Spirituality, Science and Transformation
Versus
Frozen Boundaries of Belief Systems [i]

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Abstract

It is hypothesised that the basis of spirituality is the ability to question one's experiences. This ability is derived from a mind-set, which is usually termed as faith. Scientific investigation in any field of human behaviour also arises out of this ability, and to that extent spirituality and science may be thought of as going hand in hand, though in popular perception the two are considered as very different processes. Belief, on the other hand, springs from assumptions that are often considered to be beyond question. Both magic and religion appear to be based on the latter, though in essence they differ. It may well be that some culture traits (processes) get categorised as magic because those who term these processes as magic fail to question their own assumptions about what is rational and what is irrational, what is probable and what is improbable. Two corollary hypotheses can now be formulated. First, the frontiers of spirituality and science expand forever because to ask questions, the 'impossible' questions in particular, is to challenge the validity of accepted boundaries. In other words, boundaries undergo transformation, a process that takes place on the basis of faith. Institutions, on the other hand, whether religious, socio-economic or political, are in the business of upholding the notion of frozen boundaries since they are based on belief systems. Hence, whereas spirituality and science can undergo transformation, institutions can only go through change, which is a process of compromise based on a tension between the old and the new.

Introduction:

I would like to begin by stating that although in the abstract I have used words to the effect that one either questions one's experience or does not question one's experience, I have actually meant questioning the way we interpret our experience rather than the experience itself. It is important to note this difference in order to have some idea of the mind-set and heart-set[ii] that pave the way for questioning rather than defending what one already 'knows through experience'.

Experience is sensual. It is then articulated. This articulation is based partly on what we have been taught and what we have learned in the past, and on associated feelings related to these past experiences. It is also partly based on what we have, beyond our awareness, refused to admit in our conscious part of the psyche, once again due to the feelings associated with those experiences that have been left out of what we call 'memory'. That is to say, the here and now experience is always partly interpreted on the basis of thoughts stored in the memory and partly through a process taking place beyond one's awareness, on the basis of data stored in the unconscious, along with the associated feelings and emotions.

I would also like to make it clear that what I am going to present here is a series of tentative thoughts and formulations rather than conclusions.

It has been hypothesised in an earlier article (Chattopadhyay, 1998) that religion is a defence against spirituality. The thrust of the argument was that those who are known as founders of various religions, like Moses, Buddha, Mahavir Jain, Jesus Christ, or Guru Nanak, never talked of founding or creating a new religion. Based on their insights about the place of their fellow beings in the cosmos, they all sought to influence people

in adopting particular ways of living. For Moses, according to the Old Testament, the fundamental basis of this way of life rested on ten principles, known as the Ten Commandments. According to the myth, God spoke these Ten Commandments and Moses heard them while alone in the mountains. What may have happened in this case is that Moses gained insights through a period of inner exploration in the solitude offered by the mountains. In this case of Buddha, it is even clearer that he did not set about creating a religion. On the basis of the insights gained while meditating for years under a tree in a place called Bodhgaya in India, he exhorted people to follow an eightfold path of living. Similarly, Mahavir Jain talked about following a way of life and Guru Nanak sought to build a bridge between Hindus and Moslems by inventing a way of life during a period in his life when he lived in Persia. I do not know of any record of how exactly Jain and Nanak arrived at their respective insights. As for Jesus, the myth relates how he went into the desert alone, where he presumably went to mediate. His insights were about restoring the purity of a way of life upheld by Judaism.

In all of these cases the spiritual leader shared his insights with the people and these insights dealt with boundary conditions, i.e. of managing boundaries of relationships. These boundaries included all kinds of relationships with people (economic, political, kinship, etc.) and other kinds of relationships with the environment in general. Thus, for example, in the case of Moses, the 'commandment' against committing adultery concerns management of the family boundary as well as intrapersonal sexual boundary both emotionally and physically; the 'commandment' to give up idolatry conveys the idea that all boundaries are man-made, an idol being a prime example of a man-made boundary since it highlights the process of strong emotional investment on the boundary once it is imagined (i.e. conceptualised) and put in place.

It can also be said that Moses himself personified a challenge to boundaries. He was born to Jochebed, an Israelite woman, and her husband Amram of the tribe of Levi, yet he was brought up in the royal Egyptian household in a style befitting an Egyptian prince. But eventually he challenged on behalf the Semitic tribes the boundary imposed upon them by an autocratic ruler.

Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan attempted to expand the emotional boundary beyond the petty tribal loyalties of his time. In fact, by emphasising the importance of love throughout his life as a preacher, Christ sought to transcend the boundaries set by other emotions such as anger and envy.

Buddha and Jain were born in the Indian sub-continent at a time when the *varna* system (generally known as the caste system) in its transformed shape had become well entrenched. The original purpose of the system had been to bind together within a socio-economic framework the various peoples of the sub-continent, who engaged in an extremely wide range of social practices and religious beliefs, by recognising and managing those differences (Bose, 1976). However, over several millennia, the varna system degenerated into a system of control over the majority by a minority elite (Chattopadhyay, 1997). Buddha's and Jain's preaching were directed, on the one hand, at breaking down the narrow boundaries that were leading to the physical and emotional impoverishment of the majority in the hands of a self-indulgent minority, and, on the other, towards drawing people's attention to a state of boundarylessness which reflects the true nature of the experienced cosmos (as opposed to the perceived cosmos).

One could, in fact, go back to many millennia before Buddha and Jain in the Indian sub-continent and point out that when the Vedic teachings, based greatly on the use of metaphors to convey what the sages had learned experientially, began to be misinterpreted, no doubt due to the effect of unconscious defence mechanisms, some of the *Upanishads*, such as the *Mandukya,* were composed to draw people's attention to the boundaryless state of the perceived cosmos. This effort was again made during the period chronicled in the Mahabharata as the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, just before the start of the war, which is reflected in the eighteen chapters that are together known as the *Geeta* (or the *Bhagavat Geeta*). Neither of these efforts, however, achieved long-term success in the face of entrenched elitism and associated vested interests.

As for Guru Nanak, he composed his magnum opus about the 'pure way of living' (the *Khalsa*) in an effort to remove the animosity between the invaded Indians known as the Hindus and the Mughal invaders who had also settled in India as Indians after defeating both the Hindu and the Pathan kings. Both the Pathan and Mughal invaders were Moslems, i.e. followers of Islam. Hence, Nanak too tried to expand the emotional boundaries of two groups of people in order to reduce, or do away with, conflict and strife. To that extent he was also a spiritual leader concerned with managing ever-wider boundary conditions. However, once again his ideas, through the creation of a narrow boundary, were institutionalised as the *Khalsa* or the Sikh religion[iii].

I have not tried to deal with Islam and its prophet Muhammad because, though he gained his insights while in solitary retreat in a mountain cave, his teachings, as contained in the holy Quran, deal with what he said not just in his capacity as a spiritual leader, but also as a general and an administrator. I therefore find it difficult to discuss any one aspect of his teachings in isolation. However, since the prophet's teachings revolve around the belief in a Supreme Being (*Allah***,** and many other names), by seeking to abolish many tribal boundaries of that period, he was also preaching about doing away with smaller boundaries.

Besides Moses, the lives of at least three of the great spiritual leaders – Sri Krishna, Buddha and Jesus – also in some sense personified the questioning of narrow boundaries in order to explore and expand one's sense of relatedness to one's environment. Sri Krishna was a Jadava prince who was related to the great Kshatriya lineage known as the Kuru Vangsa through his aunt Kunti, who was married to prince Pandu. Sri Krishna had the vision of being instrumental in creating a *maha* (great) *Bharata* (India). This led to his becoming a kind of consultant to the Pandava princes, the sons of Pandu, an act that culminated in a war that, of the younger generation, left alive only prince Pariksheet, who became the emperor of an undivided kingdom that covered most of Bharatbarsha, as the sub-continent was then known. (Even now the alternate name for the Republic of India in the Indian constitution is Bharat). Thus, quite apart from his teachings about the individual's identity with the boundaryless cosmos, his political actions were also about uniting fragments by eliminating boundaries. Buddha, like Sri Krishna, was a prince who broke out of the boundaries of his privileged elitist position and embraced the whole of humanity when he began to meditate. Jesus, a carpenter by profession and a Jew by religion questioned the beliefs of the religion to which he was born. The nature of his questioning also concerned the narrowing of various boundaries, which did not go down well with the priests at all.

SPIRITUALITY ENCAPSULATED AS RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

Unfortunately, the followers of all these spiritual leaders managed, in rather a short while, to create religions out of each of the attempts to create a more satisfactory way of living through expanding and managing the boundaries of consciousness.

These religions were created, I have speculated, in an attempt to safeguard the teachings of an insightful leader by institutionalising his ideas. Some of the experiences shared by those who have participated in group relations conferences (also known as working conferences) reveal the various results of institutionalisation. Different people carry different images or pictures of institution in their mind (see in this context Armstrong, 1991; Chattopadhyay, 1997). Part of these pictures is conscious. But beneath the conscious picture lies unconscious aspects of the image. Another way of looking at these phenomena is to follow Lawrence's (1999) suggestion and explore the dreams that in most situations remain unexplored. One striking feature of these dreams is the fragmentation of the wholeness of the institution in the mind.

Initially, groups of members of an institution come together on the basis of holding somewhat similar pictures and dreams of what they think and feel and dream about the institution, both consciously and unconsciously. However, conflict and power struggles usually ensue, due to the fact that each group tries to establish that the picture, which they hold in their minds, is the most appropriate one. Such power struggles in their turn destroy the wholeness of the institution in terms of its perceived and created man-made boundaries. Depending on the nature of the institution, it would mean the weakening and splintering of the institution itself, giving rise to many institutions, each claiming to carry on the ideal tradition of the founder, who, for most religious institutions, was not a founder of any institution at all!

Examples of the above process abound in the case of religions. All three Judeo-Christian religions are now represented by many sub-religions, the members of each of which claim to belong to the true institution (i.e. the true religion) as preached by the founder. In some cases, cults have also formed that try to pass themselves off as the true religious institution. As for the 'Hindu' religion, as has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Chattopadhyay, 1998), a number of peoples who were not Moslems were termed as 'Hindus' by Arabs when they first came to settle down on the West bank of the river Sindh (which they called 'Hind') in the sixth century AD. Even earlier, the Jews, who call themselves Ihudi in Hebrew, used to know those who dwelt along the banks of the river Sindh as the Hodi (Sindh-Hind-Hodi) and the Greeks had referred to the people living in that region as the Inde. Later a number of religions were loosely lumped under the term 'Hinduism', mainly due to the influence of the Christian missionaries in India, buttressed by the British historians. The picture of this institution called 'Hinduism' is varied and conflict-ridden, and it will be discussed in more detail later in the essay.

There are also examples of the institutionalisation of individuals, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose in India. In institutionalising Gandhi, one of the most critical elements of his teaching, an element that he demonstrated in his life again and again – that of using one's personal authority based on what one experiences as true on the basis of available evidence – has been relegated to obscurity. In this case of Bose, institutionalising him as Netaji ('the respected leader') seems to have successfully

hidden his life-long effort to create an emotionally integrated Indian nation rather than what it is today, a nation eating up its soul through regionalism of various kinds. Gandhi urged every individual to explore one's own truth (*Satyagraha*) and then to act from that truth on one's personal authority. Gandhi himself could thus state that the South African and the British imperialists could jail his body but not imprison his mind. In practice this was demonstrated by his becoming a more dynamic leader after each of his prolonged spells of imprisonment. This really meant not allowing the self to be fragmented, since fragmentation of self results in projecting various unacceptable fragments of the self on, among other things, various pictures of the institution as held by others.

As for Bose, it suffices to look at how he spent most of his adult life. His life in India as an adult was spent in whole-hearted participation in anti-British freedom struggle. Later he successfully hoodwinked the police when he was sent home from jail under guard for medical treatment, left India through the mountainous North West Frontier Province of British India posing as an Afghan, and spent his last few years building up the Indian National Army, largely composed of the Indian armed personnel who were Japanese prisoners of war during World War II, and fighting alongside the Japanese with the idea of entering India from the north-east and freeing the sub-continent from the grip of British imperialism. His death around the time of Japanese surrender, like that of many other great leaders, remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. By institutionalising Bose, the major thrust of his ideal – putting one's life in danger for the sake of creating an emotionally integrated nation called India – has been left out of the various pictures of Netaji as an institution.

Fragmentation of the institution called nation on the basis of mental images has been demonstrated many times in history and the process continues in the present for all to experience.

Then again, like all institutions, the religious ones too need administrators and in most cases these administrators follow a bureaucratic model that brings in two kinds of differentiation, internal and external. The internal differentiation usually has a heavy component of hierarchy, which is not amenable to questioning (see Chattopadhyay and Malhotra, 1991). The external differentiation creates a boundary around the institution and endows it with emotions that lead to competition and strife, more with similar kinds of institutions rather than with those that are very dissimilar, unless the threat of boundary incursion becomes high in reality or in imagination. This latter phenomenon has been discussed by Biran and Chattopadhyay (1997) by showing how the suppressed and the repressed evil in one's own group is projected onto another group which is then perceived as barbaric. That is to say, the other institutions are placed lower in some kind of a moral hierarchy imagined to exist in the environment. It is usual for the priests to form the bureaucracy in religious institutions (see Fromm, 1991) and it is they who provide the impetus for high-lighting the differences and creating moral, and in many instances political, sanctions to uphold both kinds of hierarchies in the mind.

In governments, particularly those that are democratically elected, the job of the political 'masters', i.e. the ministers, is to integrate the system called the nation and question various boundaries in order to introduce changes which they believe will result in a better system for the people. The bureaucrats or civil servants, however, as the administrators, steadfastly attempt to hold on to the existing differentiation. Although presented as a great caricature of what actually happens, the BBC TV series *Yes Minister* provides an admirably accurate representation of these phenomena.

In this connection it is also interesting to note one of the processes that occurred during the working conference on 'Authority for Spirituality' offered by the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis during September 1999. A series of related hypotheses that were developed by the staff on the basis of available evidence and worked on during the second day were: (i) the members had unconsciously assumed that the staff would offer 'spirituality' to them, which they would then ingest; (ii) this would be partly done through staff helping the members to put together their internal fragments of sexuality, spirituality, love, hate, etc. in order to become whole; (iii) as the members actually moved towards experiencing boundarylessness, the terror of that happening made them fragment themselves more and more as a defence against that potential experience. Thus the paradox created was fighting the very objective of the working conference in the name of working towards it.

The experience of the staff was one of being threatened with fragmentation through conflict. One of the ways in which the staff managed to deal with this internal process was to mentally move out of the conference in order to understand what was happening within the conference. This sounds rather paradoxical in that it was as though the staff became a basic assumption Flight group instead of remaining a task group (Bion, 1961) in order to engage with the task of the conference! In fact it was an effective tactic in terms of engaging with the conference task. (The process was akin to what Sievers (1996) describes as the use of narrative method by the staff of a conference directed by him in Germany). Once the staff succeeded in getting their act together, one of the members immediately felt free in a plenary to talk about her experience of boundarylessness.

The process described in the foregoing paragraphs can be interpreted in the following way. The conference was fantasised by the members as some kind of an institution where the members in student role learned from the staff in teacher role, rather than an event where they could develop insights from their own experience within the conference. The fantasy was one of a common set of beliefs about what spirituality is, based on the staff's supposed authority. But when the staff mobilised their authority to surface this phenomena, the members, through an unconsciously selected spokesperson, succeeded in experiencing spirituality by holding in the mind a holistic picture of the working conference as an institution.

SPIRITUALITY, FAITH AND BELIEF

We have used the term 'spiritual leader' to describe people like Shree Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mahavir Jain and Guru Nanak because each of them sought to do away with numerous boundaries assumed by people in order that they could live harmoniously with their environment. Some of them clearly went so far as to point out, albeit metaphorically, that the entire cosmos is boundaryless. Furthermore, most of them had discovered this insight within themselves while meditating in some kind of solitude. Thus, we have defined 'spirituality' as the phenomenon of discovering within oneself one's identity with the entire boundless, indivisible (*advaita* of the *Vedanta* philosophy) cosmos (or the *cosmic continuum*, as I would prefer to describe it). If we now reconsider the acts of the spiritual leaders mentioned in the foregoing section, we could formulate a definition of 'faith' in order to differentiate it from 'belief'. Faith is something that one derives from one's experience based on learning of one kind or another. One arrives at one's faith through mobilising one's personal authority to explore what one considers to

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be one's reality, one's truth. This exploration includes questioning one's perceptions and feelings. When followers make attempts to institutionalise the faith of a spiritual leader, based on his insight, that faith gets converted into an institutionalised belief system.

One always has the possibility of questioning and exploring the basis of one's faith. Such questioning and exploration are likely to either strengthen the faith, or modify it, or lead one to reject it, thus paving the way for a new faith to replace it. A great political leader like Gandhi demonstrated this phenomenon again and again by publicly denouncing his previous ideas to talk of a new one based on his more recent experience of what he held as the Indian reality. If any conflict arises in this process, it is a matter involving one's head and heart.

Belief, on the other hand, is something that is based on ideas largely frozen in time. It is of necessity bound to be so since beliefs are about maintaining the boundary conditions of institutions of all kinds – religious, cultural, economic, emotional, and so on. Unlike in the case of faith, which one accepts, rejects or modifies on the basis of one's experience (if one remains open to it), one is rejected as a person by the group if one questions a belief system that forms the basis of the institution, whatever be one's motive for doing so. One of the results of this process is that the boundaries of belief systems do not grow, but may well contract. This is how either the religious system declares the questioner as a heretic and puts such a person outside its boundary, or the religious system itself gets fragmented each time someone successfully questions its boundary and tries to explore alternatives. The same process occurs in such other systems as political parties and various forms of social organisations.

In the sense that its philosophy and rituals are not open to questioning, religious beliefs appear to share much in common with magic. For example, in the kind of magic known among many Australian Aboriginal tribes as bone pointing, it is considered permissible under certain circumstances to inflict physical and mental harm on a fellow human being by following certain procedures. Failure to produce the desired result is always attributed to mistakes made in following the rituals, but the effectiveness of the rituals themselves is never questioned. There are many such examples of damaging or killing people through performing certain rituals. An example from rural Bengal would be what is known as *Nishi'r daak.* A very sick person's relatives may hire the service of a specialist known as the *Nishi.* He goes out at night holding a green coconut with a small hole made on its top. He carries the bit that has been cut out to make the hole. Then he chooses a house where there is a healthy person of same age and gender as that of the sick person, and calls out the name of the healthy person thrice. If the person wakes up and answers to his or her name, the hole in the coconut is quickly closed and the Nishi runs away to some place to proceed with other rituals. It is believed that after this the sickness is transferred to the healthy person whose name had been called out thrice in the dead of night by the Nishi. This specialist is always secretly called from a faraway village to avoid retribution.

It may be hypothesised that both in the case of the Australian Aboriginal bone pointing ceremony and the *Nishi'r daak* ritual what is involved is some kind of projection of psychic power for destroying a person. The widespread belief in many cultures about casting the evil eye may well have come from repetitive experience of use of psychic power by individuals for destructive purposes[iv]. But since these beliefs and practices are never explored to the extent of actually being experimented with in the wider culture, their boundaries are thought to have remained unchanged for centuries, if not for

millennia. This happens largely because from certain ethical and moral points of view it is considered better for some of those destructive phenomena to remain unexplored.

There are also examples of phenomena that appear magical because they defy the laws of nature as understood up to now by science. Those phenomena are powers or capacities demonstrated by individuals through such practices as, for example, meditations based on Zen (*Zazen*) or the comparatively recent invention known as Transcendental Meditation (TM), or through various forms of millennia old practice of Yoga and Reiki. While I do not know enough of the Zen techniques in order to pass comment, I am somewhat familiar with the experiments that have gone on in developing TM, and I am even more familiar with the experiments carried out in the present in the field of yoga. To mention here two examples, *Surya namaskara* and *Laya yoga* are two recent additions made to the practice of yoga by the Bihar School of Yoga. The same institution and the Yogoda Institute have experimented with Kriya yoga to adapt it to modern conditions and have come up with two very different methodologies, both of which, if followed with diligence and discipline, allow the practitioner (*sadhak*) to acquire the kind of powers that are likely to be considered magical, or at least extra-sensory, by those who convert science into a 'scientific belief system'[v]

Thus any belief system, whether religious, political or economic, or a conversion of science to a scientific belief system, creates narrow boundaries within which the believers are expected to remain, both in thought and action. Thus, economic systems like feudalism never transform but break down when their boundaries are successfully questioned, while unsuccessful questioning leads to punishment for the questioner by the powers that be. This is also true for such political systems as were and are based on imperialism, Nazism and communism. There is enough evidence available to us in the contemporary world and in the recent past for me not to require chronicling examples here.

Magic has been placed in the category of belief system, it seems to us, without adequately exploring the phenomena, since most 'magics' are considered to be in some ways unethical by so-called civilised societies. It could well be that such magical phenomena as bone pointing or *Nishi'r daak* are based on projection of a kind that the science of psychology is yet to research and understand.

In effect, then, acting on the basis of one's belief would mean mobilising the institutional authority that underpins and sustains the belief. This would be, broadly speaking, the cultural authority in its widest sense. It could be the authority of the politico-economic aspect of the culture, or the religious aspect of the culture, or the social structural aspect (e.g. the kinship structure) of the culture, or the authority vested in the myths and values embedded in the culture (e.g. behaviour related to keeping out of trouble vis-à-vis any supernatural agency, particular examples of which are: (i) not opening an umbrella indoors, not walking under a ladder, throwing salt behind one's back after spilling salt; (ii) various acts to steer clear of ghosts; (iii) various actions to avoid the evil eye; (iv) not uttering the word 'snake' after dark in certain snake infested parts of Bengal but substituting it with the word 'creeper', etc.), or even that of science if the practitioner proceeds without the necessary scientific mind and heart-set to observe a new experiment or explore a set of new experiences that apparently shake one's beliefs based on published work one is familiar with. In all of these examples, one abdicates one's personal authority to accept the authority of the belief system without leaving the

door open for questioning and exploration. Something is then either done or abstained from being done without considering any probable cause and effect relationship.

Other examples, taken from diverse fields, of the unquestionable nature of beliefs are presented in the following paragraphs.

The first example is one of unquestioning belief based on a person's credibility in fields other than those, which should be explored and questioned. Thus the belief about the honesty and integrity of a naval lieutenant named Nicholas Koping, who was known as (that is, believed to be) a good observer, led to Linneaeus declaring his record of human beings with tails found on an island in the Bay of Bengal in 1647 to be true. Since Linneaeus was accepted as (that is, believed to be) an authority in the biological sciences in those days, the Scottish judge James Burnet, also known as Lord Monboddo, accepted the existence of human beings with tails and published the 'fact' some time between 1773-1792 (Monboddo, cited in Lewis, 1997). At a different level there is the example of Aristotle, followed by Aquinas and later by Descartes, all of whom championed the belief that among all kinds of living creatures only human beings have immortal souls because only they have the power of reasoning and reflection (Williams, 1978).   Another example comes from the famous anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1922), who believed that primitive tribes did not have the capacity for abstract thinking. This belief has been carried into the late twentieth century by Hallpike (1979), who suggests that the only way to cultivate the capacity for abstract thinking comes through the modern system of schooling and literacy.

The interesting thing about the beliefs of Lord Monboddo, Aristotle, Aquinas and Descartes is that they seem to have remained in the unconscious of people in many societies, so that a couple of centuries later well-known social scientists like Radcliffe-Brown and Hallpike echoed these very ideas in their intellectual exercises, while their compatriots found unconscious sanction in destroying, both morally and economically, if not physically, tribes that had existing for thousands of years.   *It is as though the 'civilised' people unconsciously made the tribes people the receptacles for holding some unacceptable internal realities that are termed as 'primitive' and then sought to destroy these internal realities in the (unconscious) hope of getting rid of them.   Thus it seems most likely that the image of tribes people in the unconscious of many so-called civilised societies is that of some kind of distant relation to the Bay of Bengal islanders with tails who, because they merit the term 'primitive', cannot have immortal souls, and therefore can be destroyed like animals or insects !*

This is the psychic mechanism behind the mass destruction of the aboriginal tribes in Africa, Australia and the Americas in the hands of so-called civilised societies of Europe and those who were exported from Europe to those continents.   In Asia, the picture is even bleaker because first the aboriginal tribes (along with the other natives) were exploited to destruction by the European invaders, and now their present-day so-called civilised countrymen are exploiting them to destruction as well.

Regarding religious beliefs and why people do not question them, for reasons other than the embedded hierarchical infrastructure of the religious institutions (Chattopadhyay & Malhotra: 1991), two important views may be cited. Robertson Smith (1899) expressed one in the late nineteenth century while interpreting the Old Testament. His view is that religious beliefs as experienced at the time of the Old Testament gave distinctive order to the society, thus making them essential for the people to hold on to.   In this way the

Semites differentiated themselves from the other tribes around them. Emile Durkheim (1915) in the early twentieth century held, on the basis of his study of primitive religions, that a collective belief is emblematic of membership of a group and therefore is dangerous to question. Both the above points obtain even today in the case of the major religions, albeit in more subtle forms than found in the descriptions of the Old Testament or in the lives of the aboriginal tribes studied by Durkheim.

Religious rituals also become unquestionable because the basic assumption dependency (Bion, 1961) implicit in them cause regression of one kind or another. People in a regressed state of mind are not capable of logical questioning and exploration. It would be difficult otherwise to explain such rituals as the Holy Communion, of food becoming kosher through the blessings of a rabbi, or the practice of animal sacrifice, to name just a few examples. In the case of the Holy Communion, an element of make-believe is involved concerning what the wine and the wafer represent. There is also an underlying unconscious assumption (through the process of primitive identification) that one becomes Christ-like (i.e. a good Christian) through devouring the host. In the second example, first there is an unsubstantiated belief in the impure nature of natural products, followed by a second unsubstantiated and unsustainable, belief in the power acquired by a rabbi after going through a prescribed period of training. In the case of animal sacrifice, there seems to be a belief that bodiless supernatural beings are lustfully waiting to devour the raw flesh and blood of the sacrificed animals as payment for looking after the interests of those who offer sacrifice. This is also where religion and a particular type of social custom meet, the type in which one regresses and believes like a child that one can have what the 'adults' have without making the necessary effort over time to acquire skills and apply them to tasks. An example par excellence of such a social custom is gambling (cards, horse race, lottery, the works) in order to make a pile.

Faith, on the other hand, requires the mobilisation of personal authority, whether this involves accepting an insight or an intuition. One gives spiritual leadership based on one's insight or intuitive understanding of the cosmic phenomena after exploring one's faith within oneself, and continuing to explore it right through one's life. That is why John the Baptist could not become a spiritual leader. He had only one message to offer, in which he believed and for which he died. There was no scope for questioning him. But spiritual leaders like Jesus or Buddha were questioned time and time again and they did not offer the kind of almost pre-recorded message given by a person Like John the Baptist or many of the so-called godmen in India (unlike the original Shankaracharya, who was a spiritual leader). In the modern world, some spiritual leaders like Paramahmsa Satyananda Saraswati and Paramahamsa Niranjanananda Saraswati continually encourage their disciples and followers to question them (personal experience of the author and also published records[vi]). Faith, therefore, leads to expansion of boundaries.

Many thousand years ago in the Indian sub-continent, wise people explored their insights about the cosmos, both individually and within groups, and eventually concluded that the cosmos has no boundaries. It was their faith, which gave them the authority to come up with such a startling insight. Many Christian and Muslim so-called mystics (the Sufis, for example) have echoed this idea of boundarylessness.

I have used the term 'so-called' to qualify the word 'mystics' because it is likely that, since their insights continue to threaten the beliefs that have been institutionalised, the

basic assumption dependency (dependency on religious institutions) comes into play in selecting a terminology that fits the insights within a boundary that is hopefully *shrouded in mist.*   An attempt was made to institutionalise the insight that the cosmos has no boundary and no creator, and the result was fragmentation, giving birth to numerous religions, such as Shaivism, Shaktaism and Vaishnavism.   Between 600 and 1700 AD these religions were dubbed as sects, and were then lumped together to give rise to something called Hinduism.   Although this process appears to be an effort to move towards wholeness, in reality it conceals diverse conflicting issues that for several hundred years have been kept from surfacing and revealing the actual state of fragmentation.   As noted earlier in this essay, the term Hindu was coined by Arabs in the seventh century AD to describe all non-Moslems with whom they came into contact as they settled on the west bank of the river Sind.

Several centuries later, the Christian missionaries created the myth of Hindu*ism* in their efforts to proselytise the inhabitants of the sub-continent.   Since they had behind them the support of British imperialism, it seems that it was the process of identification with the aggressor that led the vast majority of Indians to internalise the idea.   Also, given the way the *varna* system had been interpreted during the last millennia before Christ, it suited the minority power elite, the Brahmans and the Kshatryias, to accept the notion of a religion with them at the top of the religious hierarchy.   However, in recent years issues surrounding caste hierarchy and exploitation have begun to surface in many parts of the country, leading to violence.   It could be hypothesised that the reason why it was possible in India after the 1996 general election for a rather extreme right-wing 'Hindu' political party (the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP for short) to form a coalition and capture the central Government at Delhi, and gain outright ministries in several states, was that a massive unconscious assumption was held by many Hindus that only by formally politicising religion could enough pressure be generated all over India to once again suppress the fissiparous issues successfully and keep the belief system intact, albeit superficially,   For the same reason, the 1999 general election brought even greater power to the BJP and already many incidents of suppression and oppression involving violence, reminiscent of incidents in Germany under Hitler or in the USSR under Stalin, are taking place in India.

BION'S NOTION OF THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTAINED:

If we now turn to Bion's (1970) idea of the container-contained relationship, one could argue that religion as a bounded container was invented by mankind to contain spirituality in a way that made it appear less threatening.   To that extent, religion appears as an appropriate container[vii] from the point of view of its being a shield, a defence against confronting basic assumptions that keep the ultimate reality (Bion's 'O') safely distanced from one's consciousness.   As Bion has pointed out:

"…..the ultimate reality of the personality, O, is baseless.   This does not mean that the psychoanalytic method is unscientific, but that the term 'science', as it has been commonly used hitherto to describe an attitude to objects of sense, is not adequate to represent an approach to those realities with which 'psychoanalytical science' has to deal.   Nor is it adequate to represent that aspect of the human personality which is concerned with the unknown and which is ultimately unknowable – O.

"The criticism applies to every vertex, be it musical, religious, aesthetic . . . these and similar vertices are not adapted to the sensually baseless.   What is required is not a

base for psychoanalysis and its theories but a science that is not restricted by genesis in knowledge and sensuous background. It must be science of at-one-ment." (Bion, 1970).

From this point of view socio-analysis too must become a science of at-one-ment. This is a view point that resonates with the position taken by numerous modern physicists when it comes to the question of understanding the physical laws that govern the universe, as discussed briefly in this essay and also in greater detail elsewhere (Chattopadhyay, 2000).

In this connection it is also worth mentioning that Bion (1970) had quoted two lines from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

"The rising world of waters dark and deep.,
Won from the void and formless infinite." (1667, Book III, II. L. I-2)

These two lines are part of an invocation to light, which in Christian thought is equated with the first creation out of nothing. In other words, here is a message of boundarylessness in Christian thought that got lost during the process institutionalising the thought. It took a rebel poet like Milton, who supported Cromwell against the established monarchy of England, a poet whose sympathies lay with Satan for questioning God's authority (as it comes out rather clearly in the earlier parts of *Paradise Lost*), to achieve contact with the notion of 'the void and formless infinite', i.e. boundarylessness. (It is no wonder that he could transcend the boundary imposed by blindness!).

In fact this was also the position taken by the seers who composed the *Upanishads* in the Indian sub-continent some time between 6000 and 2500 BC. But this idea got buried again and again in a process similar to what Bion (1970) describes as a process of creating 'bigger and brighter paganism, with gods refurbished and rejuvenated as saints and devils'. (Milton represents this very clearly in his representation of *Pandemonium* in Books I and III of *Paradise Lost*.) Bion continues, 'One Christian Establishment restored the disrupted structure and ensured its continuity by taking over the festivals of paganism and thus mollifying the hostility that might otherwise have followed the loss of holidays and feasts that were beloved and valued.'

In the Indian sub-continent the notion of boundarylessness was buried under the creation of bigger and brighter pre-Aryan animism in the process of building up what is currently known as the Hindu religious establishment. This was done through deifying the powerful chieftains of non-Aryan pre-Vedic tribes known as *Devas* (with leaders with names like *Indra, Shiva*, etc.) and *Asuras* (with leaders like *Varuna*, etc.) and worshipping them. Both the related tribes of *Asuras* and Devas belonged to the race known as the *Vratyas*. They came to the Indian sub-continent earlier than the Aryans who were responsible for developing the Vedic culture (Chattopadhyay, 1963).

Keeping these ideas in mind, let me now change tack and look at the idea of container and contained in terms of a readily available example. The writing surface of a black board in a lecture theatre can be said to contain the chalk marks (written words, diagrams, etc.). At the next level the frame can be said to contain the blackboard. At the next level, the room can be said to contain the blackboard. We can thus keep increasing the size of the boundary of the container to suit our need. In the end we will

inevitably get to a cosmic boundary. This cosmic boundary was declared as an illusion on the basis of their experiential learning by the visionary sages who lived in the Indian sub-continent many thousands of years ago, and modern-day physicists have come to a similar conclusion through their scientific experiments. Thus, in terms of objective reality, neither containers nor the contained seem to exist. However, in order to engage with the tasks necessary for survival and growth, human beings are required to imagine boundaries, which are the containers. But it is faith that allows people to mobilise their personal authority to keep questioning these boundaries in order to expand the horizons of knowledge and understanding, and to change the nature of the container to suit the nature of the contained, i.e. in terms of institutions to reshape and even transform them according to the objectives for which they were founded, or according to the new objectives that are currently relevant. This faith is what underpins science and spirituality, both of which allow people to successfully question all boundaries, albeit in two very different ways.

Belief systems, on the other hand, lead to the creation of institutions which often insist on the performance of absurd tasks, as has been shown by Chapman (1999), that lead to hatred and corruption of the tasks. In the long run, this process inevitably defeats the objectives of the institution, and even, in some cases, its viability. Leaving aside the examples that Chapman has worked with in her article, I would suggest that modern formal education is a very good example of this process.

Some years ago, while exploring the academic scenario in India, I concluded that formal education in India was covertly being sabotaged, while overtly its aim was to vastly expand horizons (Chattopadhyay, 1991). I suggested the reason for this was the vested interest of members of the establishment and their anxiety that the succeeding generation would easily dislodge them from their position of power if it had access to an increasing amount of knowledge. This is an anxiety that each parental generation finds it difficult, if not impossible, to acknowledge largely because it is believed that every parent would like their children to have more opportunity for success in life than they themselves have had. This actually is part of a belief system that is supposed to govern parent-child relationships in most Indian cultures. As a result, parents apparently make a considerable effort to provide educational opportunities for their children's generation that were not available to them. However, this objective is carried out so messily that instead of being a stepping stone to developing wisdom, the education system increasingly overloads the younger generation with information, leaving little space for reflection which leads to the acquisition of wisdom. The way in which computing and the internet have been taught to the young provides a perfect illustration of this phenomenon. This teaching is pushing the young towards living in virtual reality and social isolation rather than grounding them in objective reality, where they may collaborate with others to create real things rather than virtual realities on the internet!

One could argue at this point that while theoretically it is possible to accept that both spirituality and science could, or even would, lead us, human beings, to an ever increasing extension of consciousness till we identify ourselves with the boundaryless cosmos – which one may designate as the cosmic continuum or *atman* or *brahman* or God – in practice this is an impossible objective to achieve. It would be impossible because, as Tagore (1914) pointed out a long time ago, "if this extension of consciousness be an outward process, then it is endless; it is like attempting to cross the ocean after ladling out its water. By beginning to try to realise all, one has to end by realising nothing."

However, the answer to this rather pessimistic argument has also been very clearly given by the same author.   He continues:

"But in reality, it is not so absurd as it sounds.   Man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burdens.   His burdens are many, too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load.   Whenever they feel complicated and unwieldy, it is because he has not been able to hit upon the system which would have set everything in place, and distributed the weight evenly.   This search for a system is really a search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonise the heterogeneous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment.   In the search we gradually become aware that to find out the One is to possess the All; that indeed is our last and highest privilege.   It is based on the law of the unity, which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength.   Its living principle is the power that is in truth of that unity which comprehends multiplicity.   Facts are many, but the truth is one . . . The apple falls from the tree, the rain descends on the earth – you can go on burdening your memory with such facts and never come to an end.   But once you get hold of the law of gravitation you can dispense with the necessity of collecting facts ad infinitum.   You have got at one truth, which governs numberless facts. . . a truth opens up a whole horizon, it leads us to the infinite . . . Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts – it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

"As in the region of knowledge so in that of consciousness; man must clearly realise some central truth which will give him an outlook over the widest possible field.

"It is this quest for realisation of a central truth, a quest based on one's faith in one's ability to explore the interpretations of one's experience, which, in my understanding, underpins both spirituality and science.   Exploring one's experience by definition involves reviewing and questioning how one keeps interpreting one's experience."

I would like to end by recalling here, side by side with the above quote from an Indian thinker's writings during the early 20th century about truth and the infinite reality, based both on his own experience of realisation and his intellectual understanding of the arguments presented in the ancient Sanskrit texts known as the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta*, the research based thoughts of a present day great physicist and mathematician, Stephen Hawkins.   His final quest is, and has for some time been to find out what he calls the Theory of Everything (TOE for short).   The aim is to formulate a theory, which will build bridges between other existing theories such as those of strong force and weak force and magnetic and gravitational fields.   The idea is that this theory will make the natural laws that govern the cosmos clear to mankind and also prove that since the cosmos 'has no edge' i.e. no boundary, there is also no possibility of there being a creator.

In a sense this seems to tantamount to realising the ultimate reality, the 'O', the one truth, by being at one with it.   Though in almost every way Hawkins is nothing beyond a lump of flesh with an active and brilliant mind, he continues to use that mind to open up the last frontier through his faith.   It is also interesting to recall the thoughts of another Nobel Laureate physicist, Sagan.   He wrote that he found it difficult to accept the notion of a God as an individual who counted the fall of every sparrow.   But if by God one

meant the natural laws that govern the cosmos, then he had no problem in accepting the notion of God.

This intellectual notion of God as a boundaryless, all pervading interplay of elementary particles governed by laws scarcely understood by mankind, and the realisation of that unbounded God within oneself, is in the domain of both spirituality and science. Engaging with spirituality and science requires a faith that has the prerequisite of exploring one's belief. My position is that such an exploration will lead to the discarding of some of one's beliefs or to constant modification of one's beliefs, a process that will not be acceptable to the establishment of any belief system, nor by those who adhere to belief systems.

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[i] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the September 1999 Scientific Meeting of the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis in Melbourne and a revised version of which was published in *Free Associations*, Vol. 8, Part 4, No. 48, 2004, Pp. 653-677, London. Later, a slightly reduced version was presented as the Dr. S.S.Sarkar memorial lecture, 2003, at the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta.

[ii] My colleague Zahid H. Gangjee, an HRD Consultant, uses the term "heart-set" to get across to his clients the idea that intellectual understanding on its own is not enough when an enterprise needs to transform itself for survival and growth. There is also the need for a very different kind of emotional investment.

[iii] It is not implied as a judgement that institutionalisation is a bad phenomena. Institutionalisation is a phenomenon that occurs both through planned process and through the unconscious dynamics of groups of people who have come together for various reasons. In this essay the impact of a particular kind of institutionalisation has been referred to.

iv The phenomenon of projective identification is well known to psychoanalysts and socio-analysts, if not to most serious students of psychology. Projective identification, particularly if it is based on envy, can be a very destructive process that could be perceived by the lay person as a case of casting the evil eye.

v I experienced an example of these phenomena of the mindset that converts science to a scientific belief system a few years ago while co-ordinating a series of Yoga for Health programmes offered by the Bihar School of Yoga in Calcutta. After recording a dramatic improvement in the health of patients with diabetes and heart problems, I approached the scientific correspondent of a Calcutta based national daily and requested him to attend some of the sessions and talk to former participants in order to do a piece in his columns on the application of yoga in curing and containing ailments that allopathic medicine cannot cure, though in many instances succeeds in containing with a lot of medication. The correspondent dismissed me with a single sentence 'I might as well do a piece on astrology!'

vi The question-and-answer sessions are recorded and published in various issues of *Yoga*, published by the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, and *Atmabha*, published by its Bangalore branch, Atma Darshan Yogashram.

vii Religion has been described as appearing to be an appropriate container because evidence suggests that it is such a narrow container that in every case modern religion are bursting at the seams. All the major religions have split into different sects that, more often than not, do not stop at murder and mayhem when it comes to dealing with 'brother' or 'sister' sects of the same religion.