

Book Review

Mystical Worlds Spiritual, Social and Secular

Amita Valmiki

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Even though we have been practising religion for thousands of years, why are we still in this unfathomable condition? What is it that prevents us from realising God's truth on earth? In today's pluralistic world, to maintain one's identity and sanity, the study of theistic-existentialism-mysticism in this voluminous work is enriching, and offers great value to all of us. It will immensely benefit students, research scholars and spiritual seekers. Reading this book would provide glimpses of experience in delight and thrill, and would motivate every reader to be involved in spiritual healing. I am extremely excited to write my views after reading this book. Amita Valmiki, a spiritual seeker herself stands as an inspiration for me. Her great passion towards mysticism, spiritual philosophy and to find deep meaning of life always came to forefront during the various philosophical discussions that I had with her.

Valmiki's book *Mystical Worlds Spiritual, Social and Secular* is an inspirational and timely work. While reviewing this book I was reminded of these famous lines that I came across some time ago-

The demon is always within,
 The goddess is always within,
 The battle too, is always within,
 And so is the triumph of one, over the other.
 Which one, over which one?

That choice is also, somehow always within.

What is this 'within?,' 'Where is the battle taking place?' and 'What is it seeking?'

These lines help one to presuppose, a 'self'. The conflict is within oneself and the 'self' is seeking some kind of solution or solace. Today, the pandemic crisis in the world has forced us to ask, why most of us do not have one true calling? It is because, there is a perpetual conflict in our nature. Our hearts, emotions, thoughts and deeds are in conflict; they aspire high, but they act quite differently. That is why, in spite of centuries of practices of religion, we are still far away from this realization that human reason is meant for discretion and not distinction.

In this book Valmiki has examined the impact of world religions and the pivotal role of theistic mysticism with a focal point of devotion as its integral part. She has very philosophically woven the silken fabric of Kabir's mysticism and Soren Kierkegaard's theistic existentialism and unfurled these two mystical seers' worlds with spiritual, social and secular seams of yarn draped in the evolutionary process of human civilization.

In the introduction, the author has referred to a wide collection of available resources in order to reiterate the fact that the religious aspirants on their perennial quest seek answers for, is there any immanent connection between one thing and another in this world—between a tree and a stone, or a human and a beast? The relationship between God and the world is the crucial point in cosmological doctrines and theological principles. In fact, the explanation behind the existence of many religions in the world, as mentioned in the book, namely, is to explore the relationship between God and the world, and consequently the relationship between the world and humanity. There are systems which have taken a stand that emphasizes one aspect or the other—the transcendent aspect of God, the immanent aspect of God, or the total difference between God and the world can be seen as transformative in the emancipation and upliftment of human life from the dogmatic slumber.

Valmiki, in chapter 2 and 3, has very comprehensively addressed the difficulty in the present times that we all are facing with the actual state of affairs. God's

relationship to the world includes his relationship with everything, because all things are contained in what we call the world or creation. The points of the different theologies are taken into consideration from ancient to medieval and to modern India's Bhakti Tradition in these two chapters. Further, chapter 4 on devotion is much more than an emotion. It is a combination of love, respect and surrender. The author has very clearly mentioned devotion comes out of acceptance and humility. Devotion brings out the best in us—love, humility, surrender, selflessness, fearlessness. It sublimates our emotions and thoughts. It is a matter of intense self-discipline; not merely intense contemplation, but intense self-searching. We have to scrutinise our hearts and ask ourselves every moment of our lives whether what we are doing is in accordance with our own basic nature. Valmiki has rightly pointed out the limitations of the world religion as being formal, mechanical, standardised and not a religion which has searched the depths of our own being and brought about a conversion of our nature.

It does not matter what religion we profess. All religions insist on the same kind of intense self-discipline. We are lacking in that. The moral crisis of the world today is the direct result of this divorce between our theory and practice. It is not necessary to say we are all religious. We talk of religion but commit murder uttering the name of God; we commit theft uttering the name of God. What sort of religion do we practise? That is the question we have to answer ourselves. That is why all the great religions ask us to practice austerities and asceticism. These seem so difficult, it may not be appropriate for present times. Instead, what is necessary is self-search. It is not religion that is at fault, but we the followers of religion are at fault.

As a result in chapter 5, the author has highlighted the multi-disciplinary approach to help us get over our present difficulties. Citing from various realms like environmental studies, Valmiki states that social reforms and humane virtues have the knowledge repositories from which every seeker can learn something or the other valuable in the philosophical journey of life where the personal and supra-personal meet. There is this discord between what we profess and our actual practices. So far as our theory is concerned, we affirm that there is God,

but when it comes to practice, we behave as if there is no God. And so long as this divorce exists, the present moral crisis will also exist.

The author very emphatically has therefore, drawn a parallel understanding between theistic existentialism with special mention of the works of Kabir and Kierkegaard. Reminding us of the fact that during any religious, moral or social crisis their contributions are symbolic, and can influence our thoughts and behaviour towards spirituality, the feeling of oneness with the whole of universe. Theistic mysticism is indeed the most desirable egalitarian model to build a secular society.

Thus, the only purpose of human existence is to be spiritual, to keep examining oneself and ask oneself whether we are drawing nearer to the ideals we profess or departing from them. This book has mysticism as a key to unlock concealed chambers of consciousness to establish spiritual unity.

