

International Hybrid Seminars on

**Cultivating Transformative Faith and a New Ecology of Hope
&
Good Life, Good Society and Evolutionary Flourishing**

Date and Venue
6–8 January 2025
Adishesiah Auditorium, MIDS
& Online via Zoom
Adyar, Chennai, India

About the Seminars

In our two interlinked hybrid international seminars, we want to engage with issues of faith and hope in the first seminar and with good life, good society and evolutionary flourishing in our second seminar.

The first seminar will explore how we can cultivate transformative faith in our contemporary world which is nurtured by critique, creativity and transformations. We explore some of the following themes:

1. Cultivating Transformative Faith and a New Ecology of Hope: The wider philosophical and sociological challenges of rethinking and reconstruction;
2. Cultivating Transformative Faith: Rethinking and Re-Realizing Faith and Knowledge from multiple philosophical and spiritual traditions of the world;
3. New Dynamics of Faith and Contemporary Social, Political, Cultural and Social Movements for Transformations in the Face of Contemporary Challenges such as Climate Change and Corona Virus;
4. Understanding the Multi-Dimensional Challenges of Hope: Philosophy, Sociology, Politics, Poetics and Ecology of Hope;
5. Faith, Hope and the Agonistics of Human Existence: Toward a New Agonal Politics, Democracy and Spirituality;
6. Ecology of Faith and Hope and Steps towards a New Ecology of Mind;
7. Understanding the Works of Faith of Hope in Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Tillich, S. Radhakrishnan, Alama Iqbal, Aurelio Peccei, Harvey Cox, Hilary Putnam, Raimundo Panikkar, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and others;
8. Cultivating Transformative Faith and a New Ecology of Hope: Learning with Multiple Traditions of Humanity such as African, Chinese, Indigenous, Indian and South American traditions and exploring border-crossing pathways such as Vedanta, Confucianism, Ubuntu and a New Ecology of Faith and Hope;
9. Cultivating Faith and Hope, and Building a New Civilization of Life and Death
10. Faith and Hope and the Calling of Emerging New Civilizations of Humanity

The second seminar will engage with the themes of good life, good society and evolutionary flourishing. We invite interested seekers, scholars and participants to join us and offer their reflections on the following:

1. Good Life and Good Society: Different Perspectives and Pathways of Practices from Different Philosophical, Religious and Spiritual Traditions of the World;
2. Rethinking and Transforming Good Life: Rights, Rites and the Good
3. Good Life and Good Society: Rights, Justice and Responsibility
4. Good Society: Civil Society and Good Society
5. Good Society: Decent Society, Creative Society and the Good Society
6. Good Life, Good Society and the Challenges Before Disciplines and the Calling of a New Transdisciplinarity: The Challenges of the Empirical and the Normative and the Pursuit of the Good in Social Sciences, Humanities and the Natural Sciences and Exploring Pathways of Disciplines and Learning Pathways like Good Sociology and Good Economics
7. Good Life and Good Society: Constitutional Morality and Constitutional Spirituality (cf. Patnaik 2023).
8. Good Life and Good Society: Ethics, Aesthetics, Critique, Creativity and Transcendence
9. Good Life, Good Society and Evolutionary Flourishing: Rethinking Evolutionary Dynamics, Socio-Cultural Evolution and Practices of Learning from Failures and Collective Learning
10. Good Life and Good Society: Social, Cultural, Political and Spiritual Movements
11. Good Life, Good Society: With and Beyond Anthropocentrism and the Anthropocene and the Calling of Cross-Species Dignity, Beauty and Dialogues
12. Good Life and Good Society: Poetry, Songs and New Dance of Life

The above are only suggestive and you are invited to bring your own related themes to our conversations and exploration.

Cultivating Transformative Faith and a New Ecology of Hope

The Outline

*The highest strove to neighbor eternity
The largest widened into the infinite,
But though immortal, mighty and divine,
The first realms were close and kin to human mind;
Their deities shape our greater thinking's roads,
A fragment of their puissance can be ours:
These breadths were not too broad for our goals to range,
These heights were not too high for human hope.*

—Sri Aurobindo (1950), *Savitri*, p. 264–265.

I know the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip. God's word is: "He who strives never perishes." I have implicit faith in that promise. Though, therefore, from my weakness I fail a thousand times, I will not lose faith but hope that I shall see the Light [..]

—M. K. Gandhi (1955), *Truth is God*, p. 4.

Faith is a foundation and a continued co-traveller in our lives. Faith is a multi-dimensional journey. It is not reproducing blind faith and taken for granted dualism, oppositions and battles between self and other. Faith has a dimension of scepticism which makes us open as Paul Tillich (1957) tells us in his epochal, *Dynamics of Faith*. Tillich tells that the doubt that accompanies faith is not conventional doubt but existential scepticism of a person of faith. But how do we cultivate existential scepticism in our journey with faith and keep our journey open rather than closed? Alama Muhammad Iqbal also challenges us to cultivate such an open faith nurtured by existential scepticism in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Crises of faith has been a challenge with humanity for long and in our modern and postmodern world it has reached a chronic and pathological stage leading to loss of faith in Nature, Human and Divine which probably inspired S. Radhakrishnan (1956) to cultivate recovery of faith in his inspiring and epochal work, *Recovery of Faith*. We find similar aspirations and strivings in our contemporary savants such as Hilary Putnam (2008) who in his work *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* challenges us to find the roots of our faith as does Harvey Cox (2009) in his *The Future of Faith*. These also bring us to Jurgen Habermas's (2003) journey with both faith and knowledge which we can also read together with Giani Vattimo's (1999) journey with both faith and critical knowledge and developing what he calls weak thought and weak ontology which resonates with Tillich's pathways of existential faith.

Faith does work in self, society, culture, history and cosmos and we find glimpses of this in the works of philosophers and historians from India such as S. Sundara Rajan, G. C. Pande, Chitta Ranjan Das and Mushirul Hassan. Both Sundara Rajan and Pande interrogate modernist valorization of reason and challenge us to realize the role of vision in human history which is linked to the vision and practice of faith (Giri 2013). In his study of Gandhi, *Faith and History: Gandhi in History*, Mushirul Hassan (2013) also helps us understand the work of faith in history. Chitta Ranjan Das (2020) also challenges us to understand faith as *sraddha* which means love and respect and how it can help us in our journey of self, social and world realization and free us from loss of faith.

Faith is related to hope. Like faith, hope is also multi-dimensional. Hope does not fall from sky. It arises from our practices and movements though hope is not confined to it. In his work, *Spaces of Hope*, David Harvey (2000) challenges us to understand that hope emerges from our strivings and struggles. Ecologist M.S. Swaminathan (2011) also talks about ecology of hope which challenges us to understand hope in an ecological way. Ecology of hope is nurtured by our practice, vision and minds of self and society we create as suggested in such important works as G.H. Mead's *Mind, Self and Society*, Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and J.P.S. Uberoi's *Mind and Society* (Bateson 1972; Mead 1934; Uberoi 2019). Our journey with ecology of hope also relates to classic and contemporary works on politics and theology of hope such as Ernst Bloch's (1954) *The Principle of Hope*, Jurgen Moltmann's (1965) *Theology of Hope*, Jonathan Sack's (1997) *The Politics of Hope*, Barack Obama's (2006) *The Audacity of Hope*; Mamphela Ramhele's (2017), *Dreams, Betrayal and Hope* (2017); and Fred Dallmayr and Edward Demenchonok's (2017) journey with *The Courage to Hope*.

In our seminar, we explore some of these issues. We explore how we can cultivate transformative faith in our contemporary world which is nurtured by critique, creativity and transformations. We explore pathways of critical and creative co-creation in our journey with faith and knowledge. We also explore how we can cultivate transcendence in our life worlds and faith worlds which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent. We also explore new movements of transformation—political, social and spiritual—which are needed for cultivating transformative faith and a new ecology of hope in our lives.

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Good Life, Good Society and Evolutionary Flourishing

The Outline

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. [..]

Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it.

—Sri Aurobindo, “Evolutionary Crisis,” *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* 21: 1089.

More than any human value, the practice of a certain degree of non-violence has been at the core of human evolution and economic progress since the Industrial Revolution.

—Bharat Rao (2021), *Human Evolution, Economic Progress and Evolutionary Failure*, p. 3.

The most important value of status in Cuan [an alternative community the author has studied] is environmentalism and anti-consumption.

—Daniel Miller (2024), *The Good Enough Life*, p. 18.

The development of new *purusarthas* in the history of a culture or civilization would perhaps be one of the more important ways of looking at man’s history as it will emphasize ways of making his life significant in the pursuit of new ends of a different kind. [..] The emergence of any new *purusartha* on the horizon of human consciousness should be seen as a breakthrough in human history, providing the possibility of a new kind of pursuit not available earlier.

—Daya Krishna (1997: 25).

There are lesser and larger eternities, for eternity is a term of the soul & can exist in Time as well as exceeding it.

—Sri Aurobindo (2000), *Thoughts and Aphorism*, 31.

The *Good Life* has been a concern of Humanity since time immemorial. In the Greek tradition it is related to the vision and practice of *Eudaimonia*. The Good Life has been nurtured in many different cultures, religions, and philosophies of the world. In Indic traditions, *Purusartha* (ends and excellences of life) consisting of *Dharma* (right conduct), *Artha* (wealth and meaning), *Kama* (desire), and *Moksha* (salvation) presents us visions of the Good Life. In South America, we find this in *bon vivre* and in Bhutan in the discourse of the Gross National Happiness. In modern European traditions, especially that of Kant, there is also the challenge of the priority of right over good which thinkers such as John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Amartya Sen in their unique and related creative and critical ways have worked with and have challenged us to work, walk and meditate with (Rawls 1971; Habermas 1996; Sen 2009).

Therefore, our concern with the good life needs to address the challenges of right and good, but we need not be imprisoned in a dualism between the right and the good. At the same

time, we need to bring three other engagements here—Rites, Nature and God, understood in open ways (Divine and open Transcendence; Nature both external and inner Nature). Rite in the Confucian traditions refers to rituals of living and co-existence which is a part of the universal aspect of rituals of life, culture, and society. The rite is not just a site of the habitus of unreflective reproduction or repetition; it is a site of meditative and critical thinking. Rituals in the Vedic and Vedantic traditions also have this dimension and challenge of meditative self-realization and co-realizations. Discussion of Rights in the Kantian traditions of Rawls, Habermas, and Amartya Sen need to engage with rites and ways of life and living which also point to the limits of traditions of social contract. As Durkheim had challenged us a long time ago to realize that all contracts have a non-contractarian dimension, Amartya Sen recently tells us that the fundamental limits of traditions of the social contract is that it does not realize the need for unconditional support for each other that needs to accompany any vision and practice of social contract (Sen 2020). Sen draws this from his journey with Buddhism, but we can find resonance of this in many religious and philosophical traditions of the world, including in the philosophical streams nurtured by Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. Our journey with good, rights, and rites need not forget God, Goddesses, and varieties of small and big Transcendence in our lives. For this, in our present-day Euro-American dominated worlds and the world of European modernity (cf. Uberoi 2004), a special conscious cultivation is needed as most of us may still be imprisoned in “an Enlightenment Black Box”—cut off from Nature on the one hand and Divine on the other, as Fred Dallmayr (1998) challenges us to realize. Our journey with Good Lives needs to now make Enlightenment Bridges with Nature and the Divine. Nurturing a good life therefore needs simultaneous engagement with Good, Rights, Rites, Divine / Transcendence, and Nature.

Our multi-dimensional engagement with the Good Life takes in multiple planes and spheres of life—soul, self, society, culture, states and the world (cf. Schrag 1999). We need to cultivate our *sadhana* (strivings) and struggles of good life in all these spheres not only in the levels of self or society. The vision and practice of *Good Society* as cultivated by Robert Bellah and his co-authors following their earlier work on American society, *Habits of the Heart*, point in this direction (Bellah et al. 1985; 1991). For Bellah et al, a good society needs institutions that help us be attentive to each other rather be prisoners of distraction. Similarly, the visionary critique of Jeffrey Sachs (2013) in his *The Price of Civilization* challenges us to realize that American society today suffers from economic and social illusions and is prone to distraction rather than practice attentiveness to each other in economy, society, and polity. Bellah et al and Sachs, in their creative and critical ways, challenge us to link our vision and practice of the good life with the challenge of building good societies and economies which also include critiques and transformations of existing structures of political economy, linking them to a moral economy, moral sociology, and spiritual ecology (Piketty 2014; Giri 2024a; Giri 2024b). This can be linked to the visions and practices of decent society as discussed by Avishai Margalit (1998) and creative society as nurtured by Manoranjan Mohanty (1998; also see Mohanty 2024).

This calls for transformation in our existing modes of thinking and social organization and transcivilizational dialogues on the meanings of life and the good life. One important clue here is suggested by Charles Taylor that any discourse of life that does not acknowledge death and prepare itself to die has the danger of a violent cult of life. Taylor (1996), starting with his *Catholic Modernity*, possibly learned this with his admirable journey with Buddha (also see Taylor 2014). Similarly, Stanley Cavell and Veena Das in reflecting on the Wittgensteinian discourse of the form of life ask us what constitutes life and the danger of

a cult of form such as nation-state-centered rationality and anthropocentrism at the expense of life (cf. Das 2007). These questions bring us toward multiple pathways of learning across philosophical, religious, and spiritual traditions as already suggested. Here we can also bring Indic visions of *Purusartha* (ends and goals of life for human beings) consisting of Dharma (right conduct), *Artha* (wealth and meaning), *Kama* (desire), and *Moksha* (salvation) to our vision and practice of good life and good society. Today we need a new collective *purusartha* of self, society, and the worlds where we strive to bring these ends together in a spirit of multi-valued logic and ways of autonomy and interpenetration rather than the dualistic logic of either or (cf. Daya Krishna 1991; Mohanty 2002). We need a relational and integral *Purusartha* where our *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha* are related to each other rather than isolated from each other. Given our crises of economy, polity, society, and governance which need more trust in these and in ourselves, we need to bring *dharma* and *artha* together, *dharma* and *kama* together, and *dharma* and *moksha* together.

Our *sadhana* and struggles with the good life and good society as it is nourished by our trans-civilizational dialogues also meet with the trigonometry and *Sangam* (confluence) of ethics, aesthetics, and responsibility. We need to cultivate this trigonometry and three-folding confluence in our visions, discourses, and practices of good life and good society. We need to attend to challenges of global responsibility today in our engagement with the good life and good society especially focusing on global justice, dialogues across borders of religions and cultures, corporate social and spiritual responsibility, and responsibility in the face of climate change (Giri 2023). This calls for *planetary realizations*—realizing that we belong to and are children of our Mother Earth and that we live with this planet with other species as well as rocks and other forms of existence. In our seminar, we wish to explore some of the issues mentioned above.

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