates. The dancer tries to reach out to anyone and everyone who will listen and see with a sensitive heart – a *sahrdaya* (a heart in communion) with a *kalahrdaya* (a heart of art); but to do this s/he must talk through moving symbols.

Art is evocation; it has its own specific language, not so easily understandable to everyone. *Natya* has never been a mass-art or a crowd puller. Its audience has always been a discerning *sahrdaya*.

### ***Natya* is Creative Expression.**

*Natya* by nature is not static but dynamic expression, in the sense that it is a process of coming to be. The beauty of *natya* is enabling and ennobling. In Heideggerian style of thinking, art is creative not imitative. Thus, beauty shows itself ever anew, every moment. When *natya* is performed, its medium melts away in aesthetic contemplation and one is transported to the realm of *ananda*/delight/bliss. It is said that living is dancing. Philosophizing dance is perceiving dance intellectually. Theologizing dance is perceiving dance spiritually. Worshiping is being attuned to this *natya* reverentially. Life is an ongoing *natya*. Humans are *natyakars*/dancers in the eternal sphere.

The ability to convey or reproduce human emotion gives power; it is a tremendous gift, mysterious and precious. Humans value emotion; it is one of the chief well-springs of human activity, but it is perishable on the earthly sphere like *natya* vanishes in front of the eyes moment after moment. It lasts only a brief time and it can affect people only while it is strong. So artists try to fix it in forms that will endure and that will arouse a response in many people at widely different times.

*Natya* has over centuries of evolution reflected the color, movement, and rhythm of subsequent lives and times. It has a life of its own, ever renewing life. This is its strength. It has to express, otherwise it has no life and existence. *Natya* is the only time-space art. It employs rhythm in both spheres – audible and visual. *Natya* must always use both to some degree. *Natya* differs from all other exercises. Sports require skill, coordination, and strength, but they are neither *natya* nor the stuff of *natya*.

*Natya* moves us and reveals to us aspects of life and human emotions. In *natya* there is a pattern of expression. Pattern is law. It

has several sets of consciously ordered sequences of movements. In *natya*, it is through the pattern of steps that emotion is transmitted and sentiments produced. Every ordered movement is a statement of life. Certain harmonies and sequences make us laugh; others make us weep; yet others make us fearful; some surprise, and so on. It is the pattern that moves us in spite of our unfamiliarity with the subject matter or the performers; it involves us emotionally with the artist and his intent. *Natya* explores ever new creative ways to express oneself. It is an ever refreshing and never ending process.

### ***Natya* and Religiosity**

*Natya* visualizes in motion the spiritual aspirations of the humans. The purpose of *natya* being sublimation, it is deeply associated with supernatural motives. Gods and goddesses and their relationship to humans and vice-versa are often the themes of *natya*. Social and religious ceremonies in India, regardless of distinctions, are incomplete without *natya*; and *natya* is nothing if it is not the expression of the religious fervor of the people. *Natya* aims to lift our spirits from the mundane to the loftiest heights of spiritual experience. That is why *natya* draws its content from Hindu mythology. Hindu *bhakti* movement used *natya* as the most fitting tool to propagate religious ideas and increase religious fervor in believers. *Natya* reveals life using beauty as the parameter.

In religious dances, endurance becomes a kind of distortion. The very fact that a dancer has surmounted a real physical difficulty makes him extraordinary. His/her body is not like the body of others – s/he trains it to be special for specific movements. As a result they can do things we cannot. This gives him/her power. This distinguishes him/her from other artists too. It is to say that it is different due to strenuous and rigorous training of the body and mind.

Agility and steadiness in movement and finesse in expression are the very spirit of *natya*. Virtuosity adds to perfection in execution and composition. It shows the stamina, strength, and speed of the dancer; and the accuracy and control of the music. The extraordinary

and the unusual have a kind of attraction for both performer and public. A dancer tries to reveal the hidden or the obvious. Being symbolic in representation, dance is prophetic action seeking transformation.

As with any art, the true purpose of dancing must always remain the expression of human feelings. A dance step in itself is neither useful nor a natural action. It is different from any movement employed in daily life. It is an expressive action – special, rhythmic, accented. A dance must convey meaning or power; in other words, it is art or, as primitive people would say, it is magic! Dance has grown out of living experience, and the form and style, the idiom used, are characteristic, as in speech, of the particular people that produce it. *Natya* represents a particular culture and religiosity inbuilt in it.

### **The Soul of *Natya***

The modern media and materialism have robbed our spiritual energy and tone; likewise our refined sense of aesthetics too. The rat-race of competition and consumerism dries our spiritual resources. A well disciplined soul, like a well-disciplined body, is agile and active, supple and adaptive, forward looking and harmonious. One needs to adapt to changes that are good and prosperous, peaceful and progressive. Hence, there is a constant need to be flexible in moving ahead. A soul that is not pliable and free is incapable of progress in the ways of prayer. In this situation the beauty of *natya*, which is the soul of *natya*, would anchor our soul in Him who is Beauty incarnate.

*Natya* is not a mere intellectual activity, study or reasoning using only the head. It is a sort of reflection with body and mind, head and heart, with total love and dedication to enter into that reality that steers every minutest movement from within, inner thirst or sublime quest. It is indeed ‘a quest for truth’. We may call *natya* a “psycho-physical prayer”. For example, the biblical scene I depict, the blind man seeing, is a psycho-somatic spiritual healing for the dancer as well as the audience who is a *sahrdaya*. It leads to a change in life. It helps us to ‘see’ things differently.

## Dance Meditation

Dance meditation springs from love or *prema*. *Prema* in *natya* meditation intensifies and clarifies our thought by giving it a deeply affective quality. The aspect of love makes meditation meaningful to life and self. Dance meditation is sparked by devotion or *bhakti sadhana*. In dance meditation the soul stretches heavenward willingly and knowingly. The grace of God assists us to climb new/fresh heights. Dance meditation emerges out of a mystical explosion of “praise”. Hence most dances are in praise of somebody, often a god or a goddess, a king or a great person, or a famous place.

As there is a method in intense meditation, in intense dance too there is a method of entering into the heart of it. Initially one may be so fascinated by the beauty and glamour of the dancers on stage, but as and when one enters into the inner chambers of its tremendous treasure s/he will discover that there is a whole world of inter-related subjects hidden in it. They include music, rhythm, literature, psychology, anatomy of the human body and its technique, yoga, scriptures, languages, thousands of physical gestures, meditation, contemplation and cultivating a fine sense of imagination of the physical, spiritual and mental worlds, a keen sense of observation and perception of things waiting to be explored - all leading to *ananda*.

*Natya* gives shape and form to a prayer or praise in symbols and movements - abstract and real. A transformation that takes place in the word to visible movement in space and time is something that is typical of *natya*. It gives me a chance for a meditative trip through the inner chambers of a traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire, from invocation - *pushpanjali* to *thillana* – the exuberance of a joyful finale and blessing or *mangalam*- almost all of them filled with Saivite or Vaishnavite or related imageries and religious-philosophical underpinnings. It is a class apart from all other dance forms I have known so far.

## Natya - an Inter-Faith Experience

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton once said that he could be perfectly faithful to Christianity, and yet learn in depth from other religions like Buddhism. The same is true for me as an ardent Christian learning from the world's other religions like Hinduism. What made this possible is *natya*. It takes me into the heart of Saivism and Vaisnavism, the two major sects in Hinduism. Today I can understand Hinduism better and deeply respect their religiosity; it is possible mainly because of my culturing of Hindu ethos through the help of different art forms of India. It has never questioned my faith, and love for Christ; rather it has enriched me personally.

Finding and promoting common ground among faiths can help us bridge needless divides at a time when unified action is more crucial than ever. We must appreciate oneness of humanity as against global threats like terrorism and communalism. The arts are wonderful means to promote harmony among faiths and promote peaceful coexistence in our world. The form of *natya* by nature is flexible to depict any content. From this perspective, mutual understanding among these traditions is not merely the business of religious believers – it matters for the welfare of humanity as a whole.

## Conclusion

To sum up, *natya* is *mahayoga* (yoga of yogas) that aims at achieving a state of physical, mental and spiritual well-being and integration through the practice of physical exercises, as well as through conscious mental exercises and contemplation. It aims at the union of the individual self with the Universal Self. *Natya* reiterates the fact that a sound soul dwells in a sound body. It follows the path of aesthetic reflection in the rhythms of body, mind and spirit. We need tremendous openness of heart to savor *natya*, and for that matter any art.

The great dancer, like the great actor or musician, disappears in the performance. The dancer and the dance are the same.

# THE BODY IN HINDUISM

Colette Poggi

*(Ms Colette Poggi has a doctorate in Kashmiri Shivism comparing Meister Eckhart and Abhinavagupta. She teaches in Catholic Institutes in Lyon and Marseille, France. She has many books and articles in French to her credit. The following text has been adapted and translated from the French original published in Voies de l'Orient, 118/2011, by M. Amaladoss, with the kind permission of the author.)*

Where would be the modern knowledge of human anatomy without André Vésale, who challenged the religious taboos of the Renaissance by daring to dissect human corpses? Similarly, where will be the knowledge of the human body without the Indian Ayurvedic healers and the yogis? The tantric texts show an extraordinary knowledge of the fields of psychology and physiology. The control of the body that the practice of the yoga facilitates can lead very far. But the idea of the body has evolved in very different ways in the West and in India.

## ***The Tradition of the Ascetics and the Knowledge of the Body of the Medical Healers***

In ancient Indian society, the knowledge of the body, in both its physical and subtle dimensions, had reached a level rarely equaled

elsewhere. It still remains the centre of interest for ayurvedic healers and yogis. We think today that this practical knowledge was developed and transmitted over the centuries in two kinds of circles which were centres of deep research: that of the healers and that of the ascetics. These two groups have the common orientation of placing themselves outside the circles of the Brahmin elites, and this from the earliest Vedic period. The contact with the body and, more generally, with any object affected by pollution or disease or, worse still, with human and animal corpses, is seen as being beyond bounds for Brahmins. As a matter of fact, the purity-pollution factor heavily structures Brahminic society and is the corner stone of rites and sacrifices and of the distinctions between communities and classes (*jati, varna*)

The ascetics and the healers, on the contrary, consider the composite of body-breath-spirit as a field of observation, of experience and of change. They also look at the animals as well as decomposing corpses. The taboo of purity-pollution does not hinder such practices. Over the centuries a rich osmosis between medical science and yoga emerged, from the encounter between healers and ascetics, who were well disposed towards the art of healing. The fifth century before the Common Era seems to have been a very favourable moment for this bipolar approach, given the explosion of ascetical sects, not merely Hindu, but also Buddhist, Jain, and *ajivika*. We notice a remarkable advance in the knowledge of the anatomy, particularly in the medical texts of the Buddhists (*Sutta Pitaka, Dighanikaya...*)

### ***The Body in the Shramana Traditions of the Yoga, of the Upanishads and of the Tantras***

In the later Upanishads we find the basis of a subtle physiology of the human body, as well as the mention of different yogic techniques seeking to produce internal heat (*tapas*), to change it into conscious energy, and then to enable a fusion between the *Atman* (individual soul) and the *Brahman* (the absolute, universal soul). The interest of this transmutation is that it opens the way to liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*).

The Tantra texts also offer us an extraordinary testimony to the psychological and physiological knowledge of medieval India. An important example is given by *hatha-yoga*, the art of interior transformation, which uses the power of the breath and its control, the *pranayama*. According to this doctrine when the breath is made stable and balanced, the thought and the energy are also stable and balanced. When the central channel (*sushumna*) is open at the basis of the vertebrae and the ascending energy of the *kundalini* is launched, the flow of time and of thought are inverted, which leads to the opening of the individual conscience to the cosmic Conscience in *Samadhi* (perfect concentration).

To summarize this approach on the crossroads of yogic and medical circles: human reality is understood as a small part of the infinite essence, placed for the moment of an ephemeral voyage in a changing vehicle submitted to the circumstances of time and the body. The journey of existence has, in ancient India, a fundamental meaning: it has to achieve a radical transformation of self, passing from darkness to transparency, from inertia to dynamism, from forgetfulness to the recognition of the self. In this manner, the yogi sees himself as a “spiritual worker”, to pick up the expression of this wonderful anonymous book of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

However, it is something characteristic and exceptional to India that it has been able to offer a collection of a large variety of techniques of health including the body, the breath, the thought. Here are some essential elements of this approach:

- The body is made up five sheaths (*koshas*) made up respectively of food (*anna*), breath (*prana*), mind (*mano*), knowledge (*vijnana*) and bliss (*ananda*). The self/Self (*atman*) is at the heart. Self-integration does not mean that the sheaths have to be abandoned. Rather one has to descend progressively without attaching oneself to any of the sheaths. When one has reached the centre one integrates everything.

- The body with its sensual and motor capacities is 'irrigated' by a network of 72,000 small *nadis* or canals of subtle energy or streams of cosmic breath (*prana*). There are three main *nadis* (channels of energy or consciousness) that twist themselves through the 7 *chakras* or nodes: the *Sushumna* at the centre, the *Ida* on the left with a negative polarity and the *Pingala* on the right with a positive polarity. This network represents the energy field.
- The physical body is lived as an emanation or expression of the Self.
- The body is the revered vehicle which allows each living being to play its role during its existence and to accomplish its *svadharma* (his/her proper duty or vocation).
- But rather than identifying ourselves to a particular role, an appearance, we have to discover, across the various aspects of our being (body, breath, consciousness), the totality of our being and its profound links to the universe. We can thus reach the intuitive knowledge of the cosmic play that goes on as much in us (perceptions, thoughts, impressions...) as outside us, in the ever changing flow of the world (*Jagat*, the being in movement).
- Under this perpetual movement there is an underlying reality, the Self, pure, immobile, but living Consciousness, according to the school of Kashmiri Shivism. The access to this essential dimension constitutes the peak of yoga and the ways of liberation. It is at the same time insight and lived experience.

In the Western tradition the body is seen merely as a material container of the spiritual soul. The Indian tradition, through the breath and yoga, touches an energy field that mediates, not only between the body and the spirit, but also between nature and the

human and the human and the divine. Much of oriental spirituality revolves round the mastery of the energy field. This is why the body has to be cared for. It cannot simply be renounced. It has to be integrated.

### ***The Role of Attention in its Approach to the Body in Ancient India***

Neither the yoga, nor any psychosomatic technique, will be viable without the light of attention (*smriti*). Besides it is noteworthy that the same word *smriti* refers at the same time to attention and vigilance as well as to remembrance and love. The triad attention-memory-love is meaningful in many ways that is for each one to discover. Traditionally the following powers are attributed to *smriti*: getting out of inertia (*tamas*); taking care with intense attention; being in a state of attention.

As we know, the body holds an important place in the world of Hinduism: by means of various techniques and practices, with the energy of attention, it becomes a body that is disciplined, controlled, reduced to its essential function, suited to live the direct experience of reality.

Another interesting element concerns the intuition of a continuity of body-breath (energy)-consciousness. The body appears as the house of being, the locus of consciousness. Whereas in the West the duality body-spirit is taken for granted, in the East the triad body-soul (breath)-spirit (consciousness) is highlighted. One *is*, rather than *has*, a body. That is why one pays much attention to the body.

### ***The Body Expressive of Wisdom***

Indian tradition thinks of the body as a universe made up of complex networks at the same time physical and psychic, in which body, breath and spirit are intimately related. In its physical dimension the body is constituted by the five great elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether, which form the exterior cover. The more subtle, interior cover is made up of the canals through

which the breath-energy of life flows and of the various chakras which are the bases and nodes that structure the central axis of the body.

It is equally the place where the emotions are stored, the *vasana* (residual impregnations or hidden unconscious memories). As a matter of fact we are made up of innumerable strata, levels of identity, which can flower forth on the occasion of an experience. An innate wisdom is inscribed in our bodies, that of *ritam*, the cosmic order, which can become accessible again thanks to *smriti*. The fact of coming into contact again with oneself, also through the body, seized in its different dimensions, also plays an essential role in the process of transformation, of interior recognition.

### ***The Bhakti Tradition***

In the *Agamic* or *Bhakti* tradition the body as microcosm reflects the universe, the microcosm. Integrating the body one integrates the universe. The layout of the temple is such that as one walks from the entrance to the sacred centre, one moves from the basic to the summit chakra, integrating the whole body with the universe. The body in worship, in song and dance, integrates the senses, the emotion, reason and insight. In the Vaishnavite tradition the world is seen as the body of God, who is the Indweller. In the avatars God takes on a human body as a mediation of salvific loving relationship. Vishnu is supposed to have a subtle body form even without the avatars.

### ***Bhavana, Creative Contemplation***

The creative power of consciousness is, in India, an important part of yogic asceticism, probably 'invented' by the *shramana*, and used to its limits in the world of the Tantra. Translating it as contemplation may lead us to a mistake, for it is a question of a dynamic practice which consists in bringing to birth in oneself a reality, to experience it intensely. It is a causative term: the fact of making to exist in an act of mental creation.

This technique serves as an antidote to erroneous conceptions which are powerfully rooted in thought and hinder knowledge. The individual thinks of himself as limited, broken away from the absolute Reality, with his energy bound by physical and psychic structures. The yogic philosophers of Kashmir on the contrary develop a vision of being based on movement, osmosis, development and openness - so many innate, but forgotten qualities. It is interesting for us to discover such an imagination, of great value, philosophically profound and well argued. What then about the body in its multiple dimensions?

The subtle, interior, body is perceived as a stream. It is made up of currents, (canal) locks, sometimes obstructions. Most of the time, its fluidity escapes internal perception. But if the attention becomes really awake, then the *shramana* perceives the circulation of the universal sap in the *nadi* and realizes the presence of the *prana* in himself and in the universe. Thus in India, the body as the field of experience and transformation finds itself at the heart of the sacred, of rituals of diagrams such as the *mandala* and *yantra* destined to fix or concentrate the mental energy. These symbolic images are interiorized and recreated interiorly in a dynamic contemplation by the yogi. Such a practice aims at entering into contact with the breath in its varied forms, symbolized precisely by the lines called precisely *prana*.

When one becomes conscious of this fluidity the body is no longer lived as an individual space, closed, isolated, but as a place of osmosis between the individual which one is and the phenomena of the universe; this perception evokes a sentiment of fullness which, according to the treatises of Ayurveda, favours health (*aroga*), a term that signifies 'unbroken' fullness.

Thus the *shramana* or the yogi can at the same time "be a body", and experience oneself as 'self' (*atman*), going beyond this body. This fundamental experience of yoga is expressed as "pure presence to oneself".

## ***The Body, a Vibrating Frame Made of Consciousness-Energy according to Kashmiri Shaivism.***

Among the many philosophical schools that have flourished in the context of the *Tantra*, Kashmiri Shivism (8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> cent.) stands out by the originality and subtlety of its approach. Starting from experience, the authors speak much about the fullness (*purna*), the flowering (*vikasa*) of the energy-consciousness, etc.- so many themes incarnated by Shiva Nataraja, the Lord of the cosmic dance, master of time and of the rhythms oscillating between expansion and contraction on the stage of the universe and of the body.

Among the many schools of Kashmiri Shaivism, that of vibration (*spanda*) goes back to the 11<sup>th</sup> cent., to Vasugupta, the author of *Shiva-Sutra*. This first treatise on vibration is consecrated to the reality of *spanda*, the vibration of universal Consciousness which gives life and movement to all that exists. *Spanda* appears first of all as a wave, a simple tremour in the supreme Consciousness, according to the expression of Abhinavagupta (10-11<sup>th</sup> cent). *Spanda* is assimilated to the universal Heart, the centre and origin of everything. Starting from there these waves of pure energy-consciousness diffuse themselves progressively and weave a frame, a vibratory matrix, in which the phenomenal world in its entirety is deployed, from the invisible to the visible world.

The philosophers of Kashmir evoke a metaphor of radiant light (*prakasha*). This original luminosity of reality, different from the Vedanta, is understood as being without ceasing animated by an interior pulsation, charged with energy. Everything happens as if the high frequency of this original vibration, infinitely subtle, has to diminish its intensity in order to assume, in space and time, the varied forms of the things of this world, up to becoming the nearly unconscious and inert matter. Abhinavagupta pays homage to the vibration, essence of Shiva, in the beginning of his *Commentary on the Recognition of the Lord*: “We constantly praise Shiva, whose supreme vibration evokes the manifestation of the infinite variety of things.” It is obvious, from this point of view, that the body also

participates in this universal vibration. Vasugupta declares: “The body is the ritual oblation.”

The commentary of Kshemeraja (12<sup>th</sup> cent) clarifies that this sacrifice beyond the usual forms is possible only if the yogi does not undergo the illusion of taking the body, etc as the Self (*aham*). This is not the usual ego, but the pure consciousness “I am”, not weighed down by the ego (*ahamkara*) which stays behind all thoughts, perceptions, etc. The yogi then becomes aware of his body/bodies (gross, subtle, causal) as constantly immersed in the vibration of the universal Consciousness and making it/them a perpetual and spontaneous offering in the fire of consciousness. All agitation disappears when the roots of oppositions, attachments and aversions – the consciousness of the ego - is uprooted.

As in the Upanishads, the non-dual shivites of Kashmir place at the top of the hierarchy of rites the transcendence of forms, going beyond the ritual or meta-ritual which sees in the interiorization of the ritual action its most eminent form. A clarifying example is given in the passage of *Shiva Sutra* where consciousness assumes the role of fire, the objects of knowledge such as the body being the oblation. They become altogether one light.

The subtle or gross body which all beings consecrate as “subject” is the oblation which this great yogi pours in the fire of consciousness as soon as the error which identifies the body with the knowing subject ends. The only activity of the yogi consists in an uninterrupted offering of his person in the sacrificial fire of the universal Consciousness.

In the third and final chapter of the *Shiva-Sutra* the verses 9-11 present an allegory of the yogi as a dancer and spectator at the same time. The ballet of existence takes place in the universal Consciousness-Energy. The cosmic play and all his experiences are perceived by the awakened yogi, who no longer identifies himself with any particular role, as an expression of the free energy of Shiva.

The self is the dancer  
The interior self is the stage  
Its sense organs are the spectators.

The following verses describe a state of flowering, possible for every being which experiences in its body, its organs of knowledge and perception, the highest vibration and recognizes it as the universal vibration. If this is diffused in the daily activities, the yogi lives the awakening in the heart of *samsara*.

Such it is there (in the body), such it is elsewhere.  
The functions of the body form its religious observance.  
The universe is the expansion of its own energy.  
Each one feels by his own experience the creative energy.  
In the body, in the organs and in the external objects.

In this way during his life the yogi uses his body as an instrument that he manipulates according to his will with a total detachment. He sees the world as the crystallization of divine energies animated by the universal *Spanda*. All his being appears to him, as long as he goes along the ways of realization, as a field of transformation and of awakening. Let me give the final word to Abhinavagupta, evoking the highest yogic experience, lived in all the dimensions of life, everything appearing to him as a soaring of cosmic vibration.

Shiva, a perfectly free Consciousness, limpid in its essence, vibrates without ceasing and this supreme energy diffuses itself up to the sense organs. There is nothing more to do than be happy and the whole universe vibrates with consciousness. In truth I do not see where could be this echo which is transmigration.

These texts seem without doubt sometimes unclear and cannot be understood in all their depth in an instant. However they have an undeniable quality, that of orienting the yogi on his/her way, pointing to a horizon which, to some, has become familiar.

## NEW BOOKS RELEASED BY GUJARAT SAHITYA PRAKASH IN 2011

### **RIPPLES OF LOVE**

Hedwing Lewis SJ

The book is a collection of stories and poems, all on the central reality of life - love.

ISBN 978 93 80066 52 3      pp 152      ₹ 120.00

### **BECOMING WHOLESOME TO HELP MANY**

Mark Barco, SJ

The book presents fruitful findings from faith, experience and wholesome heroic responses beyond the talk, touches and tokens of love."

ISBN 978 93 80066 53 0      pp 128      ₹ 100.00

### **LIFE WITH WINGS**

Carlos G. Valles SJ

The angels fill up the Bible... This book aims at collecting the memories of all those angels with biblical accuracy and personal affection.

ISBN 978 93 80066 47 9      pp 128      ₹ 110.00

### **HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US**

Maurice Dullard, SJ

This book is from an Ignatian scholar. He offers references and explanations from the Bible and the Spiritual Exercises.

ISBN 978 93 80066 28 8      pp 152      ₹ 120.00

### **JESUS MOST PRECIOUS GIFT, PRAYER**

Fr. Pablo Gil SJ

Pablo Gil, SJ writes in a popular and simple style what theologians and spiritual writers have written in more scientific and technical Language.

ISBN 978 93 80066 43 1      pp 112      ₹ 90.00

### **MY PERSONAL VOCATION & MISSION**

Tom Kunnunkal SJ

ISBN 978-93-80066-34-6      pp 56      ₹ 50.00

If a person wants to be happy, he needs a road map in order to navigate his life's journey, he needs to revise his map of life time to time.

### **FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS**

Jose A. Pagola

These are inspiring Sunday homilies for year B (2012).

ISBN 978-19-34996-27-0      PP 158      ₹ 100.00

### **THE JOYS OF MARRIAGE**

Sr. M Carol A.C.

Sister M. Carol A.C. was in touch with the problems of her students. She wrote this book to help students.

ISBN 978-93-80066-56-1      PP 112      ₹ 90.00

### **THE SPIRITUAL DAIRY OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**      Dr. Thomas Panikulam

Fr. This book is fruit of doctoral studies on the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Mystical Classic - Spritual Dairy of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

ISBN 978-93-80066-54-1      PP 108      ₹ 100.00

### **GOD'S FOOLISH LOVE II A SEQUEL**

Edwin Daily S.J.

The book contains thought provoking poems which deal with various aspects of life in relation to God and we can make our life meaningful.

ISBN 978-93-80066-51-6      PP 88      ₹ 80.00



*"In regard to the five senses of the body, the same procedure will always be observed, but the subject matter will be different. If I wish to imitate Christ our Lord in the use of my five senses, I should commend myself to the Divine Majesty in the preparatory prayer, and after the consideration of the each sense, recite a Hail Mary and an Our Father."*

*Sp. Ex. 247-248*

