



# *The VOICE of* **ŚAṆKARA**

śaṅkara-bhāratī

His Holiness Jagadguru Jayendra Sarasvatī  
Pīthārohana-Svarṇajayantī Special Issue

*Editor*

**R. Balasubramanian**



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nirvāṇa-sandāyinī

victorious is the voice of Śaṅkara,  
leading, as it does, to liberation.

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## HOMAGE TO PRECEPTORS

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सदाशिव-समारम्भां शङ्कराचार्य-मध्यमाम् ।  
अस्मदाचार्य-पर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम् ॥

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*DEDICATION*

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TO OUR ĀCĀRYA-GURU

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R. Balasubramanian

This special issue of the *Voice of Śaṅkara*  
is dedicated to  
Pūjyaśrī Jagadguru Jayendra Sarasvatī  
Śaṅkarācārya of the Kāmakoti-pīṭha  
on the occasion of his  
Pīṭhārohaṇa Svarṇajayantī.

A text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.2.7) declares that the expounder of the *Brahma-vidyā* is wonderful and that the receiver of this knowledge is wonderful; and wonderful is he who knows being instructed by a proficient teacher, a guru extra-ordinary. What the Upaniṣadic text says is true of His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Jayendra Sarasvatī Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñcī Kāma-koti Pīṭha and his illustrious guru, His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Candrasekharendra Sarasvatī, justly famous as the Sage of Kāñcī, who was the sixty-eighth Śaṅkarācārya of the Kāñcī Kāmakoti-pīṭha. Of the different kinds of heritage that we speak of, the greatest is the spiritual heritage. Śrī Jayendra Sarasvatī, the sixty-ninth Śaṅkarācārya of the Kāmakotipīṭha, is the beneficiary of the spiritual heritage transmitted to him by his ācārya-guru, the Sage of Kāñcī.

The tradition of Ādi Śaṅkara which flourishes throughout the length and breadth of India is hoary as well as ancient. Its impact on the philosophy, religion, and culture of India is deep and pervasive. It is respected by both scholars and laymen in and outside India. It is followed by the *elite* and the commoners, the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate in India under the spiritual ministration and guidance of the Śaṅkarācāryas of the different sacred seats (*pīṭhas*) established by Ādi Śaṅkara. The antiquity of this tradition is traced to no less a personage than Nārāyaṇa himself—who is no other than Brahman, the source, support, and end of the world. The tradition of Advaita which owes its origin to Nārāyaṇa has come down to us first through family succession (*vaṁśa-paramparā*) and then through the teacher-disciple succession (*śiṣya-paramparā*). The family succession proceeds from Nārāyaṇa, the first teacher, through Brahmā, Vasiṣṭha, Śakti, Parāśara, and Vyāsa to Śuka. From Gauḍapāda onwards commences the *śiṣya-paramparā*. Gauḍapāda was the sannyāsin-disciple of Śuka; Govinda Bhagavatpāda was the disciple of Gauḍapāda; and Ādi Śaṅkara was the disciple of Govinda Bhagavatpāda.

Among the legendary figures in the religio-philosophical history of the world, Śaṅkara is one. He is unique in the Indian tradition. There is no one to be compared with him before or after his advent. According to tradition, Śaṅkara as a young boy of eight years met Govinda Bhagavatpāda on the banks of the river, Narmadā, accepted him as guru, and was initiated into the *sannyā-sāśrama* by him. Thereafter, as directed by his guru, Śaṅkara visited several places, held philosophical discussions with many scholars belonging to other traditions during his *dig-vijaya*, and established monastic institutions in the different places in the country, the most notable of which are the Jyotir-maṭha at Badarikāśrama, the Kālikā-pīṭha at Dvārakā, the Govardhana-pīṭha at Jagannātha-purī, the Śārādā-pīṭha at Śṛṅgeri, and the Kāmakoti-

स्वाध्याय-धर्मपठितं निजवेदशाखा-  
वेदान्तभूमिगतम् आदरपालितं च ।  
संन्यासिना परदृशा गुरुणोपदिष्टं  
साक्षान्महावचनमेव विमुक्तिहेतुः ॥

The major texts which occur in the Upaniṣad portion of one's own recension of the Vedas, which are studied in accordance with the rules prescribed for the study of one's own Veda and which are kept in mind with faith, when instructed by a preceptor who is an ascetic and who has realized the self, are the direct cause of liberation.

*The Saṅkṣepa Śārīraka (3.295) of Sarvajñātman*

-आशाङ्गानि तथैवैत-साशाङ्ग  
 । ज तलोपशाङ्गं सामीप्येनैव  
 श्रुतीपिण्डात् प्रकृत्या तस्मिन्  
 ॥ : हृत्क्रीमुनि र्मन्त्रहस्ताशाङ्ग

The major texts which occur in the Upanished portion  
 of one's own recension of the Vedas, which are studied  
 in accordance with the rules prescribed for the study of  
 one's own Veda and which are kept in mind with faith,  
 when instructed by a preceptor who is an ascetic and  
 who has realized the self, are the direct cause of  
 liberation.

The Sanskrita Śāstra (3.202) of Śaṅkara







pīṭha at Kāñcī. Tradition holds that he attained siddhi after ascending the *sarvajña-pīṭha* at Kāñcī. Quite a few must have been his followers. However, mention must be made of four of his direct disciples—Padmapāda, Hastāmalaka, Totaka, and Sureśvara—who expounded, elucidated, and amplified the teachings of the master. The preceptors belonging to the Advaita lineage are called creators of the *Brahma-vidyā* tradition.

The monastic institutions established by Śaṅkara continue even today, each functioning under the spiritual leadership of a Śaṅkarācārya whose lineage from Ādi Śaṅkara is traced through a succession of disciples. Tradition has it that Sureśvara, one of the direct disciples of Śaṅkara, was associated with the Kāmakotīpīṭha, and that Śaṅkara, after ascending the *sarvajña-pīṭha*, spent his last days at Kāñcī. To uphold and continue the sacred tradition of Ādi Śaṅkara, His Holiness Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī ascended the Kāmakotī-pīṭha at Kāñcī as its sixty-eighth Śaṅkarācārya on February 13, 1907. Speaking about the tremendous impact of the spiritual radiance of the Sage of Kāñcī, William Cenkner writes:

(Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī's) ministry, his administrative acumen and his influence upon the people of Tamil Nadu as head of a religious institution remain unparalleled by any figure of this century. He and Śrī Ramana Maharshi and Śrī Aurobindo [Ghose] have dominated South India as religious personalities in modern times, but the Śaṅkarācārya had the broadest appeal and effectiveness among the people.<sup>1</sup>

The Sage of Kāñcī selected a young disciple of nineteen years by name Subrahmanyam as his successor to the Kāmakotī-pīṭha, initiated him into *sannyāsāśrama* giving him the *sannyāsa* name "Jayendra Sarasvatī" on March 22, 1954, and trained him for continuing the tradition of Ādi Śaṅkara and also for discharging the responsibilities of the Maṭha. Spending the next sixteen years under the care and guidance of the Sage of Kāñcī, Śrī Jayendra Sarasvatī took the responsibility of the Maṭha in 1970. He under-

took the *dig-vijaya* in 1972 and visited Delhi, Varanasi, and other important places in the whole of India. He covered a distance of more than 1500 miles on foot. The *dig-vijaya* helped him to establish contact with scholars and lay people throughout the country. He addressed large gatherings everywhere in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit. It must be borne in mind in this connection the significance of the term "Jagadguru" that has been appended to the personal names of the Śaṅkarācāryas. This term means "world-teacher", because their teachings are meant for all sections of society, for the entire mankind. Even when they are addressed to the Hindus, they are applicable, with suitable modifications, to the followers of other faiths.

Pūjyaśrī Jayendra Sarasvatī is both an ācārya and a guru rolled into one. There is a traditional verse which defines an ācārya as follows:

*ācinoti hi śāstrārthān, ācāre sthāpayatyapi  
svayam ācarate yaśca, tam ācāryam pracakṣate.*

An ācārya is one who inquires into the meaning of the scriptural text, lives in accordance with the teachings contained therein, and makes others live according to them through the example of his own life. It may be pointed out in this connection that "ācārya", "ācaraṇa" "ācāra", and "cara" are cognate words conveying the sense of walking along a path, a certain order, conduct, and so on. It is also relevant in this context to note the significance of the term "*śāstra-sampradāya*". A *sampradāya* is tradition which has evolved according to the rules which are codified in scripture (*śāstra*) for the purpose of observance in life (*anuṣṭhāna*). While *śāstra* is common to all, a *sampradāya* is what is practised by the members of a given community including those who are conversant with the scriptural text. It follows that *sampradāyas* may differ from community to community, from region to region, even from family to family. That is why we speak of *deśācāra*, *kulācāra*, and so on. So an ācārya is one who is not only proficient

यस्मात्कृपापरवशो मम दुश्चिकित्सं  
संसाररोगमपनेतुमसि प्रवृत्तः ।  
त्वत्पादपङ्कजरजःशिरसा दधानः  
त्वामाशरीरपतनाद् अहमभ्युपासे ॥

Since you have undertaken to remove my disease in the form of transmigration which is hard to cure, I shall worship you until the final fall of my body, by bearing the dust of your lotus feet on my head.

*The Saṅkṣepa Śārīraka (4.59) of Sarvajñātman*

सर्वोक्तिं सांख्ययोगकृतम्

संस्कृतमीमांसाशास्त्रम्

व्याख्यानं श्रीमद्भारतमुनिविरचितम्

संस्कृतशास्त्रसंस्कृतशास्त्रम्

How far you have undertaken to read or to understand the form of transcription which is here given, I do not know. You may be the real tip of my nose, but I do not know of your feet, or of your hands.

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in scripture, but also practises the codes of conduct of the *sampradāya* he belongs to and disciplines his followers both in theory and practice.

The term "guru" means "weight", "big", "great". A guru is inwardly big or great, i.e. a *mahān* because of his learning and experience. He need not, like an ācārya, be proficient in *śāstra* and do anything outwardly perceptible for the world. He may even spend his time in silence. However, it does not follow from this that a guru does not know *śāstra* and impart its teachings to disciples. There have been gurus who have also functioned as ācāryas, e.g. Ādi Śaṅkara and his disciples who have adorned the *pīthas* established by him.

Though an ācārya may be differentiated from a guru, the two, in an important sense, are the same. The Sage of Kāñcī in his discourse draws our attention to the oneness of an ācārya and a guru. He observes:

If the ācārya is fully qualified, he too becomes a guru. He is a teacher of exemplary character as far as his outward life is concerned and, besides being a man of learning, he leads a life that conforms to a particular system. At the same time he may be beyond any system, *as far as his own life is concerned*, and has the realization of the Ātman and Īśvara and the power of bestowing grace. All our ācārya-puruṣas belong to this type.<sup>2</sup>

As the head of the Kāmakoti-pīṭha and follower of the *Brahma-vidyā* tradition, Śrī Jayendra Sarasvatī is a great ācārya. He is also at the same time an illustrious *jagadguru*. He is concerned as much with the improvement of the social life of the people as with their spiritual upliftment and cultural renaissance. Help to the poor and the needy, upliftment of the downtrodden, preservation of the *pāṭhaśālā* and the Oriental schools, renovation of temples and revitalization of their activities, health-care of the sick and the aged, promotion of value-sustaining cultural activities—all these received and continue to receive the special attention of His Holiness. What a glorious life of spiritual ministration which one notices in him reaffirming the past, reflecting the great-

ness of the tradition in all the activities of the present, and regulating the present for the fulfilment of the lofty ideals in the future!

As an exemplar of the Advaita tradition, our ācārya-guru discharges his functions at two levels, spiritual and empirical. It is necessary to bear in mind the important distinction that Advaita makes between the *pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika* standpoints. It is wrong to think that Advaita which holds that Brahman-Ātman is the sole reality has ignored the value and importance of the *vyāvahārika* realm. When Advaita holds that the everyday world which is assigned to the *vyāvahārika* level is illusory or false (*mithyā*), it is not to reduce it to a non-entity, an airy nothing, but to emphasize its dependent nature on Brahman-Ātman. We have to discover Brahman-Ātman in and through the world in which the former remains concealed when the world manifestation has taken place. Hence the value and importance of the world as the gateway to Brahman-realization. In his discourses our ācārya-guru tells us that we have to perform our activities, both spiritual and secular, according to the principles of *dharma*, which take care of our total life. Though he has renounced the world, he is watchful of the activities of both individuals and institutions, and responds to their calls. Though a *sannyāsin* of the highest order, he leads an active life without any "involvement" in the worldly affairs; he is *in* the world, but not *of* the world. His is actionless activity. His spiritual ministrations are available to hundreds and thousands of people who seek his guidance and grace. He showers his blessings on them, but does not lean upon them. He achieves his aim, but does not call attention to what he does. This indeed is the glory and greatness of our ācārya-guru.

#### NOTES

1. William Cenkner, *A Tradition of Teachers and the Jagadgurus Today*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, p. 123.
2. *Voice of the Guru: The Guru Tradition*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1991, p. 45.



## HOMAGE TO ŚAṄKARA

[192]

अस्माकं यद्भिदाज्ञानम् अज्ञानेन प्रवर्धितम् ।  
तन्नाशनं कुरु गुरो मोक्षदो भव सन्ततम् ॥

asmākaṁ yad-bhidā-jñānaṁ ajñānena pravardhitam /  
tan-nāśanaṁ kuru guro mokṣado bhava santatam //

Oh Master Śrī Śaṅkara! Be thou forever the one who yields *mokṣa* (liberation). Oh master, kindly remove our knowledge of duality which is nourished by our ignorance.

[193]

यद्ब्र-मानससरः प्रतिलब्धजन्म-  
 भाष्यारविन्द-मकरन्दरसम् पिबन्ति ।  
 प्रत्याशमुन्मुख-विनीत-विनेयभृङ्गाः  
 तान् भाष्यवित्तकगुरुन् प्रणमामि मूर्ध्ना ॥

yad-vaktra-mānasa-śaraḥ pratilabdha-janma-  
 bhāṣyāravinda-makarandarasam-pibanti  
 pratyāśam-unmukha-vinīta-vineya-bhṛṅgāḥ  
 tān bhāṣya-vittaka-gurūn praṇamāmi mūrdhnā.

Let me prostrate at the feet of the great Master, Śrī Śaṅkara, the exalted Sage—whose famous commentaries (*Bhāṣyas*) always yield the nectarine knowledge to drink which, scholars from all directions throng in multitude to the lotuses of the crystal-clear Mānasa-sarovara, the lake on the great Himālayas. These commentaries of my Master are the veritable treasure-houses of bliss. They are the sole wealth of this extra-ordinary Ascetic and of his pupils also. *Mānasa-sara* here refers to the calm lake of the mind of the World-teacher (Jagadguru), Śrī Śaṅkara.

From the *Pañcapādikā* of Śrī Padmapāda

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## THUS SPAKE ŚAṄKARA

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R. Balasubramanian

### Self-body Relation

The problem of the relation between the Self and the body has been engaging the attention of the philosophers of all traditions right from the beginning of philosophical speculation. The western philosophers usually refer to this as the problem of the relation between soul and body. Drawing a distinction between the human body and the human being, Wittgenstein refers to the relation between the soul and the body in two different ways. He says, "The human body is the best picture of the human soul."<sup>1</sup> Again, in another context he says, "The human being is the best picture of the human soul."<sup>2</sup> At one stage in his philosophical thinking, Wittgenstein thought that the human body is like any other material body we are familiar with in the day-to-day world. Being a part of the world, there is nothing special or important in the human body. Such a view of the human body is in consonance with the Advaita view of the human body. According to Advaita, the human body in which the mind and the senses are located is material (*jada-vastu*), and every material object is a product of

five elements, viz. ether, air, fire, water, and earth. The mind and the senses are also material. When the Advaitin speaks of the mind-sense-body complex, it is to draw our attention to the materiality of this complex which is radically different from the Self (Ātman). Since the Self is called Ātman, the mind-sense-body complex is called anātman. The point to be noted here is that the Self and the not-Self are radically different like light and darkness.

Before we analyse the Self-body relation according to Advaita, it is necessary to explain why Wittgenstein substituted "human being" for the "human body" in his explanation of the relation between the soul and the body. What distinguishes the human body from other material bodies is the presence of the soul in the human body. It is by associating the human soul with the human body that Wittgenstein developed a new attitude towards the latter. The human person, Wittgenstein realized, is capable of experiences of various kinds; that is to say, the human person is the "owner" of experiences; and this will not be possible in the case of the human body, which is just material. We do not ascribe any experience to the human body. It is the presence of the soul or Ātman that makes the entire mind-sense-body complex sensitive to other things. A brief explanation will help us to understand how the mind-sense-body complex, even though material, becomes sentient *as it were*, claiming to be the owner of experiences of various kinds. If we use the Vedāntic terminology, we may say that the human being who is the subject of experiences is the jīva and that the core element, which makes the mind-sense-body complex what it is and what it is does, is the human soul or Ātman. We may define the human being or the jīva as the Self-in-the-body. This way of characterizing the human being presupposes an intimate relation between the Self and the body, notwithstanding the radical difference between these two entities.

How does Wittgenstein explain their relation? He says that the "human being is the best picture of the human soul." The

word "picture" conveys many senses such as portrait, image, representation, description, and so on. The Wittgensteinian scholars hold the view that the word "picture" is probably used in the sense of "form" following Aristotle. Whatever be the explanation of the term "picture", it is difficult to understand how the body which is material can be the image, or representation, or form, of the Self which is non-material. When Aristotle speaks about the matter-form relation, he is thinking about the form which a material object assumes in a given situation. It is intelligible to speak about the lump-like form of clay, or the pot-form of clay, because the matter-form relation is restricted to the material object alone; that is to say, the form that we speak of is the form of the matter. But the situation is different in the case of soul-body, relation. How is it possible to think of body, which is material, as the form of the human soul, which is non-material, or spiritual. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika systems speak about two kinds of relation called *saṃyoga* (conjunction) and *samavāya* (inherence). There is *saṃyoga* relation between two material objects, e.g. between the tip of the finger and the table which it touches. Conjunction is the temporary union between two or more objects which exist separately. *Samavāya*, on the other hand, is a permanent or eternal relation between two objects of which *one* inheres *in* the other. The whole is *in* its parts; a quality or an action is *in* a substance; the universal is *in* the particulars; and particularity is *in* some simple eternal substance. Since the relation between the soul and the body is not like whole-part relation, or quality-substance relation, and so on, it is not possible to explain the soul-body relation in terms of *samavāya*.

It is here that we have to consider in detail the way Advaita explains the relation between these two radically different entities. According to Advaita, the Self is the only reality, and everything else is an appearance of the Self. Advaita uses the terms such as "*mithyā*", "*kalpita*", "*adhyasta*", and so on to refer to an entity which is an appearance. Consider, for example, the relation

between clay and pot, which are related as cause and effect. While clay, which is the cause, is real, the pot *as such* which is a modification of clay is only an appearance of it, and so it is said to be *mithyā*, or *kalpita*. The Upaniṣad says that, between cause and effect, cause alone is real and that the effect (*vikāra*) exists only in name. The pot as a particular entity has a form (*rūpa*), and is identified, for the purpose of differentiating it from other particular entities, by a name (*nāma*). What is true of the pot in this example is true of all entities in the empirical world. So, every object in the space-time-cause world is spoken of as *nāma-rūpa*. The clay that is said to be the cause of pot may itself be the effect of another object, which again may be the effect of something else, and so on. This method of causal inquiry, when pursued regressively, will come to an end when we will be compelled to postulate something as the First Cause, or Uncaused Cause. If we do not postulate the First Cause, our reasoning will be vitiated by the fallacy of infinite regress; but to postulate the First Cause is not only arbitrary, but also to go against the very spirit of causal inquiry. Though we can justify the need for postulating the First Cause, we cannot establish or ascertain its nature by means of reasoning. That is why Advaita holds the view that the nature of the First Cause, i.e. the ultimate cause, can be known only through scripture. Since the concept of the cause involves time relation, Advaita prefers to use the term "*adhiṣṭhāna*" (substratum or ground) instead of cause. Ātman which is identical with Brahman is the only reality, and whatever we experience in our day-to-day world is only a manifestation or an appearance of Brahman-Ātman. What is said to be an appearance has no existence of its own, no revelation of its own, and no attraction of its own. All these three—its existence, revelation, and loveability—are derived from Brahman-Ātman. The only thing which an empirical object can claim as its own is its name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). In other words, the entire manifested world is grounded in, or superimposed on, Brahman-Ātman. Brahman and the world are

related as *adhiṣṭhāna* and *kalpita*, i.e. as the substratum and the superimposed; and the essence of what is said to be *kalpita* lies in its *adhiṣṭhāna* (*kalpitasya adhiṣṭhānameva svarūpam*). Since the Self is identical with Brahman, what is true of Brahman and the world is equally true of the Self and the body. We may characterize the body as the micro-world. Just as the world is a product of the five elements, even so the body is composed of the five elements. As a product or result, it is *kalpita* deriving its existence, revelation, and loveability from the Self.

It is necessary to bear in mind that, like Brahman and the world, the Self and the body have different ontological status. While the Self is absolutely real (*pāramārthika*), the body is empirically real (*vyāvahārika*), and so their relation cannot be explained through either *saṁyoga* or *samavāya*. To say that these two entities have soul-body relation is a case of begging the question. Though essentially different, these two entities, Śaṅkara holds, are wrongly identified with each other due to *adhyāsa*, which is the result of ignorance (*avidyā*). Śaṅkara defines *adhyāsa* as *atasmin-tadbuddhiḥ*. Mistaking one thing for another, or superimposing the characteristic of one thing on another, is a case of *adhyāsa*. For example, we identify the Self with the body when we say "I am stout". In the same way we identify the Self with the senses when we say "I am deaf". Likewise, when we say "I am happy", we identify the Self with the mind. The Self which is pure consciousness is devoid of qualities. That is why it is said to be *nirguṇa*. If we associate stoutness, deafness, and happiness, which are the characteristics of the body, the sense-organ, and the mind respectively, with the Self, it is a case of superimposition (*adhyāsa*).

Śaṅkara points out that we are in the habit of super-imposing the nature of the Self on the mind-sense-body complex. Every one of these entities, being material, is insentient; consequently, none of them can comprehend anything or be sensitive to anything. However, we superimpose the sentient nature of the Self on the

mind and the senses, and view them as cognitive instruments. Extending the work of superimposition further up to the body, we speak of the *sensitivity* of the body. It means that there is two-way superimposition between the Self and the mind-sense-body complex, and so Śaṅkara speaks of reciprocal superimposition (*itaretara adhyāsa*). In the justly famous *adhyāsa-bhāṣya*, which forms the introduction to his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*, Śaṅkara refers to the Self as the subject, and the mind-sense-body complex as the object, and explains how there is reciprocal superimposition between these two entities which are radically opposed to each other. To quote Śaṅkara:

It is quite natural in our day-to-day life not to distinguish these two entities (object and subject) and their respective attributes, although they are absolutely distinct, and then to superimpose upon each the characteristic nature and the attributes of the other. Thus, the real (Self) and the unreal (not-Self) are coupled with each other. It is avidyā that is the cause of this naïve superimposition in our daily life. This is well brought out by our expressions such as "That am I" and "That is mine".

And he goes on to say:

The mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-Self, which is termed avidyā, is the presupposition of all kinds of practical distinctions we make in our secular as well as scriptural activities—distinctions such as means of knowledge and objects of knowledge, distinctions concerned with injunctions and prohibitions as well as final release, as laid down in scriptural texts.

Instead of using the terms "Self" and "body", the *Bhagavad-gītā* text (Ch.13) uses the terms "*kṣetrajña*" and "*kṣetra*". The body is called *kṣetra* because the fruits of actions are reaped in it as in a field. The fruits of karma in the form of happiness and suffering manifest themselves through the body. The Self who is the knower of *kṣetra* is called *kṣetrajña*. So these two words are contextual. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna (13.26) that everything in the world, moving as well as unmoving, is the result of the union of *kṣetra*



and *kṣetrajñā* (*kṣetra-kṣetrajñā-samyogāt*). Śaṅkara in his commentary on this text notices the problem of the relation between the Self and the body, formulates the objection of the opponent against the possibility of union between these two incompatible entities, and then gives his reply to the objection.

*Objection:* What kind of union is there between *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā*? The union between these two entities cannot certainly be a relation through conjunction (*samyoga*) of each other's parts, as between a rope and a vessel, inasmuch as *kṣetrajñā* is, like ether, without parts. Nor can it be of the nature of *samavāya* (inherence), inasmuch as it cannot be admitted that *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā* are related to each other as cause and effect.

*Reply:* The union between *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā*, i.e. between the object and the subject, which are opposed to each other in nature, is of the nature of mutual *adhyāsa*; that is to say, it consists in mixing up these two entities as well as their attributes due to non-discrimination between the nature of *kṣetra* and that of *kṣetrajñā*. It is like the union of a rope with a snake, or that of a shell with silver due to non-discrimination. The union of *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā* is of the nature of *adhyāsa*—which involves mistaking the one for the other; it is a case of erroneous cognition, what is popularly called illusion (*mithyā-jñāna*); and this illusion vanishes—because it gets negated by the right knowledge—when a person attains to the right knowledge of the distinction between *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajñā* as explained in the scriptural texts, i.e. when he is able to separate *kṣetrajñā* from *kṣetra* in the same way as a person separates *iṣika* reed from the *muñja* grass... .

In the course of answering the question, "What is the light for a man through which he sits, goes out, works, and returns?" asked by Janaka, Yājñavalkya replies by saying that it is the Self which serves as the light, as the revealing principle, for a human being in all his activities—cognitive, affective, and conative. Clarifying Yājñavalkya's answer, Śaṅkara observes:

The Self is called light, because it is self-effulgent, for through this light, the self-effulgent Ātman, this aggregate of body and organs sits, goes out, and works, as if it were sentient, as a jar placed in the sun shines. Or, as an emerald or any other gem dropped for testing into milk, etc. imparts its

lustre to them, even so this luminous Self, being subtler than even the intellect, unifies and imparts its lustre to the body and organs, including the intellect, etc. although it is within the intellect; for these have varying degrees of fineness or grossness in a certain order; and so the Self is the innermost of them all.

In the passage quoted above from his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.7, Śaṅkara explains how the entire mind-sense-body complex which is material becomes sentient as it were because of its proximity to the Self. The Self transmits its sentient nature or power of revelation to the internal organ, the senses, and the body sequentially one after another following the order in which these entities happen to be located in the body. The internal organ, being the closest to the Self, is the first beneficiary; and thereafter the senses and then the body are inspired by the Self and become sentient as it were. In his commentary Śaṅkara elucidates how the Self, though totally different from the mind-sense-body complex, is able to share its lustre with it, resulting in the identification of the former with the latter. Śaṅkara's explanation is worth quoting *in extenso*.

The intellect, being transparent and next to the Self, easily catches the reflection of the intelligence (light) of the Self. Therefore, even the wise men happen to identify themselves with it first; next comes the mind, which in its turn catches the reflection of the Self through the intellect; then come the organs, through contact with the mind; and lastly the body gets the reflection through the organs. Thus, the Self successively illumines with its own intelligence (light) the entire aggregate of the body and organs. It is, therefore, that all people identify themselves with the body and organs and their modifications indefinitely according to their discrimination.

With the view to substantiate his elucidation, Śaṅkara quotes the *Bhagavad-gītā* text (13.33) which says: "As the one sun, O Arjuna, illumines the whole world, even so the Self, the owner of the field of this body, illumines the whole body."

The point to be noted here is that it is impossible for the *jīva* to play its triple role as the subject of knowledge (*jñātā*), the agent of action (*kartā*), and the enjoyer of the consequences (*bhoktā*) of actions unless the Self, which is not only the sustaining but also the animating and controlling principle of the entire aggregate of the mind, senses, and the body, inspires the latter through its light. In other words, the Self, though essentially different from the aggregate, gets identified with it. This identification of the Self with the aggregate of the body and organs is what Śaṅkara calls *adhyāsa*. Unfortunately, we have neither the time nor the training to reflect on the presupposition of our activities, both secular and scriptural. If I claim that I know something, or claim that I have some subjective experience such as pleasure or pain, or claim that I am engaged in some action, I function under the spell of *adhyāsa* without being aware of it. So the Self and the body are related as *adhiṣṭhāna* and *adhyasta*, i.e. the substratum and the superimposed. There is, according to Śaṅkara, no other way in which they could be related.

The body is not a simple entity. It is indeed complex. It is an aggregate or a totality of three bodies, viz. the gross, subtle, and causal. Instead of three bodies, we can also refer to five sheaths (*pañca-kośa*) as constituting the aggregate. The five sheaths—physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and blissful—are arranged telescopically one inside the other, the physical sheath (*annamaya-kośa*) being the outermost and the blissful sheath (*ānandamaya-kośa*) being the innermost. The Self or Ātman remains concealed in the body as it is covered by the five sheaths, or three bodies. The Upaniṣad tells us that we have to dis-cover the Self by removing the five coverings or the three bodies. The removal of the coverings, Śaṅkara says, is like removing the husk in order to get at the grain inside. The physical sheath which is a product of

food has a human shape; consequently, every sheath inside it has the human shape (*puruṣa-vidhaḥ*). The shape of the sheath is like the configuration of an image cast in a crucible. Though the Upaniṣad speaks of every succeeding sheath as constituting the self or essence of its preceding one, the Ātman alone which is beyond the *ānandamaya-kośa* or *kāraṇa-śarīra* is the essence of all the sheaths or bodies, because it is the *adhiṣṭhāna* while the entire aggregate is *adhyasta*. The principle to be remembered here is: *kalpītasya adhiṣṭhānameva svarūpam*.

#### NOTES

1. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, Oxford, p. 178.
2. ———, *Remarks on Philosophy of Psychology*, I, Oxford, p. 281.

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## THE RELIGION OF THE WORLD\*

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Śrī Candrasekharendra Sarasvatī

There are ever so many religions in this world. Each has a separate name of its own to distinguish it from the others. All these names are personal and are derived from the founders of the respective faiths. Thus Buddhism takes its name from its founder, Lord Buddha, Jainism from Jina, Muhammadanism from its prophet, Muhammad, Christianity from Jesus Christ, Zoroastrianism (the religion of the Parsees) from its founder Zoroaster, and the Chinese religion, Confucianism, from its propounder, Confucius. No doubt all these founders of new religions have been great men possessing the power to attract many men to their way of thinking. Thus every religion other than ours has a distinctive name of its own. But if you ask a youngster belonging to our religion what religion he professes, he would, if he happens to have received a little English education, at once reply that he belongs to the Hindu religion. On the other hand if we ask our peasants about the name of our religion, they would be at a loss

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\* Courtesy: *Sankara and Shanmata* Souvenir published in Connection with the Conference on 'Sankara and Shanmata' held in Madras from June 1 - June 9, 1969.

to give a common name to it. If we put the same query to those employed in writing negotiable documents in the South of India, they would describe themselves as they do at the top of these documents, as belonging to the Saivite or the Vaishnavite cult. These are really subdivisions in our faith and cannot be taken as representing the whole of it: but even these names are not derived from those of any historic personages but merely follow the names of the respective divine forms selected for personal worship. If Hinduism is really the name of our religion, it should have been known and described as such even during the period of our remote forefathers. But it would appear that to our ancestors of even a few centuries back, the name "Hinduism" would have been a strange and meaningless term. It is so because ours is a religion without a name.

No doubt the subdivisions in our faith go by certain specific names. These again take their names only after the various forms of the one Almighty selected for *upāsana* and not after human beings. For the general faith however it would be difficult to find a common name. Of late a name has been much in use, viz., Sanātana Dharma, but even this cannot be strictly said to be the traditional name of our religion, for in that case it should be known as such to the poor peasant and to the humble widow, as in the case of the followers of other man-made religions. But such is not the case.

The term Hinduism is really a name somebody has presented us with. We can find in History a clue as to how this term came to be coined. Our forefathers were once the inhabitants of the region watered by the river Sindhu (the modern Indus) which, to some foreigners who came into contact with us was known as Indus. From this they christened the land in which this river flowed as the Indu Desa or "the land of the Indus". Naturally and in course of time they applied this name to the entire Bhāratavarṣa of which the part watered by Sindhu formed but a slice. Are we not familiar with the saying that "beyond Hyde Park all is desert"?

Again, every religion has some distinguishing symbol which at once marks it off from the others. The Cross of the Christians is one such example. The Hindus on the other hand, have no apparent symbol to point to as being common to all of them. As we are without a name, even so we are without a common symbolising badge. Ours, therefore, appears to be a religion without a name and a distinguishing mark! For instance, some of us wear the sacred ash, while others wear the "Vishnupad" on their foreheads. Some among us are "Vīra Vaishnavas" and an equal number, the "Līngāyats" and similar others are "Vīra Śaivas". All these, however, have the consciousness that they are the adherents of one common religion.

The real grandeur of our faith consists in its being nameless. The need for names for an article arises only when there are many of that type so that each could, in some way, be distinguished from the others. But if there is one and one only of that article, why need a name for it? To take a concrete instance, if there are, say, four Ramasvamis in a village we must give them different initials or personal names to differentiate the one from the other or to distinguish between them by calling one of them Ramasvami, the dark, another of them, Ramasvami, the fair, and so forth. If there be only one Ramasvami, there is hardly any further naming required.

Even so, with our religion. What is religion? It is that which shows us the way out of this miserable cycle of births and deaths or in other words sins and sorrows. It was pointed out at the outset that other religions are known by the names of their respective founders. Their religions therefore did not exist before the rise of these great personages. Specific dates are assigned to every such religion. It naturally follows that ours is a religion which existed before all these other faiths were born. Thus it should have existed at a time when it was the only religion in the world, administering to the spiritual needs of humanity as a whole. This then explains our religion not having had a specific original name, as there was

no second religion from which this name should distinguish it. It was merely the Dharma—a word synonymous with Religion.

It would appear then that its having no specific name is itself a distinctive symbol. Although the religion has no distinguishing name of its own there is in it a common basis—viz., the faith in the final authority of the Vedas, i.e., *Veda-prāmāṇyam*, in spiritual matters. This is also implied in the saying current in some of our mother-tongues that makes the Vedas a simile for authoritativeness!

The question then arises that, if ours was the only religion prevalent at the time, were our religious principles observed by all the inhabitants of the world? We can now give plenty of instances to show that the reply to this question is in the affirmative. For instance, one of the charges against Jesus which made the Jews crucify him was that Jesus drank water from a well intended for the lower classes. Does this not imply the existence of a caste system before Jesus' time?

Again an inscription unearthed in Egypt, dated 1280 B.C. contains the terms of a treaty between Rameses II and the Hittites. In this treaty, the Vedic deity, "*Maitrāvaruṇa*," has curiously enough been cited as the witness! (See H.R. Hall, *Ancient History of the Near East*—pp. 364 *et seq.*) Besides, in the ancient Egyptian chronology, we find a series of kings bearing the name of Rāma as for example, Rameses I, Rameses II, Rameses III, etc. In the island of Madagasgar off the Eastern coast of South Africa, as many as seventy-five per cent of the names of places happen to be Sanskrit names. Most of them are akin to the name of the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma.

We are all aware of the Great Sahara desert in Northern Africa. There is a theory that all deserts once formed the beds of the seas or, in Sanskrit, Sagaras. Is the suggestion far-fetched, that the modern name, Sahara, is a corruption of the Sanskrit "Sagara"? It is said that while the Sahara was under water, there was a thick population around its banks and that the names of those people



were mostly Sanskrit and were even related to the name of Rāma. (See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. XXIII, Title—"Sagara".)

Evidences such as these are not wanting in the opposite part of the Globe. In distant Mexico a festival is being celebrated at about the same time as the Indian "Navarātri" or "Dusserah" and it is known as "*Rāmasīta*." (See p. 56 of the Text and Plate 24 in T.W.F. Gann's *The Maya Indians of Southern Ycaton, North and British Honduras*.) Further, the excavations made in that country have resulted in an abundance of the idols of Lord Gaṇeśa being unearthed (Baron Humboldt quoted in Har Bilas Sarada's *Hindu Superiority*, p. 151). The ancient inhabitants of those parts were "Āstikas" (i.e., those who believed in *Veda-prāmāṇyam* or the authoritativeness of the Vedas) a term which still lingers in the modern name "Aztecs" which is now given to this group! In Peru, a country in the West of South America, the inhabitants were sun worshippers. Their principal festivals of the year fell on the solstices. (See *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. I, p. 426). They were known as the "*Incas*," a name derived from one of the names of the Sun, "*Ina*."

While speculating in this strain, it is tempting to make another observation on the remarkable similarity between a series of names of places in California and several *puranic* names. We have all heard of the well-known story of the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara being burnt to ashes by the sage Kapila, to save whose souls their descendant Bhagīratha, is said to have brought down the Gaṅgā to the earth. The story goes that the horse sought for by the sons of Sagara was found in the netherlands (*Pātāla Loka*). America being roughly India's antipodes on the globe, is this description of that land in the Purāṇas as the netherland to be laughed at? Is it not very suggestive that *California* might be a corruption for "*Kapila Aranya*" (Kapila's forest), and that the two islands nearby, viz., "*The Horse Island*" and "*The Ash Island*," might represent the places where the horse of King Sagara was kept and where King Sagara's sixty thousand sons were burnt to ashes?

The figures 128 and 129 in page 621 of *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, by Spencer and Gillen (Macmillan, 1899) depict a kind of dance said to be current among the wild native tribes of Australia. This dance is described in the book as *The Śiva Dance*. On closer examination, the dancers appear to have painted on their forehead a third eye, a fact suggestive of the possibility that the people of even such distant lands as Australia were once well-versed in Vedic lore.

Nearer home in the Eastern Archipelago evidences of the prevalence of the Hindu faith are abundant. Java bristles with relics of Hindu cult and worship. In Borneo there is a forest which the Westerners were for a long time describing as a virgin forest, i.e., not having been penetrated by man (Wallace—*The Malay Archipelago*, pp. 44–45). A party of explorers, after they had gone a few hundreds of miles, discovered a stone which contained an inscription commemorating in detail the performance of some specified *Yāgas* and *Yajñas* (Vedic sacrifices) by a certain king (Yupa inscriptions of Mulavarman of Koeti, Borneo).

All these evidences only go to prove that our religion which was the only religion the world possessed for a long time, had spread all over the world. It will not be out of place to examine here some conceptions of Hinduism about the Universe. The common Hindu belief about our terrestrial globe is that it is composed of seven *Dvīpas* or land masses. Ādi Śaṅkara Bhagavat-pāda refers to this in the following sentence in one of his books: "*sapta-dvīpā ca medinī*".

Each one of these *Dvīpas* consists of several *Varṣas* each of which in turn consists of several *Khaṇḍas*. Our country India has been described in our scriptures as *Bhārata Khaṇḍa*, said to be a part of *Bhārata Varṣa*, which in turn is supposed to be situated in *Jambūdvīpa*. Mount *Meru* is supposed to be to the north of all the seven *Dvīpas*. There is an ocean belt between every two *Dvīpas*. The sun and the moon are said to move round *Meru*.

Let us now examine in detail the real import of these conceptions. The Westerners teach us in our geography books that the

earth is round and we think that this truth was first revealed to us by them. The Sanskrit term for "geography" is "*Bhū-gola*" which itself means "*the round earth*." Is not the very existence of this word proof of the fact that our ancients were aware of this fundamental geographical truth about the spherical nature of the Earth? In the ancient Indian mathematical science, words such as "*Khagola*" and "*Bhū-gola*" occur which are further evidences in support of the above. In our *Śaṅkhalpa Mantras* we use the word "*brahmāṇḍa*" while referring to the earth. The term *anḍa* in this word really means an egg, i.e., an oval-shaped body!

Let us now imagine the whole earth as a lime fruit with that part of it containing "*Meru*" (Himalayas) directed towards the north as its apex. Then "*Meru*" becomes the north pole and, hence, the northern most point on the earth. This position, then, will sufficiently explain the saying: *sarveṣāmapī varṣāṇām meru-ruttarataḥ sthitaḥ*. The rest of the sphere is all to the south of it. To the eye of a man standing on the apex of it, the sun and the moon would appear to go round it, i.e., the sun would not be exactly overhead at any part of the year, but would always be to a side of it. This is what is meant by the statement in our *Śāstras* that the sun goes round "*Meru*." There is thus nothing in these conceptions which could be considered as being contradicted by modern geographical discoveries.

All the modern discoveries about the geography of our earth seem, therefore, to have already dawned on our ancient seers. References to these truths are also found in the works of Āryabhaṭṭa, Varāhamihira, and Appayya Dīkṣita.

Thus we come back to the truth which we established at the outset, viz., ours was the only religion extant on the face of the earth for a long time. All the other religions of the world have only taken up and developed some phases of our bigger faith which contains all the aspects of the different religions. With a little propaganda characterized more by kindness and love than by conceit and arrogance, it might yet be possible for us to convince others of this truth.

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 ĀNANDAPŪRṆA-VIDYĀSĀGARA\*
 

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V. Subrahmania Sastri

Śrī Bādarāyaṇa set forth the *Vedānta-darśana* in his aphorisms by stringing together the flowers of the Upaniṣadic texts. And, this *darśana* is the most noteworthy among the *darśanas*. Śrī Śaṅkara enriched it by his commentary on it. Preceptors of Advaita wrote many commentaries on it; and these commentaries were supplemented by other commentaries. In the Advaita literature there are many works which prove the validity of the import of the Upaniṣads by refuting, on the basis of reasoning, the objections raised against Advaita by other opposing schools. And these works are termed *Vādaprasthāna*.

In the *Vādaprasthāna* the most prominent one is the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* of Śrī-Harṣa. He proves on the basis of reasoning that the phenomenal universe is indeterminable either as real or as unreal. All the categories and their definitions admitted in the Nyāya system are proved to be riddled with inconsistencies. He says that if one repeats, like a parrot, his arguments against the

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\* Courtesy: *Preceptors of Advaita*, Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Śaṅkara Mandir, Secunderabad, 1968. Sri V. Subrahmania Sastri, Nyaya Siromani, was Reader in Sanskrit, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar.

Nyāya system then that itself is enough to make the realists dumb. Whether one who repeats his arguments knows the import of them or not—it does not matter much. This work is so complex that it is exceedingly difficult to understand it. Not only this: the view-points that are set forth in the work are confusingly interposed. It requires profound scholarship to deal with the work.

Ānandapūrṇa wrote the commentary *Vidyāsāgarī* on this work. And this commentary is superb. It solves all the intricate points deliberately introduced in the work. Further, it refers to the view-points of the Nyāya, the Prābhākara, the Bhāṭṭa and the Sugata schools and critically examines them. Thus what was once so complicated and so full of perplexities and hence so hard to follow, that work has been made much easier to understand by Ānandapūrṇa.

Varadarāja, the commentator on Udayana's *Kusumāñjali* speaks of Udayana thus:

*audayane pathi gahane  
videśikaḥ pratipadam skhalati lokah.*

This passage means that one who is a foreigner to the Nyāya system falters at every step in the impenetrable path of Udayana's philosophy. Ānandapūrṇa reveals his profound scholarship by explaining the import of the complex statements of Udayana and the much more complicated points of Śrī-Harṣa, and by making clear the arguments used to refute the definitions of the categories of the schools opposed to Advaita.

Certain view-points of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system which are not explicitly referred to and criticized in the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā* are referred to and criticized by Ānandapūrṇa. The *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā* refers to the intrinsic validity of knowledge and further states that validity can be removed only when there arises some counteracting factor—*dhiyām svataḥ prāmānyasya bādhakaikāpodyatvāt* (p. 145). While commenting

on this passage, Ānandapūrṇa refers to the inferential argument of Udayana that establishes the validity of knowledge to be extrinsic. And that inferential argument is: *Yadapyudayano jagāda—*"*pramā jñānahetvatirikta-hetvadhīnā, kāryatve sati tad-viśeṣatvāt, apramāvat*" (p. 147). "Validity of knowledge depends upon a cause which is different from the cause that gives rise to knowledge; because it is a unique kind of effect, like absence of validity." Ānandapūrṇa proves that this inferential argument is not valid. This inferential argument is again referred to and criticized on a different ground while commenting on the passage of the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* which refutes extrinsic validity to knowledge and which runs as follows:

"*prāmāṇyaparatastvavyudasti prastāve.*" (p. 445)

Again, in the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* it is said that a cause has a *śakti* to create an object and the characteristic that determines the existence of such a *śakti* is the effect that is going to be produced.

"*kāraṇa-śakteśca viśeṣakam-asadeva kāryam.*" (p. 76).

While commenting on this passage, Ānandapūrṇa refers to the passage of the *Nyāyakusumāñjali* of Udayana. The Naiyāyikas do not admit *śakti* to be a separate category. Udayana holds that if a cause should produce an effect then what is necessary is only the absence of any factor that would prevent the origination of the effect and not the existence of *śakti*. And Ānandapūrṇa refutes the view of Udayana in detail. The *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* text deals with the nature of the witness-self (*sākṣin*). This provides an occasion for Ānandapūrṇa to refer to and criticise the objection of Aparārka raised in his commentary *Nyāyamuktāvali* on the *Nyāyasāra* of Bhāsarvajña.

All the above references have been given to show that Ānandapūrṇa refers to and refutes the view-points of the schools opposed to Advaita although they are not referred to in the text on which he comments.

Apart from his superb commentary on the amazingly logical treatise of the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā*, Ānandapūrṇa wrote a commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad-bhāṣya-vārtika* of Sureśvara. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is replete with reasonings, vast in extent and great in sense. Śrī Śaṅkara wrote his Bhāṣya on it, and Sureśvara wrote his *Vārtika* which consists of more than eleven thousand verses. Sureśvara was mainly concerned with refuting the concept of difference, the views of Bhartṛprapañca, and the theory of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, and also with establishing the indeterminable nature of the universe and oneness of the self. And on this *Vārtika*, Ānandapūrṇa wrote his commentary which is known as *Nyāya-kalpalatikā*. In this work he explains the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-sūtras* in the order in which the followers of the Prābhākara school have arranged them into *adhikaraṇas*; and this shows his profound knowledge of the Pūrvamīmāṃsā school. Although he criticizes the view-points of both the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, yet his antipathy is more deep-rooted towards the latter than towards the former. And the chief reason for this is that the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, unlike the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, does not admit the existence of God.

*avidyāratānām tārkkikāṇām īśvarakāraṇinām aviveko bahutaraḥ mīmāṃsakānām tu nirīśvarāṇām-bahutamo'vivekaḥ (Nyāya-kalpalatikā).*

Ānandapūrṇa is always averse to any digression from the subject on hand. That is why he does not explain each and every word of the *Vārtika* which, by itself, is elegant in style. He interprets only the important words and he gives the construction of the sentences only wherever necessary. He prefaces a succeeding *Vārtika* by the sense of an earlier *Vārtika*. He does not thrust upon the original verses the several theories of Advaita if they are not relevant. He does not cite the passages that set forth the views of the schools criticized. In the *Vārtika* the philosophy of Bhartṛprapañca comes in for a good deal of criticism. But very

rarely he cites the passages of Bhartṛprapañca. He is rather indifferent in identifying the authors of the schools who are referred to either directly or indirectly in the *Vārtika*. For example, in his commentary on the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā* he says that the aphorism "*yugapat jñānānutpattiḥ manaso liṅgam*" is that of Kaṇāda. In fact this is the aphorism of Gautama (1.1.16). Kaṇāda's aphorism runs as: "*ātmendriyārthasannikarṣa jñānasya bhāvo bhāvaśca manaso liṅgam*" (3.2.1). But, as the intended sense is the same, and both the systems are more or less similar, he takes the one for the other.

While commenting on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* text

*"tameva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṃ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ,"*

Sureśvara refers to the view of Maṇḍana.

*anye tu paṇḍitam-manyāḥ  
sampradāyānusārataḥ  
vijñāyati vacaḥ śrautam-  
idaṃ vyāchakṣate 'nyathā (4.4.796)*

While commenting on this verse, Ānandapūrṇa says that the view of Vācaspatimiśra is referred to here. Sureśvara who flourished before Vācaspati could not refer to him. But since Vācaspati is considered to be a close follower of Maṇḍana, Ānandapūrṇa might have identified the two. This is as it should be, because while commenting on the *Vārtika*

*nanvatrāpi kṛtaivāsau  
lyabantenābhidyate  
prajñātaḥ karaṇaṃ tasyāḥ  
bhūyaḥ kasmāna vidhīyate (4.4.798),*

he says that the view referred to herein is that of Maṇḍana.

While commenting on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* text "*brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti*" (4.4.6) Śaṅkara says that those who hold that



in mokṣa there is the manifestation of a unique kind of knowledge and bliss must explain the sense of the word "manifestation."

*yepi ācakṣate mokṣe  
vijñānāntaram ānandāntaram  
ca abhivyajyate iti taiḥ vaktavyaḥ abhivyaktiśabdārthaḥ.*

Here the *Vārttika* is:

*ye tu vyāchakṣate mokṣe  
nityānandaikagocarā  
jñānābhivyaktirityevaṁ  
svasiddhāntasamāśrayāt (4.4.324).*

Ānandapūrṇa says that the view-point of Bhāsarvajña is stated here. It is wrong. The view of Bhāsarvajña who came after Śaṅkara and Sureśvara cannot be referred to by both. All this shows that Ānandapūrṇa is more concerned with the view-points than with their authors.

Ānandapūrṇa while refuting the Pūrva-mīmāṃsā school observes that if it is said that the Upaniṣads are not valid on the ground that they are contrary to the *Śābara-bhāṣya*, then it can very well be said that the ritualistic section of the Veda is not valid because it is contrary to the import of the *Śaṅkara-bhāṣya*. Thus he shows his greatest respect towards Śaṅkara.

Ānandapūrṇa wrote ten works viz.,

1. *Khaṇḍana-ṭīkā (Vidyāsāgarī)*
2. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-vārtikavyākhyā (Nyāya-kalpa-latikā)*
3. *Nyāyacandrikā*
4. *Brahma-siddhi-vyākhyā (Bhāva-śuddhiḥ)*
5. *Samanvaya-sūtra-vṛttiḥ*
6. *Pañcapādikā-vyākhyā*
7. *Mahāvidyāvidāmbanavyākhyā*
8. *Nyāyasārvyākhyā*
9. *Kāśikā-vyākhyā (Prakriyāmañjari)*
10. *Mokṣadharmavyākhyā.*

By writing commentaries on the important works of Advaita he provided much material for *manana*, arguing within oneself about the validity of the import of the Upaniṣads. Thus he rendered a valuable service to the cause of Advaita, particularly to those who long for liberation. His *Vidyāguru* was an ascetic by name Śvetagiri. In the beginning of the *Nyāya-kalpa-latikā* and the *Vidyāsāgarī* he salutes him.

1. *Śrimate gurave  
svetagiraye sthānnamaskriyā*" (*Nyāyakalpalatikā*)
2. *vande munīndrān yatibṛndavandyān śrīmadgurūn  
svetagirīn variṣṭhān* (*Vidyāsāgarī*).

At the end of the *Nyāyakalpalatikā* also he salutes him,

"*śrīmat svetagirīm vande śiṣyadhīpadmabhāskaram.*"

At one place he refers to himself as *Abhayānanda-pūjya-pādaśiṣya*. From this we may take that Abhayānanda was his *Dīkṣāguru*. Both at the beginning and at the end of the *Nyāya-kalpalatikā*, he offers his salutations to Lord Gokaṛṇeśvara; and from this it is known that he lived in Gokaṛṇakṣetra.

In the *Prakriyāmañjari* he says that he wrote the work when King Kāmadeva was ruling over Gokaṛṇa. This king flourished in A.D. 1350. So we may take that Ānandapūrṇa flourished in A.D. 1350.

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CONTEMPORARY CRISIS OF HUMANITY  
IN THE LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO

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Kireet Joshi\*

Acceleration of wheels of change—not necessarily of true progress—has been a striking feature of the century that has just closed. That century was a unique age of gigantic ferment, chaos of ideas and inventions, clash of enormous forces, creation, catastrophe and dissolution amid the formidable agony and tension of the body and soul of human kind. During this period, the age of reason reached its highest pinnacles and widest amplitudes. Rationalistic and experimental science, armed with efficient technology, registered phenomenal developments. The result was, however, a mixture of good and evil for humanity. For, while new heights of excellence were experienced by it, it also got dwarfed as never before. A series of rivalries among nations dominated the scene; two stupendous world devastating wars swept over the globe and they were accompanied or followed by revolutions with far-reaching consequences. A League of Nations

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was formed, but broke down after some time; the United Nations Organisation came to be built, but its deficiencies and weaknesses are forcing leaders to think of radical changes in its Constitution and working; even its replacement by World-State, which may be a boon or a curse, depending upon how it is constituted, has also come to be conceived and may become inevitable under certain possible circumstances. Asymmetrical relations among nations created tensions between the North and the South, and they tend to be aggravated. Armaments were piled up in huge quantities and although they have recently been reduced or restrained, military expenditures are being ruthlessly planned at the cost of many important priorities. And science still continues to minister ingeniously to the art of collective massacre. Environment came to be vastly disturbed and, in spite of warnings and wise talks, it continues to be alarmingly ruined. Expensive lifestyles have been fashioned and advocated, and men, women and children are being increasingly led to isolated and divided lives. Multiplying complexities of the inner and outer life have been turning into complications and unresolved dilemmas; and chaos of views of life, each with only relative validity, has been shaking, for good or evil, foundations erected by ethical systems and religions. Individualism, the child of Reason and Revolt, which at one stage encouraged discovery of the inner realms of ends, has been overtaken by egoism and selfish indulgence of impulses and passions.

This and much more has led humanity to a state of crisis of serious or even unprecedented proportions. We can, however, discern two major imperatives which seem to be pressing themselves for their fulfilment. The first is visible in a continuous pressure of events towards the unity of the entire humanity. With the unprecedented shrinking of Space and Time, there is an irresistible drive towards economic, administrative, legislative and social centralization and there is an emerging need of unification of regions, continents, and even of establishment of a single

World-State. It is being increasingly felt that the world can become safe and prosperous only if human unity can come to be built up. The second imperative that seems to have asserted itself is to impress upon human kind that unity, peace and lasting welfare can come about only if human nature can be radically changed. What exactly this would mean or entail is a matter of research and experimentation, but there is a growing feeling that, at the minimum level, human way of feeling, thinking and acting should be based upon a new foundation of universal wideness, voluntary optimism and unflinching goodwill. In a significant statement made in 1967, U. Thant, the then Secretary General of the United Nations Organization, expressed quite clearly these two imperatives. He had stated:

That a fraction of the amounts that are going to be spent in 1967 on arms could finance economic, social, national and world programmes to an extent so far unimaginable is a notion within the grasp of the man in the street. Men, if they unite, are now capable of foreseeing and, to a certain point, determining the future of human development. This, however, is possible if we stop fearing and harassing one another and if together we accept, welcome and prepare the changes that must inevitably take place. If this means a change in human nature, well, it is high time we worked for it; what must surely change is certain political attitudes and habits man has."<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, almost from the beginning of our present century, themes of the ideal of human unity as also that of the necessity of change of human nature, had seized the movements of the resurgence of Asia and intellectual idealism of Europe. Asiatic peoples had begun to make bold and clear claims to equality and independence, and they had behind them centuries of inner culture and discovery of spiritual knowledge, which if applied to life, could serve as effective means of the change of human nature. In Europe, the contest between Capital and Labour had entered into a crucial phase, and the great First World War became memorable for the Russian Revolution that burst out even when that war was centred on the goal of the downfall of

Germany. This Revolution was a sign that a phase of civilization has begun to pass and the Time-Spirit was preparing a new phase, a new order. There was, at that time, a possibility of the realization of the larger human hope as a result of the evolution of the socialistic society and the resurgence of Asia. Unfortunately, the turn of events belied the bright hopes.

Socialism soon turned into stage socialism, and while it brought in greater equality and a closer association into human life, it remained confined only to a material change. It missed many other needed things and even aggravated the mechanical burden of humanity and crushed more heavily towards the earth its spirit. The resurgence of Asia, in spite of its glorious moments of achievements, meant eventually only a redressing or shifting of international balance. It became quite dormant, and in spite of great inner preparations, it has still not been able to provide the required condition of the step forward which is the one thing needful. It is also noteworthy that the international policy of labour had carried a promise of an international comity of free nations. But over a period of its development, the spirit of internationalism came to be overcome by the power of national egoism. It became clear that mere idealism of internationalism is not enough; what is truly important is the spiritual change that would make internationalism a vital need of the lives of nations and of the entire humanity.

Much hope, however, lies in the fact that despite numerous setbacks, the need for unity of human kind continues to persist. The idea of internationalism has grown in humanity and it is at work on our minds and influences from above our actions. It is also pressing itself to be turned into something more than an idea so that it may become a central motive and a fixed part of human nature as also of human organization. It is remarkable that the First world War gave birth to a League of Nations. It is true that the conception of this League was not happy or well-inspired, and it was destined to collapse. But that such an organized endea-

your should be launched and proceed on its way for some time without an early breakdown was in itself an event of capital importance. The defects of the League arose directly from the conditions of the world at that time. Its composition proved that it was an oligarchy of big powers, each drawing behind it a retinue of small States. The absence of America and the position of Russia had helped to make the final ill-success of this venture a natural consequence. However, the significance of the League was that even when it failed, it could not be allowed to remain without a sequel. Accordingly, the League of Nations disappeared but the force of idea remained active behind the succeeding years, including the terrible years of the Second World War. That War stirred the deeper depths of humanity and its leaders, and the United Nations Organization came into existence. Today, this Organization stands in the forefront of the world and struggles towards some kind of secure permanence and success. It is also significant that many defects of the League of Nations have been avoided in the Constitution of the UNO. And yet, one major defect remains because of the preponderant place that has been assigned to the five great Powers in the Security Council; and this defect has been clinched by the power of veto given to these Powers. That in recent years there is a serious demand from some quarters to get this defect removed is a significant development. For, to leave this defect unmodified prolongs a malaise and absence of harmony and smooth working. In critical situations, this defect generates widespread feeling of futility. But apart from this defect, the real danger to the ideal of human unity lay in the division of peoples in two camps which tended to be natural opponents. Survival of these two camps for more than 40 years, and that too, in the condition of a continuous cold war, prevented any major progress towards the growth of the inner spirit of internationalism. At the same time, the fact that this cold war did not generate into a hot war must be noted as truly remarkable. It is also a matter that gives comfort to the anxious mind and heart of humanity.

It was, of course, envisaged as a possibility that if the design of using ideological struggle as a means for world domination could come to be weakened or eliminated, then co-existence of two ideologies in the world could not be at all out of question. And, as a matter of fact, the world moved towards a greater development of the principle of State control over the life of the community and created a considerable force of balance of power through the movement of non-alignment. On the other hand, capitalism itself got modified by virtue of the welfare policies adopted by the powers of the free world. Nevertheless, tensions remained, overwhelming fractions continued to occur and it is only now when USSR collapsed and Eastern European countries asserted their independence, adopting market economy that the world has ceased to be bipolar and we find ourselves today in a new situation.

Has the climate for the human unity become more favourable under the new situation? When we ask this question, however, it must be remembered that a greater social or political unity is not necessarily a boon in itself; it is only worth pursuing in so far as it provides a means and framework for a better, richer, more happy and puissant individual and collective life. Looking at the past examples of large aggregates such as we find under the Roman Empire and others, we are likely to conclude that if there were to come about today a social, administrative and political unification of humanity, the organization would be so massive and tremendous that both individual and regional life would become crushed and dwarfed. And this would mean for humanity, after perhaps one first outburst of satisfied and joyous activity, a long period of mere conservation, increasing stagnancy and ultimate decay. Therefore, the unity which is to be pursued as an imperative of the present state of humanity, must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the human race intact in its roots of vitality and its oneness will be kept richly diverse.



The great beneficial consequence of the recent collapse of USSR is that the world has ceased to be bipolar, and consequently, the danger of the outbreak of world conflict has greatly disappeared. Another salutary consequence which has arisen is the collapse of oppressive system of state socialism. This has reduced greatly the peril of the coming into being that form of the World-State under which State machinery could suppress freedom of speech and thought. Had this form not disappeared, and if an all-regulating socialistic World-State were to be established, freedom of thought under such a regime would necessarily have meant criticism not only of the details, but of the very principles of the existing state of things. The World-State could not have afforded to tolerate for long this criticism or even its possibility. Ultimately, the State would have imposed strict regulation of the mental life and extended it to the totality of life. The necessary consequence would have been a static order of society, since without the freedom of individual, a society cannot remain progressive. We may note that a salutary form of world government must respect and encourage the freedom of the individual, and this form has now gained a new force. This is the third important consequence. For, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, several of its constituents have emerged as new independent and sovereign states. This event reaffirms the psychological and moral principle of self-determination, which was originally announced by Russia itself during the early phase of the Revolution when its idealism was fresh and sincere. Under the pressure of the need to resort to the principle of government by force, a contradictory element was brought in. This endangered the progress of nationalism, and the principle of free choice for each nation to choose its own line of development and association. It is true that the component States of Soviet Russia were allowed a certain cultural, linguistic, and some other kind of autonomy, but in other matters they had come to be, in fact, governed by the

force of a highly centralized autocracy of the Labourite despotism. That freedom which was put aside or crushed earlier, has now emerged, and this is bound to provide added force and strength to the movement towards the free world union in which the principle of free self-determination must be a preliminary movement.

The modern world, has, however, grown increasingly commercial in character. A powerful impulsion of our times is towards the industrializing of the human race and the perfection of the life of society as an economic and productive organism. The European idealism which was manifest to some extent, in Communism could not be sustained in the Socialist Soviet Union. Marxian principle itself proceeded on the premise that the reign of socialism has to be preceded by an age of bourgeois capitalism and should seize upon its work and organization in order to turn it to its own uses and modify it by its own principles and methods. It intended, indeed, to substitute Labour as the Master instead of Capital. But this meant merely a change from one side of the economism to the other. The story of eight decades of the development of USSR did not impel change from domination of economism to the domination of some other and higher motive of human life. And now, when the socialistic economy has fallen and is being rapidly replaced by market economy, basic economism will remain unaltered, except that the capitalistic competition will become unbridled that ever before.

This competition and the goals it seeks to satisfy constitute the upper most subjects all over the world. The futuristic studies of today are concentrated on issues of economic activity, latest technologies of communication and processing of information, developing markets and commercial competitions among USA, Japan, EEC, China, and newly industrializing countries like Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. If science were not developed as it has today, if modern warfare did not require the high level of scientific and technological efficiency as today,

the present situation could have witnessed a fresh invasion from the primitive people so as to subvert and destroy our weary and crisis-ridden civilization. But while that peril stands eliminated, the real peril that we are faced today is the resurgence of the barbarian in ourselves, in civilized people, and this is what we see all around us.

We are not grateful that the third World War has not broken out and that prospects of peace have become brighter; we are, however, engrossed with understanding the new equations between economic change and military preparedness. We are not worried about building the defences of peace in the minds of men, and secure true foundations of human unity;—is it not the task given away to UNESCO so that we can indulge in the freedom to do something else? And what is that something else if not questions of economic concerns and financial gains? We are not grappling issues of knowledge and wisdom, but we are getting absorbed in the problems of power shift which are caused by "softnomics", the technologies which are related to software that produces and processes information and knowledge with ever-increasing speed. In other words, we are interested in knowledge to the extent to which it gets related to money-making. What is our centre of gravity? It is the economic social ultimate—an ideal material organization of civilization and comfort, the use of reason and science and education for the channelisation of a utilitarian rationality which will create mechanisms and systems for vital and material satisfaction surrounded by luxuries of intellectual and aesthetic pastime.

The contemporary crisis of humanity arises from this centre of gravity; humanity is slipping more and more into the mire of this pit. While its inner soul feels mutely the agony of this plunge and wants to be uplifted and liberated, it is unable to assist itself and to break its chains. There is a deeper reason for this, and we may try to understand it.

## II

Since the last five hundred years, humanity has been living in the age of Reason. In previous cycles of human history, there have been periods where intellect dominated, but they never reached the sweep, pitch and intensity as our modern Age in cultivating, subtilising and fathoming the depths and applications of our rational faculties. The age of Reason is, therefore, of special significance, particularly when we realize that the human being is distinguishable from other species by virtue of its Reason. We can expect from the Age those results which the human beings can obtain at their maximum level of development. And, indeed, during this period, rationalism flourished uninhibitedly and produced results of highest excellence. But it also showed quite decisively what it can accomplish and what it cannot. Two articles of faith, underlying the march of Reason, came to be fully tested and disproved. The first article was the faith that Reason can arrive at Truth and can arrive at it with certainty. At the end of its march, it has come to declare that the concept of Truth has rather limited and relative meaning in terms of rationality, and that what can be known by Reason will always be circumscribed within the limits of varying degrees of probability. The second article was that Reason can, with its capacity to observe, know and govern impartially, apply itself to human life and arrive at the right relationship between the individual and collectivity. Reason also erected in this connection three great ideals of progress,—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,—and dreamt of their harmonious fulfilment in a rational order of society. At the end of its march in our own century, Reason has now demonstrated, particularly with the collapse of the socialist experiment in USSR, that Reason can neither harmonize the individual and the collectivity nor can it synthesize freedom, equality and brotherhood. It is seen that Reason can succeed only in establishing a limited rule of Law over uneasy springs of freedom and a narrow rule of efficient

organization by imposing on all concerned a heavy hand of compulsion and uniformity. It has proved that Reason as a governor of society can secure freedom only by overriding the demands of equality, and if it attempts to secure equality, it is obliged to strangle freedom. As for fraternity, the highest that Reason could achieve was temporary comradeship and pragmatic or utilitarian cooperation.

Having reached this end of the road, Reason now stands bereft of any agenda: its fundamental search seems to have ended; its basic experimentation seems to have come to a close; it can only turn now in expanding or contracting circles of probabilities in the field of knowledge and those of compromises in the field of practical life. It can, of course, take another course if it can choose to become sufficiently revolutionary and institute an inquiry into those ulterior sources from which its articles of faith regarding Truth and certainty and the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity sprang into its ken and sustained its long journey, which, even when declared to be unrealizable, keep on knocking and calling us insistently for their fulfilment.

But this is more a question of choice, of will, of a deliberate effort. It is easy to refuse, and to find reasons for the refusal. For it may be argued that all articles of faith, even of Reason, invite a return to the domain of religion or of the supra-rational against which Reason had declared an open revolt at the very commencement of its march into the modern age. Or else, it may be argued that the deliverances of the supra-rational create for the mental thought antinomies which are insoluble and therefore unacceptable. We, therefore, hear the cacophony of declarations that the supra-rational is non-existent or unreal and that the best counsel for reason is to limit its activities to the practical and immediate problems of their material existence in the universe.

What is the consequence? Reason by itself cannot long maintain the race in its progress; it is the inner spiritual necessity, the push for what is there yet unrealized that maintains the progressive

or evolutionary stress, the spiritual *nisus*. But if that is refused or renounced, there is bound to occur a crisis. The contemporary crisis of humanity is a crisis of this kind. It is not a sociological, political or economic crisis; it is what Sri Aurobindo calls an evolutionary crisis.

An evolutionary crisis can occur only at an extremely crucial moment of the life of a species. It is when a certain level of consciousness has effected an ascent to the next level of consciousness, integrated the powers and activities of the lower consciousness into those of the higher level of consciousness, when the integrated powers have achieved acute subtilisation and refinement, then the moment arrives for taking a leap into the still higher level of consciousness. It at that moment there is obstruction or failure to secure the necessary push, a crisis sets in which continues to concentrate on the issue of the next ascent until the necessary conditions are created which would facilitate the ascent or mutation of the species. Or else, if there is repeated failure, the concerned species gives place to a new species and gets itself either extinct or relapses into a certain type of fixed movement, bereft of a *nisus* for a higher ascent or mutation. With humanity today such a point of crisis has been reached; this is evidenced by the fact that its highest faculty of Reason has accomplished the tasks of maximum possible integration, subtilisation and amplitude of multisided development; having reached this stage of accomplishment, its limitations have been made bare and acknowledged; it is very clear that the deeper powers laying behind reason are in need of a surge, and they are being blocked by the achieved circuit of grooves set up by Reason. It is only if Reason consents to allow deeper powers to rise to a new stage of the ascent of consciousness, further progress of humanity could be possible. That is why Sri Aurobindo states: "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny."<sup>2</sup>

Elucidating the nature and basic cause of this crisis, he avers:

A stage has been reached in which the human mind has reached in certain directions enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organized collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. 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. . . . Man has harmonized life in the past by organized ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonize them. Reason and science can only help by standardizing, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanized unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.<sup>3</sup>

Unity of life, unity of humanity—a world-union has become a necessity; but this unity must not be uniformity; it must not be mechanical; it must be fully diverse and harmonious. Reason cannot realize this goal; it has laboured intensely for five centuries and acknowledged its inability. Corresponding to the unity of life, there must be unity of consciousness, unity of knowledge. There must, therefore, be a push towards the next stage of evolution, where new powers of consciousness can manifest. This is the central issue. Shall we hope that this issue can be resolved? Let us turn to Sri Aurobindo, who has made a detailed study on this issue. Within a brief space, we can only refer to two or three

passages, even though a much more detailed statement is truly required.

In his postscript chapter, that he wrote in 1949, and which is his last political testament, he wrote:

There are dangers and difficulties, there can be an apprehension of conflicts, even of colossal conflicts that might jeopardize the future, but total failure need not be envisaged unless we are disposed to predict the failure off the race. . .

The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared, all would have an equal status. . . . The ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact and its preservation given into the charge of the united human peoples.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time Sri Aurobindo has given the following warning:

It is the men of our day and, at the most, of tomorrow to give the answer. For, too long a postponement or too continued a failure will open the way to a series of increasing catastrophes which might create a too prolonged and disastrous confusion and chaos and render a solution too difficult or impossible; it might even end in something like an irremediable crash not only of the present world civilization but of all civilization. A new, a difficult and uncertain beginning might have to be made in the midst of the chaos and ruin after perhaps an extermination on a large scale, and a more successful creation could be predicated only if a way was found to develop a better humanity or perhaps a greater, a superhuman race.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere too he has given a similar warning: "...There is another danger,—for a cessation of evolutionary urge, a crystallisation into a stable comfortable mechanised social living without ideal or outlook is another possible outlook. ..."<sup>6</sup>

Referring to the transition from where we stand today to the new ideal of state of divine life on the earth, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the need to fulfil two conditions simultaneously. He states:



Therefore if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to recreate themselves in the image of the spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at the least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect or preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made. Such a simultaneity has never yet happened, although the appearance of it has sometimes been created by the ardour of a moment. That the combination must happen some day is a certainty, but none can tell how many attempts will have to be made and how many sediments of spiritual experience will have to be accumulated in the subconscious mentality of the communal human being before the soil is ready. For the chances of success are always less powerful in a difficult upward effort affecting the very roots of our nature than the numerous possibilities of failure.<sup>7</sup>

However, Sri Aurobindo adds:

Even if the condition of society and the principle and rule that govern society are opposed to the spiritual change, even if these belong almost wholly to the vital, to the external, the economic, the mechanical order, as is certainly the way at present with human masses, yet if the common human mind has begun to admit the ideas proper to the higher order that is in the end to be, and the heart of man has begun to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas, then there is a hope of some advance in the not distant future.<sup>8</sup>

There are, indeed, number of important questions which need to be raised and answered; but they require a much more elaborate treatment than what can be undertaken here.

## NOTES

1. *La Suisse*, Geneva, April 1967.
2. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 19, p. 1053.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 1053–1055.
4. Sri Aurobindo: *Social and Political Thought*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 15, pp. 570–71.
5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, p. 563.
6. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 19, p. 1053.
7. Sri Aurobindo: *Social and Political Thought*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 15, p. 232.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

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THE COSMIC PROCESS  
(in the light of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata)

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T.P. Ramachandran\*

Part I

Four Kinds of Pralaya

*1. Introduction*

The universe comprises the realm of non-living matter and the realm of souls occupying various living bodies. By common observation, we know that everything in the universe undergoes change. Though the change is so minute from moment to moment as not to be perceived by the senses, we can identify important landmarks in it, namely origin, growth, decay, and death, especially in living bodies. From this, it is natural to infer that the universe as a whole undergoes change. Scripture also refers to a cosmic process.

The Hindu view of the cosmic process is that it is not linear, but cyclical. It does not begin at some time and end at some other

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time. Nor does it just go on for ever without either beginning or end. It happens in recurring cycles, and the cyclical process is co-eval with time. When day and night alternate and seasons follow one another year after year, it is natural to think that the cosmic process as a whole is also cyclical. An indication for the Hindu preference for the cyclical view is that there is a sixty-year cycle recognized by almanacs, each year having a name, starting with *prabhava* and ending with *akṣaya*. There is also belief in grades of cycles, a higher grade being of longer duration than a lower one. A succession of lower grade cycles leads to a higher one. Thus there are cycles beyond cycles. The details of the cosmic process are given in some of the later Upaniṣads and in the Purāṇas. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has a clear and compact account of the cosmic process. The Hindu scriptures, however, do not regard the character of the cosmic process as important by itself. What is important is the significance of the process in terms of human values, especially liberation. In the *Bhāgavata*, the portion relating to the topic is the first four Adhyāyas of the Twelfth Skandha. This will be the focus of this article.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Catur-yuga

The first among long cosmic cycles, of which we can learn only from scripture, is *catur-yuga*, or *mahā-yuga*. It is said to last for 43,20,000 years of human life. It consists of four periods of time, each a *yuga*, their names being *kṛta* (*satya*), *tretā*, *dvāpara*, and *kali* in that order. The duration of each *yuga* decreases as we pass from the first to the last. The respective periods are said to be as follows.

<i>kṛta-yuga</i>	-	17,28,000 human years
<i>tretā-yuga</i>	-	12,96,000 human years
<i>dvāpara-yuga</i>	-	8,44,000 human years
<i>kali-yuga</i>	-	4,52,000 human years

The descending length of the yugas represents a corresponding physical and moral deterioration for the people who live in the respective yugas.<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that a *catur-yuga* period does not end in dissolution for the universe, but only in the destruction of evil and the restoration of the moral order to the level it occupied in *kr̥ta-yuga*. This happens by divine intervention in the form of Kalki, the tenth *avatāra* of Lord Viṣṇu. This brief account of *catur-yuga* was intended only to introduce the next topic. We shall return to discuss the four yugas in detail in the second part of the article.

### 3. *Nitya-pralaya*

The cosmic cycles we are going to discuss from now involve the dissolution of the universe. The dissolution (*pralaya*) is of three kinds and have the following names: *naimittika*, *prākṛta*, and *ātyantika*. To drive home the point that the universe is subject to dissolution, the *Bhāgavata* cites the fact that dissolution happens daily to one or other aspect of the universe. This is called *nitya-pralaya*. Together with this, we have four kinds of *pralaya* in all.

The *Bhāgavata* says that everything from Brahmā downwards is subject to birth and death, origin and end, undergoing change from moment to moment. This change is illustrated by the flow of a river and the burning of a flame. Another example is the continuous movement of the stars in heaven. The import of these illustrations is that, although the perpetual change is imperceptible, it is undeniable.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. *Naimittika-pralaya*

One thousand *catur-yugas* make one day-time for Brahmā. This long period is called a *kalpa*. At the end of a *kalpa*, there occurs a dissolution. During this dissolution, all the three worlds, namely heaven, earth, and hell (*svarga*, *pṛthvī*, and *pātāla*), strictly

speaking, all the fourteen worlds, together with all the souls in them, are withdrawn by Brahmā into himself. And Brahmā himself rests in Nārāyaṇa, who is at rest.<sup>4</sup> This is called *naimittika-pralaya*. The term *naimittika* signifies that the dissolution is not absolute, but only qualified. The physical universe is not actually reduced to its primal state of matter, but only withdrawn, or put to a state of rest. No physical activity takes place after this dissolution. All the souls are also put to a state of rest, without their having to involve themselves in moral action and undergo transmigration. This does not amount to liberation for the souls, since ignorance and activity are not negated by knowledge; they are only reduced to a potential state. This condition of the physical universe and souls following *naimittika-pralaya* is called *laya*, which literally means "rest." And *pralaya* is what precedes *laya*, the prefix *pra* standing for what "precedes."

The period of *laya* makes one night for Brahmā, just as the period of *kalpa* makes one day-time for him. The *laya* period is equal to the *kalpa* period, i.e. equivalent to one thousand catur-yugas in terms of human time. At the end of this period of rest, Brahmā makes the physical universe and the realm of souls manifest, or active. The souls take to bodies appropriate to the respective *karma* effects which existed for them at the time of *naimittika-pralaya*. This stage of activation of the universe and souls is called *śṛṣṭi*, which literally means "creation."

The whole cycle comprising *śṛṣṭi*, *kalpa*, *pralaya*, and *laya* makes one full day (day and night time) for Brahmā. The day-time alone, i.e. the *kalpa* period, is divided into fourteen parts called *manvantaras*. A *manvantara* is so called because it is presided over by a deity called a Manu. There are fourteen Manus, each having a special name. It is remarkable how our ancients could visualize such long stretches of time that they could identify and mention the present period for purposes of performing rituals. The present *kalpa* is named Śvetavarāha; the present *manvantara* is the seventh, going by the name Vaivasvata, after the presiding

Manu called Vivasvān. It means that seven more manvantaras remain to be gone through before the present *kalpa* ends. Since a *kalpa* consists of one thousand *catur-yuga* cycles, each *yuga* has in effect one thousand turns. Therefore, within one *manvantara*, each *yuga* has (one thousand divided by fourteen) 71.4 turns. The present period is a *kali-yuga*, and it is identified as the twenty-eighth in the seventh *manvantara*. Each *yuga* is divided into four parts (*pāda*). The present *kali-yuga* is going through only its first quarter. If the first quarter is itself so difficult as we experience, we can imagine how worse each of the succeeding quarters will be.

### 5. *Prākṛta-pralaya*

The term represents a bigger cycle than the one discussed so far. It is also called *prākṛtika-pralaya* and *mahā-pralaya*. To picture its magnitude in time, we have only to take the following line. The cycle represented by *naimittika-pralaya* takes one whole day in Brahmā's time. Repeated day-night cycles like this will make one year for Brahmā. And when one hundred such years elapse for Brahmā, there occurs the dissolution called *prākṛta-pralaya*, or *mahā-pralaya*. This unimaginably huge figure in time is represented by the expression *dviparārdha*. The word *parārdha* means a particular highest number.<sup>5</sup> And the prefix *dvi* (twice) is probably applied to stress the vastness of this time span. During the *mahā-pralaya*, the physical universe is reduced to its primal, causal state, called *mūla-prakṛti*, or *brahmāṇḍa*, which is unmanifest matter. And Brahmā himself merges in the Supreme Being, the ultimate reality, designated Brahman.

The details of this dissolution are as follows. *Mahat-tattva*, *ahaṅkāra*, and the five tanmātras (making seven prakṛtis, or kinds of matter) are resolved into *mūla-prakṛti*. *Mūla-prakṛti* first goes on fire, and then there is deluge. Water evaporates into fire; fire is absorbed into air; air is absorbed into ether (*ākāśa*); and ether merges into *tāmasa-ahaṅkāra*. Similarly, the indriyas are absor-

bed into *taijasa-ahaṅkāra*; and the devatās and vṛttis of the indriyas are absorbed into *sāttvika-ahaṅkāra*. Following this, *ahaṅkāra* itself is absorbed into *mahat*. And *mahat* is absorbed into the guṇas (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*). In this condition, *prakṛti* is without any *guṇa*. This is what is meant by describing it as *avyakta*, or *sūkṣma*. It is impossible even to infer this state. Such is the nature of *prākṛta-pralaya*.<sup>6</sup> Following this *pralaya*, another hundred years of Brahmā elapse, during which *mūla-prakṛti*, the *jīvaṣ*, and Brahmā remain absorbed in Brahman.

The period of as hundred years of Brahmā preceding the *mahā-pralaya*, during which the physical universe and souls exist as such and function, is called *mahā-kalpa*. And the equal period of a hundred years of Brahmā following *mahā-pralaya*, during which the physical universe rests in its primal state and the souls become inactive, is called *mahā-laya*. At the expiry of *mahā-laya*, there is *mahā-sṛṣṭi*, during which the physical universe is evolved out of its primal cause and Brahmā and the souls reappear from Brahman. When the souls emerge from their state of rest, they take on bodies appropriate to their individual *karma*. Hence even this very long period of rest enjoyed in *mahā-laya* does not amount to liberation.

At this stage, a critic may argue thus. The universe, i.e. in parts, is indeed open to present perception. And so it is idle to dismiss it from our minds. Likewise, old events could also be believed to have taken place so long as there is historical evidence for them. But the theory of cosmic cycles goes far beyond recorded history. In the absence of perceived or historical evidence, it is difficult to believe the details given in scripture regarding cosmic cycles. The answer to this charge is that sense perception is not the only type of perception. Those who are far advanced in the discipline of *yoga* acquire extraordinary, supernatural powers (*siddhi*), one of which is the power to visualize aspects of the universe which are not open to sense perception. This is called *yogi-pratyakṣa*. The seers of ancient times possessed this power.



And the detailed accounts which they have given of phenomena like cosmic cycles are the products of their inner vision. In his *Bahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, Śrī Śaṅkara makes the following assertions. That the discipline of *yoga* leads to the acquisition of extraordinary powers is a fact which cannot be easily set aside.<sup>7</sup> It is indeed possible that what is not open to our perception is within the sphere of perception of immortal beings.<sup>8</sup>

The veracity of the accounts given by ancient seers about cosmic cycles comes home to us when we see that, in general terms, what happens today—this *kali* age—perfectly matches their prognostications. Hence these accounts cannot be dismissed as mere concoctions of the imagination. If they have to be denied at all, the denial should equally apply to the realm of facts presented to our sense perception, about which we are so complacent. Cosmic cycles with all their details matter as much as the world around us does at present.

### 6. *Ātyantika-pralaya*

The cosmic cycles described so far imply that the universe is real. But the theory of *ātyantika-pralaya* strikes a different note. It is based on the doctrine of Advaita that Brahman alone is real and that the material universe is illusory. The theory of *prākṛta-pralaya* itself indirectly leads to this idea. The universe does not exist as such before creation (*śṛṣṭi*), and it ceases to exist as such after dissolution (*pralaya*). According to Advaita, whatever does not exist before origination and after destruction cannot exist in the intervening period either.<sup>9</sup> The universe is actually neither real nor unreal. It cannot be unreal, because it is open to common knowledge (in so far as it can be perceived) and to *yoga* experience (in regard to what is beyond sense perception). It cannot be real, because the experience of Brahman negates it. This is exactly what is meant by describing the universe as illusory (*mithyā*). Its status is *vyāvahārika*. It is the realm of all activity. The two orders of dissolution described so far, namely *naimittika-pralaya* and

*pākṛta-pralaya* belong to the *vyāvahārika*. The *Bhāgavata* offers a third which takes us beyond the idea of the *vyāvahārika*. This is called *ātyantika-pralaya*. It is identical with liberation as conceived in Advaita. Let us explain.

When it is granted that the physical universe is an illusion (*mithyā*), the difference between one *jīva* and another and the difference between the *jīva* and *Īśvara* become false. These differences arise out of a false sense of association with matter. Each *jīva* has a sense of relation to a particular part of the material universe, viz. the body. Hence it considers itself to be different from other *jīvas*. Again, the *jīva* believes in and worships a Supreme Being (*Īśvara*), which it assumes to be associated with the whole universe. Consequently, it considers itself to be finite and *Īśvara* to be infinite. In reality, the *jīva* and *Īśvara* are non-different from Brahman, and, in that sense, non-different from each other. The notion that there is a physical universe, many individual *jīvas*, and an *Īśvara*, distinct from and above all of them, is born of beginningless ignorance (*avidyā*). When *avidyā* is overcome by *jñāna*, i.e. by the realization of Brahman, the sense of plurality disappears. This is *mokṣa* according to Advaita. The dissipation of ignorance is figuratively described by the *Bhāgavata* as the "final dissolution" (*ātyantika-pralaya*). The term *pralaya* primarily applies to cosmic change. It is used here in the context of the *jīva* in the secondary sense that when ignorance disappears, the very notion of the cosmos also disappears for the *jīva*. This is the final teaching of the *Bhāgavata* in the portion XII, 1-4. We shall, therefore, cite and explain the relevant verses. They occur within XII, 4, 23-34.

बुद्धीन्द्रियार्थरूपेण  
ज्ञानं भाति तदाश्रयम् ।  
दृश्यत्वाव्यतिरेकाभ्यां  
आद्यन्तवदवस्तु यत् ॥

The mind and senses, on the one hand, and their objects, on the other, are both illusory, as they have origin and end. Through them, shine their real basis, viz. pure consciousness. They are, moreover, objects of knowledge and have no reality apart from their basis, pure consciousness.(23)

दीपश्चक्षुश्च रूपं च  
ज्योतिषो न पृथक् भवेत् ।  
एवं धीः खानि मात्राश्च  
न स्युः अन्यतमादृतात् ॥

Just as the lamp, the eye, and the shape (of the flame) are not different from the flame, the mind, the senses, and their material objects are not different from their basis, viz. Brahman. But Brahman itself is different from all these. In the rope-snake illusion, the snake is not different from the rope, which is the basis; but the rope itself has no connection with the so-called snake.(24)

बुद्धेर्जागरणं स्वप्नः  
सुषुप्तिरिति चोच्यते ।  
मायामात्रमिदं राजन्  
नानात्वं प्रत्यगात्मनि ॥

Waking, dream, and sleep belong only to the mind. The self is called *viśva*, *taijasa*, and *prājña*, respectively, when the three states are ascribed to it. But really the self is untouched by the three states and remains identical. They are purely products of *māyā* and are, therefore, illusory.(25)

यथा जलधरा व्योम्नि  
भवन्ति न भवन्ति च ॥  
ब्रह्मणीदं तथा विश्वं  
अवयव्युदयाप्ययात् ॥

This universe is subject to creation and dissolution. It is also made up of parts. For these reasons, the universe neither originates in Brahman nor is dissolved in Brahman. In other words, creation and dissolution are illusory. These states do not touch Brahman just as the appearance and disappearance of clouds do not affect the sky.(26)

सत्त्वं ह्यवयवः प्रोक्तः  
सर्वावयविनामिह ।  
विनार्थेन प्रतीयेरन्  
पटस्येवाङ्ग तन्तवः ॥

यत् सामान्यविशेषाभ्यां  
उपलभ्येत स भ्रमः ।  
अन्योन्यापाश्रयात् सर्वं  
आद्यन्तवदवस्तु यत् ॥

The universe is illusory for another reason. When the manifest universe, consisting of parts, is said to be resolved, it exists in its causal form, where the parts are unmanifest. Now, cause and effect are distinct and inter-dependent, like the threads and the cloth. The cause stands for a general quality and the effect for special qualities. And the universe undergoes a necessary transition from the causal form to the effect form and vice versa. Hence it is not eternal; and, for that reason, not real. Brahman alone is real. (27-28)

विकारः ख्यायमानोऽपि  
प्रत्यगात्मानमन्तरा ।  
न निरूप्योऽस्त्यणुरपि  
स्यात् चेत् चित्सम आत्मवत् ॥

Though the changing universe is perceived as if real like the changing dream, it has no status apart from its basis, viz. Brahman,

or Ātman. No one can prove, even by a bit, that it is independent like Ātman, which is non-dual and self-effulgent.(29)

न हि सत्यस्य नानात्वं  
अविद्वान् यदि मन्यते ।  
नानात्वं छिद्रयोर्यद्वत्  
ज्योतिषोर्वातयोरिव ॥

This much is certain that in Brahman, the ultimate reality, there is no duality. If a person who is ignorant of this were to attribute plurality to the reality, he would be guilty of the same delusion as to think that there is a difference between the universal ether and the ether in the pot or between the sun in the sky and its reflection in water or, again, between the external air and the air inside us.(30)

यथा घनोऽर्कप्रभवोऽर्कदर्शितो  
ह्यर्कशभूतस्य च चक्षुषस्तमः ।  
एवं त्वहं ब्रह्मगुणस्तदीक्षितो  
ब्रह्मांशकस्यात्मनः आत्मबन्धनः ॥

The cloud is formed as the effect of the sun, and it is made manifest by the sun. Still, it obstructs the eye from seeing the sun, though the eye also shares the nature of the sun. Likewise, the sense of ego, which is a manifestation of Brahman and shines by the power of Brahman, prevents the *jīva*, which is part of Brahman, from realizing Brahman.(32)

घनो यदार्कप्रभवो विदीर्यते  
चक्षुः स्वरूपं रविमीक्षते तदा ।  
यदा ह्यहंकार उपाधिरात्मनो  
जिज्ञासया नश्यति तर्ह्यनुस्मरेत् ॥

When the cloud, which is illumined by the sun, melts away, the eye, which is of the nature of the sun, beholds the sun. Similarly, when the desire for Brahman-knowledge arises in the mind, the sense of ego, which is the adjunct of the Ātman, dissipates, and the self realizes its true nature as Brahman.(33)

यदैवमेतेन विवेकहेतिना  
 मायामयाहंकरणात्मबन्धनम् ।  
 छित्त्वाच्युतात्मानुभवोऽवतिष्ठते  
 तमाहुरात्यन्तिकमङ्गसप्लवम् ॥

When the *jīva* cuts asunder the bond of egoism, which is born of *māyā*, by the sword of discriminative knowledge, then it is firmly established in the experience of its real nature as the undivided Ātman. This state of freedom from *māyā*, where the Ātman shines in its real nature, is called *ātyantika-pralaya*.(34)

### 7. The significance of the pralayas

We shall first consider the *naimittika* and the *prākṛta* pralayas. The details of the cosmic process under these two orders as described by scripture are intellectually stimulating. But scripture does not offer them for their own sake. It offers them for the sake of their significance. Their significance lies in how they promote the spirit of detachment from the world (*vairāgya*).<sup>10</sup> And *vairāgya* is the most essential preparation for the soul's pursuit of *mokṣa*. The teaching relating to the cosmic process contributes to this spirit in several ways.

(i) The vast stretches of time involved in the two cycles of cosmic change and their unending recurrence make our own present lives look infinitely small and produces humility, which is an essential ingredient in *vairāgya*. (ii) The prolonged stage of rest which the soul, divested of body, is said to enjoy during *laya* and *mahālaya* does not amount to its liberation. Ignorance persists for the soul in potential form, and that is why it takes on a body

appropriate to the results of its past actions at the time of creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*). (iii) The fact that the physical universe, for however long it lasts, either becomes unmanifest in Brahman (as in *naimittika-pralaya*) or is reduced to its causal form (as in *prākṛta-pralaya*) reveals that our ultimate aim of eternal freedom lies beyond the impermanent world, though it has to be sought through the world.

We shall now refer to the significance of *ātyantika pralaya*. The two orders of *pralaya* discussed above imply that the physical universe is impermanent. This fact by itself is sufficient for *vairāgya*. But the theory of *ātyantika-pralaya* offers stronger reason for developing *vairāgya* towards worldly life. It is that the physical universe is illusory. Attachment to it is not only fruitless in the end, but also futile even in the moment of attachment. This does not mean that we can afford to be indifferent to the world. No one can afford to ignore one's physical needs like food and shelter, and no one is free from the duties that befall one, until one has realized Brahman and become unconcerned with the body and its relations. What the teaching relating to the world's illusoriness really means is that even while being engaged in unavoidable worldly activities, whether secular or religious, one must remind oneself that the world of activity is after all an illusion. To put the idea shortly, one must live *in* the world, but not be *of* it. The *Bhagavad-gītā* gives the example of the lotus leaf, which, though floating on water, is uncontaminated by it.<sup>11</sup> Such is the real significance of the theory of *ātyantika-pralaya*.

Verse XII, 4, 38 of the *Bhāgavata* sums up the four types of *pralaya* and remarks that such is the nature of time. This confirms the Hindu view of cosmic change as cyclical.

नित्यो नैमित्तिकश्चैव  
 तथा प्राकृतिको लयः ।  
 आत्यन्तिकश्च कथितः  
 कालस्य गतिरीदृशी ॥

The next verse (39) says that all the four *pralayas*, which have been described in brief so far, are the sport (*līlā*) of God, who is the creator and support of all beings. It also indicates the inscrutability of God by saying that even Brahmā cannot describe in full the sport of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

पुताः कुरुश्रेष्ठ जगद्विधातुः  
 नारायणस्य अखिलसत्त्वधाम्नः ।  
 लीलाकथास्ते कथिताः समासतः  
 कात्स्न्येन नाजोऽपि अभिधातुमीशः ॥

In regard to the above verse, we have to make an observation. So far as the first three types of *pralaya* (*nitya*, *naimittika*, and *prākṛta*) are concerned, the term *līlā* could be taken in the literal sense. There is no other way in which we could explain the why and wherefore of these types of dissolution. But in respect of *ātyantika-pralaya*, the term *līlā* can be taken only in a figurative sense. This is because the state of being Īśvara, like the state of being a *jīva*, is itself part of *māyā*, or *avidyā*, from which release is to be sought and expected. The only way in which the application of the term *līlā* here can be justified is this. *Avidyā*, which is the cause of appearance, disappears when *jñāna* dawns, i.e. when Brahman is realized. But we cannot plan or predict the dawn of *jñāna*. We can only prepare for it by diligently following the steps prescribed by scripture. Brahman-knowledge comes when it comes. To express this mystery, we may say by way of eulogy that *ātyantika-pralaya* is the *līlā*, or sport, of God, without importing logical considerations into the meaning of the expression *līlā*.

Verse XII, 4, 40 recommends that, since all the four *pralayas* are the *līlā* of the Lord, listening to the story of God's *līlā* with all one's heart is the only means to attain release from the innumerable kinds of miseries which torment us in worldly life. It is the only raft to cross the boundless ocean of transmigration.



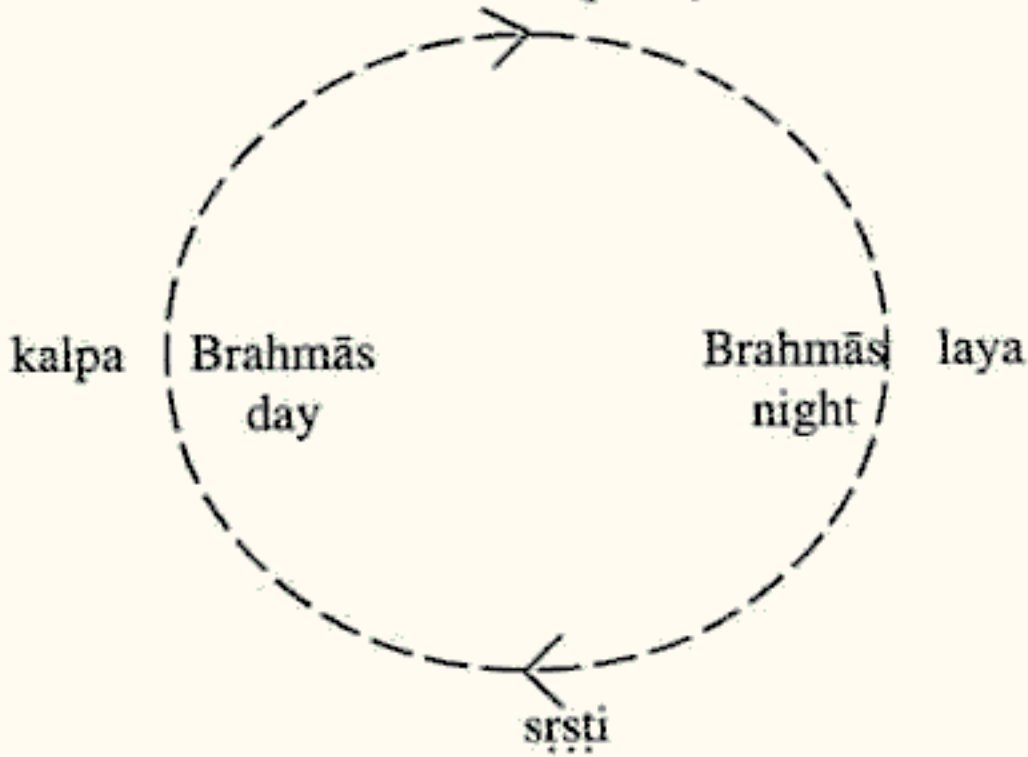
संसारसिन्धुमतिदुस्तरमुत्तितीर्षोः  
 नान्यः प्लवो भगवतः पुरुषोत्तमस्य ।  
 लीलाकथारसनिषेवणमन्तरेण  
 पुंसो भवेद् विविधदुःखदवार्दितस्य ॥

The full significance of this recommendation comes home to us when we take it in the context of *kali-yuga*, which will be the focus of the next part of this article.

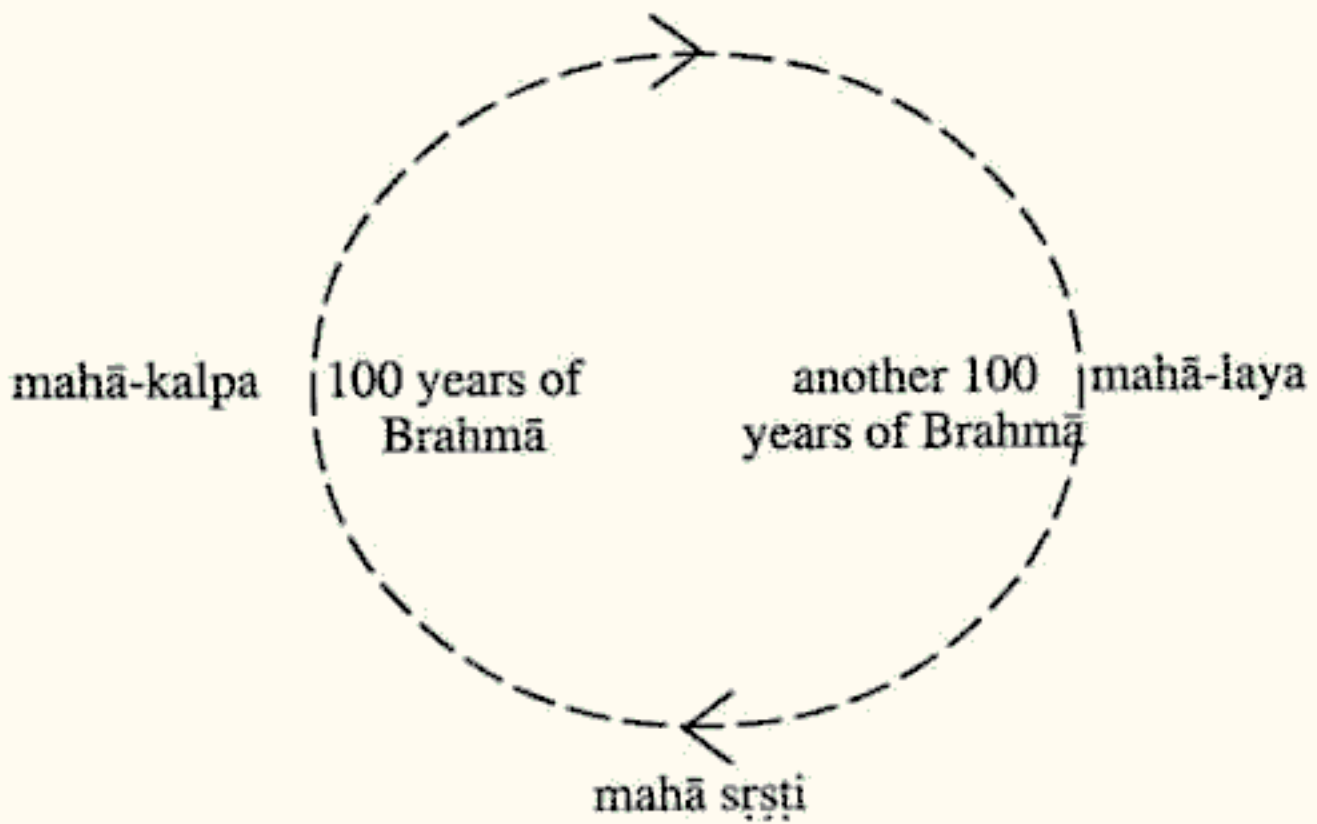
### NOTES

1. For preparing this article (in two parts), the following sources were consulted.
  - (a) *Śrīmad-bhāgavata-mahāpurāṇam* (text only), Gītā Press, Gorakhpur.
  - (b) *Śrībhāgavata-sudhā-sāgar* (Hindi commentary), Gītā Press, Gorakhpur.
2. vide under *yugam*, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, V.S. Apte, 3 volumes, Poona, 1957-59.
3. vide *Bhāgavata*, XII, 4, 35-37.
4. vide *Ibid*, XII, 4, 1-4.
5. vide under *parārdha*, *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, V.S. Apte.
6. vide *Bhāgavata*, XII, 4, 5-22.
7. योगः अपि अणिमाद्यैश्वर्यप्राप्तिफलः  
 स्मर्यमाणः न शक्यते साहसमात्रेण प्रत्याख्यातुम्, I, 3, 33.
8. भवति हि अस्माकं अप्रत्यक्षं अपि चिरन्तनानां प्रत्यक्षम्, *Ibid*.
9. अदृष्टदृष्टप्रणष्टभ्रान्तिभूतेषु भूतेषु ...  
 Śrī Śaṅkara's commentary on *Bhagavad-gītā*, II, 28.
10. . . . अतः वैराग्यप्रदर्शनार्थं च इदं आह . . .  
 Śrī Śaṅkara's commentary on *Bhagavad-gītā*, VIII, 18-19.
11. *Bhagavad-gītā*, V, 10.

A cycle representing *nimittika-pralaya*  
*nimittika-pralaya*



A cycle representing *mahā-pralaya*  
*mahā-pralaya*



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## ŚAṄKARĀCĀRYA'S PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA AND HIS CRITIQUE OF OTHER SCHOOLS

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S. R. Bhatt\*

The system of Vedānta has been one of the most significant schools of thought which has exercised a pervasive and unmitigated influence of Indian mode of thinking and way of living. In modern times its influence spread beyond India and cast its impact on Europe and America and elsewhere. This clearly evinces the inherent strength and logical tenability of Vedānta as a system of philosophy.

The Vedāntic Philosophy has its pristine springs in the Upaniṣads but later on the *Brahma-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa and the *Bhagavad-gītā* put forth its classical exposition. The three together constitute the foundational texts of Vedānta, technically known as *prasthāna-traya*. The Upaniṣads are regarded as *śruti-prasthāna*, i.e. revealed texts. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is known as *smṛti-prasthāna*, as it is an expression of the Divine in human form. The *Brahma-sūtra* is accepted as *nyāya-prasthāna* because it gives a logical and rational exposition of the Vedāntic thought.

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There has been a long array of thinkers till the recent times who have expounded the Vedāntic thought in their own way, but in the galaxy of these thinkers Śaṅkara is the most outstanding and so far unparalleled. Every exponent claims to satisfy the triple tests of *śruti* (scriptural support) *yukti* (logicality) and *anubhava* (experiential certainty). But Śaṅkara's exposition, as has been universally recognized, is the most compact and finalized. It is not an exaggeration to say that one can expound Vedānta either following Śaṅkara or criticizing Śaṅkara, but no exposition can be possible ignoring Śaṅkara. It is, therefore, not for nothing that mankind is still remembering him and celebrating his advent.

## II

The history of mankind witnesses a constant recurrence of some perennial problems and one of such problems is about the nature of reality which is given to us at every moment of our life and which every one has to reckon with willingly or otherwise. Our reason demands to have some kind of universally acceptable conception of reality, but the elusive nature of reality has always defied human comprehension. Our mind is caught in a dilemma in so far as we cannot help believing in the existence of one fundamentally all-inclusive unity, but at the same time we cannot deny the existence of the manifest plurality. It is in the midst of such a baffling situation the system of Vedānta steps in to throw the much-needed guiding light.

The most distinguishing feature of Śaṅkara Vedānta is the advocacy of the doctrine that pure consciousness (*nirvśeṣa cinmātra*) is the only ultimate reality, which is named Brahman on account of its being all-pervasive and all-comprehensive. It is non-dual, devoid of all attributes and forms. In itself it is unconditioned and unsullied. In order to convey this truth the Upaniṣads resort to the negative mode of '*neti neti*'. Brahman which has no attributes appears as if it is endowed with attributes on account of the

limiting adjuncts just as light which has no form appears to be endowed with different forms because of the objects which it illuminates. Similarly, Brahman in itself is unitary but appears manifold even as the one sun gets reflected diversely in different pots containing water.

Reality in itself is Nirguṇa-Brahman, but as a concession to empirical consciousness Śāṅkara also accepts the validity of Saguṇa-Brahman for the worldly process (*loka vyavahāra*). Thus he draws a distinction between *pāramārthikasattā* and *vyāvahārika sattā* to accommodate both unity and multiplicity. He assigns these two diverse experiences of unity and multiplicity, two different orders or statuses which are in a hierarchy that is more experiential than valuations. The multiplicity is in no way less real or less significant in as much as it is one with unity, but bereft of the unity it has no existence and no significance because it has no essence or existence outside the unity.

From the above account of the nature of ultimate reality it follows that for Śāṅkara, Brahman is the world-ground, the sole and whole cause of the world. Brahman, conceived as Īśvara, is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. The world has its origin, sustenance and re-absorption in Brahman. World-creation is just a *līlā* without involving any effort on the part of Brahman. Evolution and involution are the folded and spread out states of cloth respectively. The truth is that world is not separate from Brahman; it has no independent existence. The world is an effect but the effect is only an appearance of the cause which is the only reality.

According to Śāṅkara the manifold and variegated world is real but it has only a derivative reality. It is empirically real but intrinsically not real and hence it is characterized as *mithyā* i.e., relatively real. The world of experience is a sphere of relatively which is neither unreal nor ultimately real. So when it is said that the world has no existence it only means that it has no absolute existence. It is the ultimate reality as experienced by us. Thus all

the things and beings of the world are our apprehensions of one and the same absolute which is identity par excellence. All are real though relatively.

### III

According to Śaṅkara all finite selves are nothing but appearances of Brahman. The relation between them and Brahman is therefore that of absolute identity. Strictly speaking, we can not talk of any such relation because in reality they are not different. All the individual selves are one and the same indivisible Brahman but owing to the particular adjuncts caused by *avidyā*, the one unitary Brahman appears, as it were, to be broken up into multiplicity of individual selves, what is ultimately real in self is the universal Brahman. The whole aggregate of individualizing bodily organs and mental functions, which in our worldly experience distinguishes and separates one self from the other, is the offspring of *avidyā*, and as such is unreal.

The individual self which is manifestly in bondage, is unable to look through and beyond *avidyā* or *māyā* which like a veil hides from it its true nature. Instead of recognizing itself as Brahman, it mistakenly identifies itself with its adjuncts. The self which in reality is pure consciousness, non-active, infinite etc. becomes, as it were, limited in extent, knowledge and power. It further becomes an agent and an enjoyer. It is only when the adjuncts are removed by the right knowledge of its true nature, final emancipation takes place. Then it shines in its original nature which amounts to annihilation of its finite existence and finite nature.

Among the threefold paths of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*, Śaṅkara recognizes *jñāna* alone as the direct means to *mokṣa*. The discriminative knowledge of the real from the unreal is the sole cause of release. Ethical discipline and devotion to God are only accessories. Since bondage is due to ignorance of the real nature

of the self, true knowledge alone can bring about release. *Karma* and *upāsanā* may help us in urging to know the real and may equip us for that knowledge by purifying our mind, but ultimately it is knowledge which by destroying ignorance can enable us to be one with the real.

Thus Śaṅkara propounds a complete system of metaphysics which is logically coherent and well-knit and empirically quite instructive provided it is understood in its proper perspective. It gives us a view of life and also points out a way of life based on it. It enables us to develop an outlook on life and reality which is conducive to the realization of peace and perfection.

#### IV

Śaṅkara was not the propounder of the Vedāntic thought. He was only an exponent, an advocate and a crusader. He was so firmly convinced of the final validity of Vedānta that he employed all the three grounds of *śruti*, *yukti* and *anubhava* to refute and repudiate all those systems of metaphysics which were not in harmony with the Vedāntic thought. It must be noted here that Śaṅkara did not take into consideration systems of logic, dialectics, grammar or yogic practices. He was interested only in giving a system of metaphysics and hence undertook an examination only of rival systems of metaphysics. This was needed, he felt, to keep people away from false and misleading views. Without a strong critique of rival views it was not possible to keep people away from their perverting influence. And it can be admitted with sufficient justification that he succeeded in his task to a great extent in so far as he could thwart the negativistic Buddhist influence and make Vedānta acceptable to the Indian masses, both tutored and untutored alike.

Though the examination of the rival metaphysical systems is scattered all through the *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* and in his other commentaries, the *Tarkapāda* of the *Brahma-sūtras* presents a

concentrated and trenchant criticism and refutation. As stated earlier, Śaṅkara relied on *anubhava*, *śruti* and *yukti*. In the *Tarkapāda* his refutation was mainly on logical grounds advancing cogent and convincing arguments in his support. This was because for exposition of his position greater reliance on experience and scriptures was needed but for refutation of rival views logic and dialectics were to be resorted to. In the *Tarkapāda* Śaṅkara concentrated on the Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Buddhism, Jainism, Pāñcārātra etc. But elsewhere he also undertook examination of the Cārvāka, Mīmāṃsā, Yoga and other systems. In case of Mīmāṃsā and Yoga he only repudiated the faulty metaphysics they were upholding. In other respects they were not unacceptable to him. In this paper it is proposed to concentrate on the *Tarkapāda* only.

Śaṅkara declares Sāṅkhya as the chief rival because of two reasons. Firstly it is very close to Vedānta and therefore can mislead people easily. Secondly it claimed scriptural support and succeeded also to certain extent. Perhaps Śaṅkara also thought that if Sāṅkhya view could be shown to be untenable, it would follow that other views, which were more remote, could in no way be acceptable. The main thrust of Śaṅkara's refutation is directed towards the theory that prakṛti or pradhāna (insentient matter) is the primordial cause of the world. He argues that there is a design in the world and insentient *pradhāna* cannot have a sense of design or even a will to create. The teleological character of the world process remains inexplicable if insentient *pradhāna* is regarded as a cause. Further, it remains unintelligible why and how it begins to evolve and why and how it ceases from evolving and *pradhāna* being insentient, there would be the predicament of perpetual evolution or dissolution. If any intelligent purpose is not accepted, there would be only a blind process without an end. If it is argued that *pradhāna* has such a capacity of sentience, then this system comes to the fold of Advaita Vedānta.

After demolishing independent status of Sāṅkhya and showing its reducibility to Vedānta, Śaṅkara proceeds to examine the



Vaiśeṣika metaphysics. First of all he refutes Vaiśeṣika charges against *Brahma-vāda* and then advances his own arguments to disprove Vaiśeṣika system. The Vaiśeṣika system traces the world to primary atoms, posits *adr̥ṣṭa* as the unseen power responsible for bringing the atoms together or for separating them. But Śaṅkara argues that whether located in the atoms or in the souls, *adr̥ṣṭa*, being inert and un-intelligent like the atoms, can not move the atoms. Another serious defect in the Vaiśeṣika system is the view that out of partless atoms composite things of the world arise. Śaṅkara points out several other defects and brands this school as semi-nihilistic. He opines that this school is not to be relied on as it is bolstered up by bad logic, goes against the scriptures and is not accepted by worthy people.

As regards Buddhism, Śaṅkara takes into cognizance the Sarvāstivāda, the Vijñānavāda and the Śūnyavāda schools. About Śūnyavāda he argues that if partial nihilism is unacceptable, how can full nihilism be acceptable. He takes up the realistic school of Sarvāstivāda for examination. He questions the tenability of the theories of momentariness and non-substantiality of reality. If the reals are momentary, how can the aggregation of the physical and mental entities take place? There is a procession of successive moments but how can the moments be related? If there is no permanent soul how can memory and remembrance be possible. If there is no permanent reality, how can existence come out of non-existence. These and many such questions remain un-solved in the realistic schools of Buddhism. Then Śaṅkara turns to the later Buddhist school of idealism. For the school of Vijñānavāda there is no extra-mental reality. What is real is a series of momentary ideas. The appearance of ideas is explained by residual impressions on the analogy of dreams. Śaṅkara argues that this view is also untenable. The world can not be equated with dreams. How can there be residual impressions if there are no external things. Thus for Śaṅkara, Buddhism is totally unintelligible and untenable.

Coming to Jainism, Śaṅkara directs his polemic against the theory of *anekānta*. His main argument is that how can one and the same thing possess contradictory attributes. This apart he also questions the acceptability of the theory of the increase and decrease in the size of soul.

Finally he turns to the school of Bhāgavatas and Pāñcārātra. He rejects their view that the soul is originated from God. How can eternal soul be originated?

Though the materialist school of Cārvāka is not taken into account in the *Tarkapāda*, in III. III. 53-54 he undertakes its examination. Refuting *dehātmavāda* which identifies soul with the body, he argues that if consciousness were an attribute of the body, why is it that a dead body is not conscious.

Śaṅkara constructs his system of metaphysics on the triple foundations of *śruti*, *yukti* and *anubhava* and he bases his critique of other systems precisely on these very grounds. He was basically interested in the true knowledge of reality (*tattva*) and accorded primacy to experience. *Śruti* was acceptable to him only because it was an authoritative record of experience. *Yukti* was acceptable to him only in so far as it was an aid to the understanding of *śruti* and *anubhava*. But, as we have demonstrated above, in the examination of other systems he displayed his subtle logical acumen and put forth such arguments which were in fact devastating to some of the schools. As is well known, he assimilated some of the good points of Buddhist thought, rejected most of its basic tenets and made that system redundant and superfluous in the fact of Vedānta. It would be incorrect to hold that he banished Buddhism from Indian soil, nor would it be doing justice to him in regarding him as a pseudo-Buddhist. He was basically a seeker of truth and if he found some grains of truth in Buddhist thought, he did not hesitate in accepting the same. In the context of Buddhism, therefore, there is a need for a reappraisal of Śaṅkara. The same is the situation in respect of the Sāṅkhya system. He rejected the *pradhānakāraṇa-vāda* but accepted its theory of

evolution and also the theory of causation at the empirical level. Like Buddhism, he made Sāṅkhya system redundant and superfluous, and that is why we do not find a continuity of the Sāṅkhya tradition.

Only two systems could survive the onslaughts of Śaṅkara. One of them is Jainism which continues because it is not only a school of philosophy but also a made of religion. As a system of metaphysics, it could not regain its lost respectability. Its ethical tenets, which were not unacceptable to Śaṅkara, continued to be acceptable and remain in practice till this day. The other system which can take the credit of survival is that of Vaiśeṣika. The main reason for this is the support provided to it by the Nyāya School of thought, the epistemology and logic of which was broadly acceptable to all. But under the impact of Śaṅkara's examination of Vaiśeṣika metaphysics had to undergo a thorough revision. Acceptance of a creator God, recognition of svarūpa sambandha etc. are some of the examples of such a revision.

While concluding there is a need for restatement of Śaṅkara's position in respect of the schools of Mīmāṃsā and Yoga. Though Śaṅkara acknowledges the interrelations and interdependence of the two Mīmāṃsās, i.e., *pūrva* and *uttara*, he spares no pains to point out the difference of contents and objectives of the two. Though Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is not taken to be "paramata" and hence is not taken into account in he *Tarkapāda*, he differs with many of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā doctrines. He however confines and limits the role and utility of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā to the empirical realm. He makes it very clear that Pūrva Mīmāṃsā is concerned only with *preyas* whereas the goal of Vedānta is *nihsreyas*. Naturally therefore the former has to concentrate on *karma* and the latter on *jñāna*.

As regards the Yoga system it is both a theory and a practice. Its theory is borrowed from the Sāṅkhya system and is not acceptable to Śaṅkara. But the practice of Yoga as a method of attainment of mental equipoise is not unacceptable to him. This

means that he has an open mind about the Yoga system just as he accepts the Nyāya technique of logic he also accepts the Yoga technique of meditation, which forms an important part of the *Sādhana catuṣṭaya*. Thus like the Mīmāṃsā system the system of Yoga is neither accepted by him in full nor is there the whole-sale rejection of them.

## V

From the above account it is clear that as a philosopher Śaṅkara had an open mind. He steadfastly adhered to what he thought to be true, rejected vehemently what he thought to be false and misleading and exercised a judicious discrimination in his acceptance and rejection. He gave definite direction to the Vedāntic thought which shaped the development of the Indian culture in subsequent time. The entire smṛti literature consisting of Dharma Śāstras and Purāṇas bear his influence which was also echoed by the medieval and modern saints. This speaks of the strength, vitality and general acceptability of the thought system advocated by him. In fact he made the Vedāntic thought relevant to all times and to all places.

## SCRIPTURE\*

V.R. Kalyanasundara Sastri

Though the word "*śāstra*" (scripture) is used in different places just as *Tarka-śāstra*, *Vyākaraṇa-śāstra*, *Sāṅkhya-śāstra*, *Yoga-śāstra*, *Chandaḥ-śāstra*, *Jyotiḥ-śāstra*, *Vaidya-śāstra*, *Dharma-śāstra*, *Artha-śāstra*, *Kāma-śāstra* and so on, it is only the *Veda* that is said to be *śāstra* in the primary sense in accordance with the following definition: "The means which is not known through perception or inference is known through the *Veda*. Hence it is called *Veda*." Thus it has been said by the learned: "There is no *śāstra* superior to the *Veda*."<sup>1</sup> The word "*śāstra*" etymologically means that which commands; so, that alone which instructs us as to what should be done and what should not be done, as to what is good and what is not good, deserves to be *śāstra*. That is why at the end of the *Śikṣāvallī* of the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*, the instruction begins by saying, "Speak the truth,"<sup>2</sup> and after instructing as to what should be done and what should not be done, it is said at the end: "This is the authoritative instruction."<sup>3</sup>

\**Advaita Siddhānta Sāra*, Vol. I, Adi Sankara Advaita Research Centre, Madras, 1992, pp.12-17.

Thus, since the *Veda* instructs us as "This is *dharma*; this should be done; this should not be done; this is good; this is not good," it alone deserves to be called *śāstra* in the primary sense. Indeed, there is nothing else which can be good to us than *dharma*, nor can there be anything more evil than *adharmā*. That is why there is the statement of Jaimini in the *Karma-mīmāṃsā*: "That which is an injunction is *dharma*."<sup>4</sup> Here the word "*codanā*" refers to the *Veda* alone which is in the form of an injunction. Since the word "*adharmā*" can also be construed through splitting, instead of the word "*dharma*" here (in the above aphorism), it has been explained by the learned that *adharmā* also can be known only through the *Veda*.<sup>5</sup> So the word "*codanā*" signifies the *Veda* which is in the form of prohibition.

The venerable Vyāsa also has said in the *Śārīrakamīmāṃsā*: "(The soul is) an agent, on account of scriptural (injunctions) having a meaning on that ground only."<sup>6</sup> Here, the word "*śāstra*" refers to the entire *Veda* in the form of injunctions and prohibitions. He conveys this idea also elsewhere in the *sūtra*: "If it be said (that sacrifices which entail the killing of animals, etc.) are unholy, (we say) not so, on account of scriptural authority,"<sup>7</sup> and also elsewhere. The word "*śabda*", here, means only the *Veda* and not anything else. In the utterance of Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Therefore *śāstra* is your *pramāṇa* with regard to what should be done and what should not be done,"<sup>8</sup> the word "*śāstra*" is used only in the sense of *Veda*. The necessity of the *Veda* (which is *śāstra*) has been set forth in many ways as follows: "*Śāstra* destroys our numerous doubts; it informs about what is remote. It is the eye for all. He who does not possess *śāstra* is, indeed, blind,"<sup>9</sup> and, "A person has eyes only when he has *śāstra* which reveals what is subtle and what should be done."<sup>10</sup> So it is clear that in all these instances the word "*śāstra*" signifies only the *Veda*.

However, the *Vedānta* section alone in the *Veda* is *śāstra* in the primary sense, for it instructs what is better. When compared with *karma*, *upāsanā*, indeed, is a better means, and also it is

enjoined. There is instruction about it in the Upaniṣads. There is the statement of Vyāsa to this effect: "Śāstra is the means of right knowledge (with regard to Brahman)."<sup>11</sup> In the *bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda thereon, there is explanation such as, *ṛgvedādeḥ śāstrasya*,<sup>12</sup> "*ṛgvedādi śāstran*"<sup>13</sup> (meaning *śāstra* such as *Ṛgveda*). Here, the word "*śāstra*" signifies the *Vedānta* section also which is a part of the *Veda*, on the strength of the context, because the texts such as, "That from which all beings come into existence,"<sup>14</sup> "The *Ṛg-veda*, etc., have been breathed forth from the great Being"<sup>15</sup> quoted therein as authority occur in the *Upaniṣad* section.

However, the principal texts such as "*tattvamasī*"<sup>16</sup> must be considered to be *śāstra* when compared with the other texts of the *Upaniṣad*, because it instructs the best. Indeed, the teaching of the non-difference between the inward Self and Brahman is the highest in comparison to every other teaching, and it is taught in the *mahāvākyas* alone. There is the statement of Vyāsa to this effect: "But (Indra's) instruction (to Pratardana is justified) by his realization of the truth confirmed by Scripture (*śāstra*) viz. that he is Brahman), as did Vāmadeva."<sup>17</sup> Here, the word "*śāstra*" refers to the *mahāvākya* which is a part of the *Vedānta*. The commentary thereon (by Śaṅkara) reads: "(The individual divine self called Indra) perceiving by means of *Ṛṣi*-like intuition—the existence of which is vouched for by scripture—its own Self to be identical with the supreme Self, instructs (Pratardana)..."<sup>18</sup> The attainment of this knowledge alone is the highest end—it is this idea that is brought out succinctly.

Thus the *Vedānta-śāstra* which contains the *mahāvākyas* is really the scripture. Knowledge of the real nature of the Self is the highest (to be attained), and its revelation alone constitutes the definition of *śāstra*. Here also, knowing the nature of the Self is the immediate result, and gaining the knowledge of one's own Self is the final result. Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda says in his commentary on the *Gītā*: "The word '*tat*' refers to everything. Every-

thing is Brahman, and it is referred to as 'tat'. The nature of *tat* is *tattvam*, i.e., the essential nature of Brahman."<sup>19</sup> In the commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* and also elsewhere, he says: "The Self is Brahman."<sup>20</sup> Thus, since the essential nature of the Self is the highest (to be known), it amounts to being the *tattva*. Or, *tattva* is Brahman itself or *Ātman* itself, because there is the text of the *Nārāyaṇasūkta*, "The supreme Nārāyaṇa is *tattva*"<sup>21</sup> and the statement of Vyāsa in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, "*tattvam tattvavid-ekātmā*."<sup>22</sup>

The real position is this: the venerable Pāṇini explains that "the 'śāstra' means ruling, and the 'train' means protecting;"<sup>23</sup> and the word 'śāstra' is formed by combining (the roots) 'śāsu' and 'train'. Since there is the ruling with regard to what is good and what is not good, and since there is, therefore, protection of all, this etymological meaning of the word 'śāstra' is better (than the previous one). Thus that which gives instruction about the essential nature of the Self which is the highest for all, and thereby protects (all) from everything, is, in the final analysis, *śāstra* in the primary sense of the term. And the *Vedānta* which contains within itself the *mahāvākyas*, deserves that (status of *śāstra*). Therein alone the real nature of the Self is, indeed, truly expounded through texts such as, "The Self is free from sin, old age, death, sorrow,"<sup>24</sup> "The intelligent Self is neither born, nor does it die,"<sup>25</sup> "That thou art."<sup>26</sup> It is for this reason that the Self is said to be *aupaniṣada* (what is taught in the Upaniṣad). Indeed, there is the Upaniṣadic text, "I ask you, the Person taught in the Upaniṣad."<sup>27</sup> There is also the statement of *śruti*, "One who does not know the *Veda* does not know the Great."<sup>28</sup>

The Self alone is the highest good for all. On the contrary, the not-Self is that which is not good. It is for this reason that Āpastamba declares, "There is nothing higher than the attainment of the Self."<sup>29</sup> Also, it has been said by the author of the *Gītā*: "When, having obtained it, he thinks no other acquisition superior to it; when, therein established, he is not moved even by a great



pain,"<sup>30</sup> "This is the state of Brahman, Oh son of Pṛthā! Attaining to this, none is deluded. Remaining in this state even at the last period of life, one attains to the felicity of Brahman."<sup>31</sup> There is also the statement of the venerable *śruti*, "When a person knows the Self as "I am the *Puruṣa*," desiring what and for attaining which, should he suffer the afflictions of the body."<sup>32</sup>

Also in the *Pratardanādhikaraṇa*<sup>33</sup> of the *Śārīrakamīmāṃsā* the truth of the non-difference between the inward Self and Brahman is brought out as follows: When Indra asks Pratardana, "Choose a boon from me,"<sup>34</sup> the latter replies, "You yourself choose that boon for me which you deem most beneficial for a man."<sup>35</sup> Thereafter Indra instructs him, "Meditate on me as life, as immortality."<sup>36</sup> There is also a text of the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* which says: "Everything is dear for the sake of the Self."<sup>37</sup> One should understand the position thus: Sacrifices, etc., are beneficial since they are the means to heaven; meditation, etc., are more beneficial, since they are conducive to the attainment of *brahmaloka*; but the Self is the most beneficial, since it is the means to *mokṣa*. It is for this reason that the *Vedānta-śāstra* is called *adhyātmaśāstra* and the *uttaramīmāṃsāśāstra* is called the *śārīrakamīmāṃsāśāstra*. The use of the word "*śāstra*" in all other cases than this one is only by courtesy. (The usage of the word '*śāstra*' in the case of other disciplines is justified) since they are useful to the (study of) *Vedānta-śāstra* and not otherwise. Therefore, it is said, "The *tarkaśāstra* of Kaṇāda and the *vyākaraṇa-śāstra* of Pāṇini are useful to (the study of) all *śāstras*." Also, it is said, "The *Vedāṅgas* are six only: phonetics, grammar, prosody, etymology, astrology, and *Kalpa-sūtras*." Again, "Through *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa*, should the *Veda* be well-understood."<sup>38</sup> And, "*smṛti* follows the purport of the *śruti*,"<sup>39</sup> etc. Thus the meaning of *śāstra* has been explained.

A definition should be free from the three kinds of defects; or, a definition should contain the unique quality (of the thing defined)—this is how those who are experts in definition explain

it (definition).<sup>40</sup> The definition of *śāstra*, in the way in which it has been explained above, is the teaching of the most beneficial truth of the essential nature of the Self as non-different from Brahman. Thus the definition of *śāstra* has been explained. The direct result of the study of the *śāstra* is gaining the knowledge of one's nature. One's own nature and Brahman—the two are not different. There is reference to it as "Real, knowledge, and infinite is Brahman" in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad*<sup>41</sup> and as "Knowledge and bliss is Brahman" in the *Bṛhadāranyakopaniṣad*.<sup>42</sup> By these texts it is established that the Self is real, knowledge, and infinite bliss by its nature, and its attainment alone is the result of the study of *śāstra*. It can be attained only through the knowledge of its nature, since ignorance (*ajñāna*) alone is the impediment to its attainment. In thousands of *śruti* texts it is stated thus: "Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going over there,"<sup>43</sup> "The knower of the Self overcomes sorrow,"<sup>44</sup> "Through knowledge alone *mokṣa* is attained."

The means thereto is *karma-yoga* as well as *dhyāna-yoga*. Of these two, the former is said to be the remote means, while the latter is said to be the proximate means. Thus there is the statement of the Lord: "For a devotee who wishes to attain to *yoga*, action is said to be the means. For the same (devotee), when he has attained to *yoga*, quiescence (*śama*) is said to be the means."<sup>45</sup> Here by "*śama*" is meant *yoga*. There is a text in the *Kāthopaniṣad* to this effect: "When the five senses of knowledge come to rest together with the mind, and the intellect, too, does not function, that state they call the highest. They consider that keeping of the senses steady as *yoga*."<sup>46</sup> This has been taught in a detailed way by the revered Patañjali in *Yoga-śāstra* beginning with the aphorism, "Then, the instruction about *yoga*."<sup>47</sup> The *sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa which says, "By this the *yoga* philosophy is refuted,"<sup>48</sup> purports to refute some other (philosophical) issue and not the *yoga* discipline. Other (philosophical) issues (which are refuted) are the difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara*, the difference among

the *jīvas* and so on, which are sought to be established in that system. That is why there is also the *śruti* text to this effect: "Let him not reflect on many words, for that is mere weariness of speech."<sup>49</sup> Here the word "*bahūn*" refers to the views which seek to establish the difference between *jīva* and *Īśvara*, etc. Śaṅkara says in his *Bhāṣya* that the Sāṅkhyas and the Yogins are, indeed, dualists and that they are not those who seek to establish the oneness of the Self.<sup>50</sup>

With reference to Yoga system, the following has been stated by Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda in the *Yogapratyuktyadhikaraṇa*<sup>51</sup> of the *Śārīrakamīmāṃsā-sūtras*: "The practice of Yoga is indeed enjoined in the *Veda* as a means of obtaining perfect knowledge, e.g. there are texts such as, "(The self) is to be heard, to be reflected on, to be meditated upon," and in the *Yoga-śāstra* itself the passage, "Now then Yoga, the means of the knowledge of truth," etc., defines the *yoga* as a means of reaching perfect knowledge."<sup>52</sup> Also it is stated by him: "We willingly allow room for those parts of the two systems of Sāṅkhya and Yoga which do not contradict the *Veda*."<sup>53</sup> In this way the explanation contained in other works should be understood.

The real position is that the entire *Veda* purports to convey the sense of oneness of the Self. That is why it has been said by the Lord: "All the *Vedas* assert that I am the one to be known."<sup>54</sup> There is also the statement of the *Kāthopanīṣad*: "That state which all the *Vedas* teach..."<sup>55</sup> So the *Veda* alone is *śāstra* in the primary sense. All other works are called *śāstra* only by courtesy.

## NOTES

1. *Mahābhārata, Śāntiparvan*
2. *Taittirīya Upanīṣad* (hereafter *TU*), Anuvāka 11.
3. *Ibid.*,
4. *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, 1.1.2.
5. Compare *Śloka-vārtika*, v. 210 on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, 1.1.2.

6. *Brahma-sūtra* (hereafter *BS*), 2.3.33.
7. *Ibid.*, 3.1.25.
8. *Bhagavad-gītā* (hereafter *BG*), 14.24.
9. *Vidyāpraśānsā*, v. 2, *Subhāṣita-ratna-bhāṇḍāgāra*.
10. *Cakṣuṣmattā tu śāstreṇa sūkṣmakāryārtha-darśinā*
11. *BS*, 1.1.3.
12. *BS* on *Śaṅkara-bhāṣya* (hereafter *SB*), p. 9.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
14. *TU*, 3.1.1.
15. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (hereafter *BU*), 3.4.10.
16. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (hereafter *CU*), 6.8.7 ff.
17. *BS*, 1.1.30.
18. *SB* on *BS*, 1.1.30.
19. *SB* on *BG*, 2.16.
20. *SB* on *BS*, p. 6.
21. *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, 10.11.1.
22. *Mahābhārata*, 11.140.118.
23. *Dhātu-pāṭha*, 11.51; 1034.
24. *CU*, 8.1.5.
25. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (hereafter *KU*), 1.2.18.
26. *CU*, 6.8.7 ff.
27. *BU*, 3.9.26.
28. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.12.9.
29. *Āpastamba Dharma-sūtra*, 1.8.22.2.
30. *BG*, 6.22.

31. *BG*, 2.72.
32. *BU*, 4.4.12.
33. *BS*, 1.1.28–31.
34. *Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad*, 3.2.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *BU*, 2.4.5.
38. *Mahābhārata*, 1.1.204.
39. *Raghuvaṃśa*, 2.2.
40. *Tarka-dīpikā on dravya*.
41. *TU*, 2.1.1.
42. *BU*, 3.9.34.
43. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 3.8.
44. *CU*, 8.1.3.
45. *BG*, 6.3.
46. *KU*, 2.3.10–11.
47. *Yoga-sūtra*, 11.
48. *BS*, 2.1.3.
49. *BU*, 4.4.21.
50. *SB, BS*, p. 183.
51. *BS*, 2.1.3.
52. *SB, BS*, p. 183.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *BG*, 15.15.
55. *KU*, 1.2.15.

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE  
PRASTHĀNATRAYA—LIGHT FROM THE  
BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ-BHĀṢYA OF ŚAṆKARA

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The *Bhagavad-gītā-bhāṣya* of Bhagatpāda Śaṅkara is famous. The present paper intends to draw the attention of scholars to the Ācārya's elucidation of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, XIII.4 and to the light it throws on the probable chronology of the *Prasthānatraya*.

I

The students of Indian philosophy are aware that the entire Vedānta-darśana revolves round the three basic texts or source books, viz. (1) the *Vedāntas* i.e. the *Upaniṣads*; (2) the *Bhagavad-gītā*, known also by the shorter title *Gītā*; and (3) the *Vedānta-sūtras*. These three are collectively known as *Prasthānatrayi* (or *traya*) the 'triple path' of the Vedāntadarśana. Of these three, the *Upaniṣads* constitute the *Śruti-prasthāna* 'the path of scripture'; the *Gītā*, an integral part of the *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsācārya,

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makes the *Smṛtiprasthāna*, 'the path of code or conventional law;' and the *Vedānta-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa is the *Sūtraprasthāna*, 'the path of aphorism'.

It is known that the Vedānta-darśana and the Mīmāṃsā-darśana have much in common. Hence the latter too has its own three-fold source materials, i.e. *prasthāna-trayī* 'triplet of paths. They are: (1) the path of Śruti, comprising the entire ritualistic portion (*karmakāṇḍa*) of the Veda; (2) the path of Smṛti, under which comes the vast literature known as Dharma-śāstra; and (3) the path of Sūtra, i.e. the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* of the sage Jaimini. However, the concept of *Prasthāna-trayī* has attained prominence in the context of the Vedānta-darśana alone. This is so obviously because Ācārya Śaṅkara himself has written brilliant, exhaustive *bhāṣyas* on all the three sources of this Darśana, and those *bhāṣyas* have collectively gained eminence as *Prasthāna-traya-bhāṣya*.

## II

A little acquaintance about the status, relative importance and authoritativeness of these three paths may be of immense help in understanding the problem we propose to study hereunder and in appreciating the solution we intend to suggest in the sequel. All the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, in spite of their mutual disagreement on many issues, do agree in believing broadly that Śruti commands an almost independent final authority on matters concerned with Dharma and Brahman. The authority of Smṛti depends on that of Śruti. In other words, Smṛti enjoys authority as far as it does not violate or contradict what is taught in Śruti.

The aims of the *Vedānta-* and *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras* are identical: they intend to work out a synthesis (*ekavākyatā*) and harmony (*samanvaya*) among various passages of Śruti and Smṛti texts, of which the ultimate purport (*tātparya*) appears ambiguous and unclear (*sandigdha*) and which the unintelligent and the uninitiated are likely to mistake to speak incoherently (*asambaddham*)

and in conflicting voice (*vipratīṣiddha*). The *Sūtras* of Jaimini undertake this important job with regard to the utterances found in the *karmakāṇḍa*, i.e. the ritualistic part of the Veda where injunctions and prohibitions (*vidhi-niṣedhau*) loom large. On the other hand, the *Vedānta-sūtras* concentrate on the passages in the *jñānakāṇḍa*, i.e. the philosophical portions of the Veda, viz., the Upaniṣads. This specific purpose of the *Sūtra-prasthāna* is clearly recognized by Śabarāsvāmin,<sup>2</sup> the author of the *Mīmāṃsā-bhāṣya* and by Śaṅkarācārya,<sup>3</sup> the author of the *Vedānta-sūtra-bhāṣya*. Thus the authority and purpose of the *Sūtras* consist only (nothing more) in bringing out logically the ultimate purport of the scripture, by following the established and tested exegetical norms. As a result, it is the bounden duty of the Bhāṣyakāras of the *Sūtras* and the Smṛtis to show that the texts they comment are totally loyal to the spirit and purport of the scripture (*śruti-tātparya*).

### III

Having thus studied the relative philosophical and authoritative status of the *Prasthāna-trayī* of the Vedānta- and Mīmāṃsā-darśanas, let us concentrate our attention on the *Prasthāna-trayī* of the Vedānta-darśana since that is our present concern; and that of the Mīmāṃsā-darśana is cited only by way of illustration. We do not know the exact periods of time when these three sources originated. However, it is possible to arrive at a sort of relative chronology of these three. All scholars are unanimous in that the Upaniṣads (the principal ones) are the earliest of the three. However, regarding the relative chronology of the other two, viz. the *Gītā* and the *Vedānta-sūtras*, there prevails a sharp difference of opinion. The tradition of the Advaita school would assign the *Gītā* to an age prior to that of the *Sūtras*. But the modern researchers are inclined to reverse this chronological order.

The contention of the researchers is as follows. The thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā* teaches the *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga-yoga*,



'the doctrine of differentiating the field and the field-knower.<sup>4</sup> In the preamble to this doctrine, the *Gītā* praises the same as the one which already enjoys the favour and approval of the authority which the *Gītā* itself calls *brahma-sūtra-padas*. The concerned passage runs as ब्रह्मसूत्रपदैश्चैव हेतुमद्भिः सुनिश्चितम्<sup>5</sup> —*Gītā*. XIII.4 '(This doctrine) has already been well decided by *brahma-sūtra-padas* full of reasoning.'

All students of Sanskrit, especially those of the Vedānta-darśana, are fully aware that the word *brahma-sūtra* is the name of the *Vedānta-sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa, the third path of the *Prasthāna-trayī*, a venerated authority, noted for its teaching entirely based on reasoning. On the basis of this clear evidence furnished by the *Gītā* itself, the modern scholars, the early batch of them, assigned the *Vedānta-sūtras* to an age that preceded the date of the *Gītā*. The early stratum of the *Mahābhārata* may have to be assigned to circa 4th – 3rd century B.C.<sup>6</sup> The *Gītā* is the central and essential part of the epic. Hence it could be of the period of 4th – 3rd century B.C. itself. "Whatever the date of the *Bhagavad-gītā* is, it is a part of the *Mahābhārata*, and the age of the *Vedānta-sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa must have been earlier."<sup>7</sup>

#### IV

However, the next batch the researchers realized a serious difficulty, the above thesis suffers from. The *Vedānta-sūtras* contains as many as eighteen references to Smṛtis; and all the great commentators of the *Sūtras*, irrespective of their different philosophical affiliations, identify many of those references with various passages found in the *Gītā* and in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. On the top of all, in an instance,<sup>8</sup> the reference is taken to be of a passage in the very thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā*,<sup>9</sup> teaching the *kṣetra-kṣetrajñā-vibhāga-yoga*, the preamble of which refers to the authority of the *Brahma-sūtras* now under inquiry. All this would be anomalous, if the above thesis is right in assigning the

*Brahma-sūtras* to the pre-*Mahābhārata* age. How could an earlier work (*Brahma-sūtra*) refer to a later treatise (*Mahābhārata*)? In fact, the contradiction becomes more conspicuous in the cases of the *Gītā-bhāṣyas* of Rāmānuja and Madhva. For, these authors identify the *Brahma-sūtra* of the *Gītā* XIII, 4 with the *Śārīraka Brahma-sūtra* and yet think it fit to identify the Smṛti references in the *Śārīraka-sūtra* with the passages of the *Gītā* and the *Mahābhārata*.

The moderners however seek to solve this problem of anomaly in an ingenious way. In the *Śārīraka Vedānta-sūtras*, Bādarāyaṇa is found citing various Vedānta theories advocated by certain Vedāntin-authors. They are Kārṣṇājini (III.1.9), Kāśakṛtsna (I.4.22), Āśmarathya (I.2.29; I.4.20), Auḍulomi (I.4.21; III.4.45; IV.4.6), Bādari (I.2.30; III.1.11; IV.3.7; IV.3.10) and Jaimini (I.2.28; I.2.31; I.3.31; I.4.18; IV.3.12; IV.4.5; IV.4.11). Obviously these persons were themselves Sūtrakāras in Vedānta philosophy. Besides, the *Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali refers, in more than one context, to an unspecified Brahmin woman learning the Kāśakṛtsnī Mīmāṃsā, i.e. a Mīmāṃsā expounded by an author called Kāśakṛtsna; hence that woman was described as *kāśakṛtsnā*.<sup>10</sup> This Mīmāṃsā must have consisted of both the *Karma-* and *Brahma-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*. Hence, it is probable that the *Brahma-sūtras* of any or many of these authors of the pre-Bādarāyaṇa era might have preceded the *Bhagavad-gītā*, that refers to them.<sup>11</sup> So also the *Bādarāyaṇa-sūtras* could legitimately cite the *Gītā* as an authoritative Smṛti, since the latter was earlier to the former. It has also been suggested that the verse, citing the *Brahma-sūtras* could have been a later insertion in the *Gītā* text.<sup>12</sup>

Modern scholars face one more difficulty. Śrī Śaṅkara's *Bhāṣya*, the earliest of the extant commentaries on the *Gītā* does not take the expression *brahma-sūtra-pada* in the sense of 'the words of the *Vedānta-Brahma-sūtras*', as we would do now. But having recourse to an abstruse etymology, the *Bhāṣya* explains that compound word in such a way as to get, or squeeze, out of it

the meaning 'those sentences which are indicative of Brahman, and by means of which Brahman is realized (by the *sādhaka*)'. Those sentences that are intended here, the *Bhāṣya* identifies with such Upaniṣadic utterances like *ātmety evopāsīta* (*Br.u.I.4.7*),<sup>13</sup> and so on.;

ब्रह्मसूत्रपदैशैव - ब्रह्मणः सूचकानि वानि ब्रह्मसूत्राणि; तैः पद्यते गम्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्म इति तानि पदानि इत्युच्यन्ते - आत्मेत्येवोपासीत इत्यादिभिः ब्रह्मसूत्रपदैः आत्मा ज्ञायते ।

All the subsequent *Gītā* commentators of the Advaita school follow the path shown by the *Bhāṣyakāra*.

However, the modern researches, with no compunction whatsoever, set aside the above explanation by the *Ācārya*. They consider it as far fetched and text-twisting.<sup>14</sup> They also point out that Śaṅkara's explanation has not been accepted by other famous *Bhāṣyakāras* (see above). It is also alleged that Śaṅkara has taken recourse to the above far-fetched etymological explanation, because he was conscious of the contradiction in the *Gītā* by referring to the *Vedānta-sūtra* i.e. *Brahma-sūtra*, since the later in its turn refers to the *Gītā* as *Smṛti*.<sup>15</sup> By means of the above innovative explanations of the available evidences, the modern scholars seem satisfied that they have solved the problem of the *Gītā* and the *Brahma-sūtra* citing each other as authorities.

## V

The modern scholars however do not appear to have done well in their explanation of the expression *brahma-sūtra-pada* of the *Gītā* and in their assessment of Śaṅkara's elucidation of the same. Their suggested solution is also untenable and unconvincing. For, they have missed certain fundamental issues, both historical and philosophical, that seem to have been responsible for the *Ācārya*'s gloss over the term.

1) True, here and there the Ācārya may go for some far-fetched and round-about explanations of the texts. But we should remember that he does so only with regard to those passages of which the obvious and direct meaning is found contradicting the main theme dealt with in the given contexts. He would also do so if the direct sense of an expression of a given passage goes counter to his avowed position of the Advaita doctrine which he strongly believes to be the central spirit of the entire Upaniṣadic lore. But in the present case of the *Gītā* verse there could arise none of these contingencies even if the term *brahma-sūtra-pada* is taken in the sense which the modern researchers deem to be the direct meaning. Therefore, it behoves us to find out the probable reason: as to why the Ācārya explains the term in the way he has chosen.

2) If there had been, in a very ancient times some *Vedānta-sūtras* of Kārṣṇājini etc., and they were known by convention (*rūḍhi*) as *Brahma-sūtra*, the Ācārya would not have totally ignored the same in the context of the *Gītā-bhāṣya*, and interpreted the *brahma-sūtra* in a way which we think unusual. On the other hand, he would have probably interpreted the term in some different way, like कार्ष्णाजिनि - काशकृत्स्नादिभिः प्रचीनैराचार्यैः सूत्रितानां ब्रह्मसूचकानां ब्रह्मसूत्राणां पदैः. And it may not be proper to argue that the Ācārya was unaware of the *Brahma-sūtras* of the authors of the pre-Bādarāyaṇa age and hence is his present explanation. In fact, as we know well the Ācārya has actually commented upon the entire text of the *Vedānta-sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa including the aphorisms that cite the theses of Kārṣṇājini and other philosophers. Hence, if there had existed earlier *Vedānta-Brahma-sūtras*, the Ācārya must have been also aware of that fact; and he would not have ignored their ancient traditions. Indeed, the Ācārya maintained high respect for the tradition of the Vedānta teachers of yore.<sup>16</sup> Further, under the *Gītā* XIII, 2, i.e. just two verses prior to the one under our investigation the Ācārya has chided those persons who had mastered all Śāstras but were ignorant of the tradition of the system.<sup>17</sup>

3) Moreover, if in ancient times, the expression *brahma-sūtra* carried the conventional sense (*rūḍhyartha*) 'Śārīraka-sūtra', the Ācārya would not have ignored the same altogether. Rather, he would have drawn our attention to that meaning and to its unsuitability in the present context; and proceeded to interpret the term in the etymological sense (*yaugikārtha*) in a roundabout way to mean an Upaniṣadic passage. For, as a straightforward and established philosopher-commentator, he must have been quite aware of the most fundamental exegetical principle, honoured by all philosophers and commentators, that runs as 'the conventional sense of an expression supersedes its etymological sense (*rūḍhir yogam apaharati*)'. This point gains strength from the fact that the Ācārya himself is the author of the reputed *Bhāṣya* (his *magnum opus*) on the *Śārīraka Brahma-sūtra*.<sup>18</sup>

4) In the *Śārīraka (Vedānta) Sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa, there is no section (*adhikaraṇa*) specifically teaching the doctrine of the *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga*. It is certainly logical to believe that the general topics of Bādarāyaṇa's *Sūtra* was almost the same as that of the still earlier *Sūtra* treatises. It does not appear to be correct to assume that Bādarāyaṇa omitted this prominent topic, had the same been dealt with authoritatively in the supposed earlier *Vedānta-sūtras*. Hence, it is almost certain that the allegedly earlier treatises too did not contain a topic dealing conspicuously with that doctrine. Now, as a result it would be inappropriate to suggest that while teaching the doctrine of *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga*, the *Gītā* cites, as an authority on the subject, the *Śārīraka-Brahma-sūtra* that does not teach the doctrine specifically.

5) We saw above that Śrī Śaṅkara identifies the *brahma-sūtra-pada* of the *Gītā* with the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* passage आत्मेत्येवोपासीत etc. (*Bṛ.U.I.4.7*). it will be of immense value to know that even in his *Bṛhadāraṇyakabhāṣya*, while commenting on that passage the Ācārya describes the same as a *Sūtra* teaching *Brahmavidyā* 'Brahman-knowledge', and affirms that the entire *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is an appropriate commentary on this *Sūtra*-सूत्रिता

ब्रह्मविद्या 'आत्मेत्येवोपासीत' इति; यदर्थं उपनिषत् कृत्स्नाऽपि । तस्य एतस्य सूत्रस्य व्याचिख्यासुः. . . (*Br. Bhāṣya* I.4.9. introd.)

Not only this. More than once in that *Bhāṣya* he emphasizes the utmost value of this Sūtra.

'आत्मेत्येवोपासीत' तदन्वेषणे च सर्वमिदमन्विष्टं स्यात् (*ibid.* II.1.1. introd.) 'आत्मेत्येवोपासीत' तदेव सर्वस्मिन् पदनीयम्<sup>19</sup> आत्मतत्त्वम् (*ibid.* II.4.1. introd.)

Above all, from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Bhāṣya Vārttika* of Sureśvara we come to know an interesting fact: Bhartṛprapañca, a noted philosopher of pre-Śaṅkara age had written an exhaustive *Vṛtti* (commentary) on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*; and that *Vṛtti* was widely read by scholars before the rise of the more brilliant *Bhāṣya* of Śrī Śaṅkara. The *Vārttika* tells us further that Bhartṛprapañca traced as many as five *Brahma (vidyā) sūtras* contained in the seventh-eighth *kaṇḍikās* of the fourth *brāhmaṇa* in the first chapter of the Upaniṣad. They are:

(1) तद्धेदं तर्हि अब्याकृतमासीत्; (2) स एष इह प्रविष्ट आनखाग्रेभ्यः; (3) आत्मेत्येवोपासीत्; (4) तदेतत् पदनीयम्<sup>20</sup> अस्य सर्वस्यात्मा; (5) and तदेतत् प्रेयः पुत्रात् प्रेयः etc. [Of these five the first four are parts of the seventh *kaṇḍikā* and the fifth one constitutes the whole of the eighth *kaṇḍikā*]. Bhartṛprapañca is also said to have affirmed that the entire *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* makes an exhaustive commentary on these five *Sūtras*.<sup>21</sup>

All this makes it clear that the Ācārya did not invent or plant a *brahma-sūtra* in the Upaniṣad simply for the purpose of explaining the *Gītā* verse in question; and that much prior to the Ācārya's time there had been a sufficiently long tradition of identifying certain vital Upaniṣadic sentences, including *ātmetyevopāsīta* as *brahma-sūtras*. Besides the Ācārya seems to describe the *Taittirīya* passage ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम् (II.1.1) also as *brahma-vidyā-sūtra* of which the entire *Brahmānandavallī* is a commentary. It is to be borne in mind that the entire contexts of both these

*Brahma-sūtras* intend to teach logically and in detail, the *kṣetra-kṣetraijña-vibhāga* in their own way.

Thus the Ācārya's elucidation of the term *brahma-sūtra-pada* in the *Gītā* verse is not a text-twisting jugglery. On the other hand it follows a long venerated tradition and it enhances the beauty and sublimity of the *Gītā* verse in question.

6) We saw above that the *Gītā* is a Smṛti, commanding an authority that stands just below the same of the Śruti (the Upaniṣad) but much above the authority of the Sūtra. So, if the author of a Smṛti were inclined to add some corroboration to what he teaches in a given context, he would cite only a superior authority viz. a Śruti, or an authority on par with itself, i.e. another Smṛti, but would never cite an inferior authority, such as a popular saying or some maxim of logic and so on. It may be noted that in its *Mokṣadharmā* section, the *Mahābhārata* contains Vedāntic ideas in abundance. But nowhere does it refer to any authority by names *brahma-sūtra* or *vedānta-sūtra*. The reason is that, as pointed out earlier, the *Mahābhārata*, an authoritative Smṛti is not expected to cite the *Vedānta-sūtra* as its corroborating authority. So it would be totally inappropriate if the *Gītā*, a superior authority, is depicted as drawing support from the *Vedānta-sūtra* which itself needs to depend on the authority of the Smṛti and Śruti. That is why in his *Bhāṣyas* on the Upaniṣads and on the *Gītā*, Śrī Śaṅkara is not found citing any of the *Vedānta-sūtras* as supporting authority. On the other hand, in his *Sūtra-bhāṣya* he has to cite the authority of the Śruti and Smṛti for each and every step he takes. In this context it is to be noted that even Bādarāyaṇa never claims for his treatise a status of Smṛti, even though, following the then prevalent tradition he refers to the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga Darśanas as Smṛtis.<sup>22</sup>

The modern scholarship is totally oblivious of these vital points, yet finds fault with the Acārya's appropriate elucidation. This is strange indeed!

## VI

We saw above that the Ācārya's explanation of *brahma-sūtra-pada* of the *Gītā* is to be correctly evaluated in the light of an ancient tradition. Now we shall see that probably in the age of Śrī Śaṅkara there had been no tradition or practice of describing the *Vedānta-sūtra* as *brahma-sūtra*. A rapid survey of the likely portions of some major Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā works of the well-known authors,<sup>23</sup> upto *circa* A.D. 1,000, reveals that many of these writers were referring to the *Vedānta-sūtra* only by the titles *Śārīraka*, *Śārīraka-sūtra*, *Vedānta-Mīmāṃsā* or *Śārīraka-Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*' and they were not calling the work as *brahma-sūtra*, as we do now. Even a Coḷa epigraph of *circa* A.D. 1000 (from Tiruchirapalli district) refers to the Ācārya's *Bhāṣya* on the *Vedānta-sūtra* only as *Śārīraka-bhāṣya* of the Bhagavatpāda.<sup>24</sup>

One more point. The *Sarvatobhadra* commentary on the *Gītā* by the Kashmīrian philosopher Rājānaka Rāmakaṇṭha (9th century) is also found clearly noting that the expression *brahma-sūtra* is used in the *Gītā* verse to denote the secret portion of the Vedic teaching viz. the Vedāntas=Upaniṣads.<sup>25</sup> It is clear that he follows in this context Śaṅkara's path totally. We do not actually know how Bhāskara, the earliest known direct arch critic of Śaṅkara had interpreted the term; since the chapters ten onwards of his *Gītā* commentary are not extant. However it is possible to surmise: Rāmakaṇṭha is known to follow Bhāskara in general and like him advocates the doctrine of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*. Hence one could legitimately infer that though a bitter rival of the Ācārya, Bhāskara must have thought it wise to go by Śaṅkara's path in this context.

So the corollary is: when the *Gītā* cites the authority of certain *Brahma-sūtra* the reference there is necessarily to something other than the *Vedānta-sūtra*.



## VII

No doubt Rāmānuja (11th century), Madhva (14th century) etc. explained the term *brahma-sūtra* of the *Gītā* as *Śārīraka* and *Śārīraka-sūtra*. (see above). But this fact itself betrays that even during the periods of these authors *śārīraka* was much familiar title of the *Vedānta-sūtra* than the title *Brahma-sūtra*. Indeed it is a wellknown practice of the commentators to explain words of unknown import with the help of words of familiar meanings. Even the later commentators on the Ācārya's *Śārīraka-bhāṣya* such as Ānandagiri (c. 1,300), the author of the *Nyāya-nirṇaya* commentary, and Govindānanda (c. 1,600) author of the *Bhāṣya-ratna-prabhā* commentary referred to the *Vedānta-sūtra* and the *Śāṅkara-bhāṣya* thereon only by the titles *Śārīraka* and *Śārīrakam Bhāṣyam* respectively. The invocatory verses and colophones of their commentaries vouch for this fact. So, with no hesitation one could assert that the popularity of title *Brahma-sūtra* for the *Vedānta-sūtra* = *Śārīraka-sūtra* is of comparatively recent origin.

How? As late as 1863, the Asiatic Society of Bengal brought out an edition of the *Sūtra-bhāṣya* of Śāṅkara with *Ratna-prabhā* commentary; and the title page of this edition announces *The Aphorisms of Vedānta by Bādarāyaṇa*.<sup>26</sup> In 1904, George Thibaut had titled his translation of the *Sūtra* and the *Śāṅkara-bhāṣya* only as the *Vedānta-sūtra* (not *Brahma-sūtra*) with the commentary of Śāṅkarācārya.<sup>27</sup> However, since the time of the Anandasrama edition (1890) and the Nirnayasaragar edition (1909 and 1917), all editions of the *Śāṅkarabhāṣya* on the *Sūtra* preferred to have title pages referring to the *Sūtra* as *Brahma-sūtra* and the *Bhāṣya* as *Brahma-sūtra Śāṅkara-bhāṣya*. Yet, these editions too continued to retain the ancient colophones of the *Bhāṣya* referring to the work invariably as *Śārīraka-bhāṣya*, or *Śārīraka-mīmāṃsā-bhāṣya*. Thus one could observe the persistence of the age-old

tradition of titling the *Vedānta-sūtra* as *Śārīraka*, *Śārīraka-sūtra* or *Śārīraka-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*.

In the light of the above discussion, one could rightly conclude by using the word *brahma-sūtra*, the author of the *Gītā* could not have meant the *Śārīraka=Vedānta-sūtra*. In fact, even if that author had intended the alleged *Vedānta-sūtras* of Kārṣṇājini etc. of earlier ages he would have composed the third *pāda* of the verse (under study) as *śārīrakapadais'caiva*, (and not *brahma-sūtra-padais'caiva*). In fact even if one were to accept that Auḍulomi, Kārṣṇājini etc. preceded the *Mahābhārata*, it is quite unlikely that their *Vedānta-sūtras* would have been cited as supporting authorities by the *Gītā*, which is actually a *Smṛti* and needs no support of the *Sūtra-prasthāna* (see above).

### VIII

Now it remains to answer a pertinent question: 'How did the term *brahma-sūtra* attain the status of being the popular and conventional title of the *Vedānta-sūtras*, relegating the original title *Śārīraka* to a secondary position?' A direct answer is hard to get. Yet a tentative one could be surmised.

As glossed by Śaṅkara, the *Gītā* itself employs the expression *brahma-sūtra* to signify etymologically some Upaniṣadic passages merely on the ground that they explain about Brahman in a logical and suggestive manner. On the same analogy can we not designate the *Vedānta-sūtras* also as *Brahma-sūtras*, since they too do the same job, extremely well? After all, even the term *śārīraka-sūtra* has been applied to the *Vedānta-sūtras* only on the basis of etymology-cum-convention (*yoga-rūḍhi*),<sup>28</sup> since they teach suggestively about the real nature of the individual Self dwelling in the corporeal body.

Secondly, the *Bhagavad-gītā* (XVIII, 49) uses the expression *naiṣkarmya-siddhi* to signify 'the correct conviction about actionlessness'. And Sureśvarācārya had taken that term as an apt title

for his brilliant Advaita manual. Perhaps thinking on similar line, the noted savants like Bhāskarācārya and Vācaspati Miśra described the *Vedānta-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa as *brahma-sūtra*. This they did only once in the invocatory verses of their respective treatises, viz. the *Śārīraka-bhāṣya* and the *Bhāmatī*, while the original name *śārīraka* was retained in their colophones. Maybe Madhva (14<sup>th</sup> century) used the term *brahma-sūtra* as the regular conventional title (*rūdhī*) of the *Vedānta-sūtra*. Maybe he thought: the *Gītā*-Master Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa himself preferred to describe the *Vedānta-sūtra* with the term *brahma-sūtra* which therefore must be the real, correct title of that treatise.

Yet in the circle of the Advaitins it was not so, as evidenced by the colophons of the *Bhāmatī*, *Nyāya-nirṇaya*, *Bhāṣya-ratnaprabhā* etc. As noted above, in the recent past the term *brahma-sūtra* has become the most popular title of the *Vedānta-sūtra* and it superseded the original title *śārīraka*. This turn of events contributed much to the confusion regarding the relative chronology of the *Gītā* and the *Vedānta-sūtra*. Hence by studying in depth the Ācārya Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya* XIII.4, and by analyzing the background and implications thereof we tried to fix the chronology: whatever be the age of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, it certainly preceded the *Śārīraka-brahma-sūtra*.

## NOTES

1. Besides the *Gītā*, the philosophical portions of the *Smṛtis*, like the *Manu-smṛti*, the *Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra* etc., the *Mokṣadharmā* section etc. of the *Mahābhārata* and the like may be accommodated in this *Smṛti-prasthāna*.
2. cf. *Veda-vākyānām anekavidhaḥ vicāraḥ iha pravarttiṣyate*—the *Śābarabhāṣya* I.1.1.
3. cf. *Vedānta-vākya-kusuma-grathanārthatvāt sūtrāṇām: Vedānta-vākyaṇi hi sūtrair udāhrtya vicāryante* - the *Sūtrabhāṣya* I.1.2.

4. This doctrine is also known as *Prakṛti-puruṣa-viveka-yoga* 'the doctrine of distinction between the material cause and the person (Self).'
5. This is the second hemistich. The first one reads *ṛṣibhir bahudhā gītāṃ chandobhir vividhaiḥ pṛthak* 'In various ways it has been expounded vividly by sages by various hymns.'
6. 'Between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. the transformation of the epic *Mahābhārata* into our present collected work has taken place, probably gradually'—M. Winternitz: *History of Indian Literature* (English tr.: V.S. Sharma) Vol. I (Rept. 1981), pp. 454.
7. Max Müller: *The Six Systems of the Indian Philosophy* (Rept. 1982), p. 106. See also S. K. Belwalkar: *Vedānta Philosophy* (Shree Gopal Basu Mallik Lectures of 1925), Poona 1929, pp. 140 ff.
8. i.e. in the case of the aphorism: *darśayati cātho api ca smaryate - III.2.17.*
9. The *Gītā* verse in question is: *jñeyam yat tat pravakṣyāmi. . . (XIII.12).*
10. cf. *Kāśakṛtsninā proktā mīmāṃsā kāśakṛtsnī; tāṃ adhīte kāśakṛtsnā brāhmaṇī*—Kielhorn's edition of the *Mahābhāṣya*: Vol.II. pp. 206, 249, 325.
11. R.D. Karmarkar seems to be the originator of this theory. See his paper 'The Relation of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Bādarāyaṇa-sūtras*' in the *Annals of the Bhandarkar Ori. Research*, Vol. III (1921–22) pp. 73–79. See also Belwalkar, *op. cit.*; P. V. Kane: *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. V, pt. II (2nd ed. 1977) pp. 1172–73.
12. P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*
13. '(That is why) one should adore Him as Ātman (since in this Ātman all become one)'
14. P.V. Kane, *op. cit., Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. cf. *Yair ime gurubhiḥ pūrvaṃ pada-vākya-pramāṇataḥ/ vyākhyātāḥ sarva-vedāntās tān nityaṃ praṇatosmy aham//* (the *Taittirīya-bhāṣya*, invocatory verse 2.)

17. cf. *Asampradāya-vit sarvaśāstravid api mūrkhavad upekṣaṇīyah-*  
See the *Gītābhāṣya*, XIII.2.
18. See also H. Nakamura: *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*  
(Eng. Tr.: Delhi, 1983), p. 437; A.K. Majumdar: *Concise History*  
*of Ancient India*, Vol. III (Delhi, 1983), p. 808.
19. cf. *padanīyam* of this passage with *padaiḥ* of the *Gītā* XIII.4 and  
*padyate* of the *Bhāṣya* thereon.
20. Ibid.
21. See the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-bhāṣya-vārtika* of Sureśvara, I.4. verses  
1064–67. In this context itself Sureśvara also traces in his own way  
some five Sūtras including *ātmety evopāsīta* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*  
text.
22. See the *Sārīraka-sūtra*, I.2.11; II.2.1–3; etc.
23. Such as Śabarāsvāmin, Śaṅkarācārya, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa,  
Padmapāda, Sureśvara, Sarvajñātman etc., See also the surviving  
quotations from the *Vṛttis* of Upavarṣa and Bhartṛprapañca.
24. See *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, Vol. 62 (1998), pp. 109–23.
25. ब्रह्मसूत्रशब्देन रहस्यभागो वेदस्य वेदान्तसंज्ञ उच्यते See  
S. Sankaranarayanan (ed. and trans): *Bhagavad-gītā with the*  
*Gītārthasaṅgraha of Abhinavagupta* (Śrī Venkatesvara Univ.  
Tirupati, 1985), pt I, p.xiv and pt. II. p. 253.
26. *The Bibliotheca Indica Series*, nos. 61, 89, 172, 174, 178 and 181.  
However the Sanskrit Title page of the edition bears the title  
ब्रह्मसूत्रं नाम वेदान्तदर्शनम्।
27. *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 34, pts. I and II (Rpt. Delhi,  
1992). So also Thibaut did his translation of the *Bhāṣya* of Rāmānuja  
under the title *The Vedānta-sūtras with Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya:*  
*SBE Series Vol. 48.*
28. The intended etymology as given by commentators in this regard  
is: शरीरमेव शरीरकम्; तत्र निवासी शरीरकः जीवः; तस्य ब्रह्मभावसूचनात्  
वेदान्तसूत्राणि शरीरकसूत्राणि ।

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**BHAKTI—AN ANALYSIS**

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M. Venkatalakshmi\*

*Origin and Development of Bhakti*

Bhakti in its rudimentary form is as old as man's reflective consciousness itself. The Vedic seers are the earliest devotees in Hindu religion representing man's reflective consciousness blended with awe, inspiration and aspiration. They were wonder-struck at nature's multi-dimensional aspects of beauty, splendour, love, sacrifice and patience. The five elements, sun, moon, flora and fauna and other aspects captivated the human heart, and the seers visualized a sentient being behind the different facets of nature, which they personified representing the divine principle. Man started worshipping nature and other gods out of gratitude, love, reverence and sometimes out of fear. Most of the hymns of the *Rg-veda* are addressed to different gods in praise or thanks giving. There are also hymns in propitiating different gods in order to bless them with nature's bounty and freeing them from misery, and we do come across the hymns in the *Rg-veda* pleading with the highest God to liberate them from mundane existence.

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Different kinds of bhakti, which are spoken of in later bhakti literature, can be traced in its seed form to the Vedas, and this is well observed by R. Balasubramanian, "Most of the nine forms of bhakti (*navavidha-bhakti*) recognized in the later devotional literature are to be found in the *Ṛk-saṁhita*."¹ It will not be wrong to state that *vātsalya-bhakti*, *dāsyā-bhakti*, *sakhyā-bhakti*, etc. in their preliminary form can be noticed in the Vedas. Even four kinds of bhaktas which Lord Kṛṣṇa speaks of in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, viz. *ārtta*, *arthārthī*, *jijñāsu* and *jñānī*, i.e. distressed, seeker of wealth, knowledge-seeker and knower or seeker of liberation respectively, can be traced to the earlier sources.

Tracing bhakti to the Vedas, S. Radhakrishnan says: "The theism of the Vaiṣṇavas and the Bhāgavatas, with its emphasis on bhakti, is to be traced to the Vedic worship."² Let us take note of a few Vedic hymns to show that bhakti in its unsophisticated state can be traced to the Vedas. "O Indra, lead us on the path of *Ṛta*, on the right path over all evils."³ Many hymns in unison praise Indra, e.g. "As wives embrace their husbands, so do my thoughts embrace Indra, the divine bestower of gifts."⁴ The Gāyatrī hymn is addressed to Sūrya in the form of Savitrī: "Let us meditate on that adorable splendour of Savitrī; may we enlighten our minds."⁵ An oft-quoted hymn from the *Yajur-veda* reads: "O God Savitrī, the creator of all, remove obstructions and grant the blessings."⁶ The Vedic seers address Agni thus: "I hold Agni to be my father, I hold him to be my kinsman, my brother and also my friend."⁷ A prayer to Soma reads like this: "King Soma, be gracious to us for welfare; we are thy devotees: know that. There arise might and wrath of Indra, abandon us not according to the desire of our foe."⁸ A prayer to Lord Viṣṇu is as follows: "You praise that ancient cause, the origin of *ṛta* according to your knowledge, you will be freed from birth. If you cannot praise him, recite his name. However, we, O Lord Viṣṇu! devote ourselves to your light and attributeless form."⁹

In the *Rudra Praśna*, we find elaborate prayers offered to Rudra: "Prostrations to the Omnipresent one, who protects saintly devotees (those who seek refuge) by rushing to their help."<sup>10</sup> "We surrender our intellect to Rudra, the one with the matted hair, the destroyer of enemies."<sup>11</sup> "O Destroyer, render us happy with material possessions and spiritual liberation. We render obeisance to you, the destroyer of sin. Let us attain through your loving grace all that was attained by our forefathers."<sup>12</sup>

S. Radhakrishnan rightly observes:

Man had direct communion with gods without any mediation. Gods were looked upon as friends of their worshippers. "Father Heaven," "Mother Earth", "Brother Agni"—these are not idle phrases. There was a very intimate personal relationship between men and gods. Religion seems to have dominated the whole life. The dependence on God was complete. People prayed for even the ordinary necessities of life. If bhakti means faith in a personal God, love for him, dedication of everything to his service and attainment of mokṣa or freedom by personal devotion, surely we have all these elements in Varuṇa worship.<sup>13</sup>

Here, mention may be made of what K. Krishnamurthy comments: "Though we find the spirit of devotion in the Vedic hymns, the cult of bhakti as an intimate heart-bond love relation between the bhakta and Bhagavān is not found in the Vedas."<sup>14</sup>

When we move from the Vedas to the Upaniṣads, we notice that bhakti gains a higher development, and the concept of grace as well as "prapatti" emerges. To quote a text from one of the Upaniṣads:

This soul (Ātman) is not to be obtained by exposition, nor by intellect, nor by much learning. He is to be obtained only by the one whom he chooses. To such a one only doth he reveal his own person.<sup>15</sup>

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* actually uses the word bhakti and also mentions the concept of prapatti: (i) He who has supreme devotion towards God and as towards God so towards teacher, to Him verily, the great soul, all these things declared will reveal



themselves.<sup>16</sup> (ii) To Him who at the beginning created Brahmā, and who gave the Vedas to him, to Him—the God—who reveals the knowledge of himself, desirous of liberation, do I fly for refuge.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of bhakti (and prapatti) which in its preliminary stage developed in the śruti became more practical for the masses through the epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, since it was depicted through different personalities. Both the epics had a great impact on the religious life of the people. However, bhakti as a doctrine first developed in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Though the *Gītā* discusses in detail the three paths, viz. karma, jñāna and bhakti, for man's emancipation, it is generally concluded that the *Gītā* ultimately attaches more importance to bhakti than the others.

Later on, we come across the *Bhāgavata* as a very important bhakti treatise. In the *Bhāgavata*, we notice that bhakti, in its multicolours, captivated all, from the great sages to the ordinary people. The *Bhāgavata* has been a source of inspiration right from the time of Sage Śuka till the present time. It will not be a matter of overestimation if we say that all the theistic systems of Vedānta lay sufficient emphasis on the *Bhāgavata*, which, in its earliest form, seems to have influenced the Āḷvārs who were the pioneers of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. The deep emotional longing of the Āḷvārs towards Lord Viṣṇu and his incarnations such as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the Āḷvārs' intimate relation with him either as a child, or master, or friend, or beloved, and their glorifying his beauty and childhood pranks, etc.—these show that the Āḷvārs have been influenced very much by the *Bhāgavata*.

When we come to classical Vedānta, we do not find deep emotionalism in bhakti. Bhakti was understood in a more philosophic and technical way. But after a short gap, the *Bhāgavata*, once again, became a source of inspiration to the founders of many bhakti schools, viz. Nimbārka, Vallabha and Caitanya. Bhakti towards Lord Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇa-prema*) became the central theme

even for fine arts like drama, music and painting; and this helped in spreading the development of bhakti among the common people. The *Bhāgavata* became a source of inspiration even in the field of kāvya literature.

### *Definition of Bhakti*

The word "bhakti" is derived from the root "bhaj" having different meanings such as to "serve", to "honour", "to love", "to adore". In general, it means devotion to God and the way of love conducive to it. Sages Nārada and Śāṅḍilya, the most authoritative sūtrakāras on bhakti, have explained it in a very lucid way. According to the *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra*, bhakti means supreme love of God which is nectarine in its very nature, gaining which man realizes his perfection and divinity and becomes thoroughly contented, freeing himself from all desires, grief and hatred. This love of God is not born out of lust, since it is a form of renunciation expressing his sense of indifference towards all objects except God. He dedicates all his activities to God by total surrender, and he feels a deep sense of anguish when he does not remember God even for a few moments. The most dominant experience in bhakti is a total intoxication, fascination and enjoyment of unalloyed bliss of Ātman—"yad-jñātvā matto bhavati, stabdho bhavati, ātmārāmo bhavati."<sup>18</sup> According to Nārada, on the whole the intense love of God is beyond definition and description—"anirvacanīyam prema-svarūpam."<sup>19</sup> It is an experience akin to a dumb man's. Śāṅḍilya defines "bhakti" as the highest form of attachment to God "*paramānuraktiḥ īśvare*".<sup>20</sup> This kind of attachment arises on understanding God's greatness and attributes, particularly his lovability. By attachment to God the devotee experiences his identity with God. The *Bhāgavata* which is a treatise on bhakti defines it as follows:

When the powers of the organs of knowledge as well as those of actions, manifest as a unified mental mode directed towards the supreme Being, spontaneous like an instinct and devoid of any extraneous incentive, that (state of mind) is called bhakti to the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

It is superior even to liberation. It quickly burns up the soul's sheath of ignorance like fire that consumes all objects.

According to the *Bhāgavata*, devotion is a kind of total absorption or concentration, and this absorption can be not only out of love or attachment, but also due to hatred or antagonism. What is essential is concentration on God. The *Bhāgavata* highlights the fact that any form of intense remembrance of God can bring a transforming effect on the individual's mind. An example can be cited to validate this view. A worm imprisoned in a cavity and guarded by a beetle lives in constant fear of the latter, and through such a fear its concentration is totally on the beetle and at one point it gets transformed into the form of beetle. Similarly, thinking constantly of God as their enemy, the demoniac souls like Hiraṇyakaśipu, Rāvaṇa, Śiśupāla and others, through confrontation with God, got their sins washed off and at last attained him. Here the devotion becomes full through the attitude of censure; and this is technically termed *vidveṣa-bhakti*. The central idea of this view is that the object of concentration on God, though motivated by antagonism, has given rise to purificatory effect on the soul, like a potent drug necessarily having a curative effect on the consumer irrespective of the attitude of the patient towards the drug.

In defining bhakti as mental absorption through love in contrast to hatred, the *Bhāgavata* speaks of two kinds of feelings of the devotees towards the Lord—(i) "I am his" and (ii) "He is mine". The former is termed *śānta-bhakti* and the latter as *prema-bhakti*. In the former instance, bhakti is dominated by knowledge and consciousness of the divine majesty including both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* aspects of the Lord; hence, the devotee feels his belongingness to the Lord. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī in his *Bhagavad-bhakti-rasāyana* states that *śānta-bhakti* is the purest and perfect form of bhakti. According to him, in personal relationship with God there will be limitation since there is a possibility for the unspiritual element. The *śānta-bhakti*, apprehending infinite

excellences of God, produces immense joy in the heart of the devotee, and this gives rise to pure attachment to the Lord free from passionate affection.

In contrast to *śānta-bhakti*, the *Bhāgavata* speaks of *prema-bhakti* which does not arise due to God's majesty or glories, but on the basis of the feeling of ownership as "God is mine". One who has *prema-bhakti* addresses God as "You are mine". On the basis of ownership, there is love and affection towards God taking shape of any one of the four kinds of human relations. Here the devotee loves God either as a child, as a friend, as a master, or as a beloved. On the basis of these relationships, the *Bhāgavata* speaks of four kinds of bhakti, viz., *vātsalya-bhakti* (loving God as one's own beloved child), *sakhya-bhakti* (loving God as one's intimate friend), *dāsyā-bhakti* (adoring God as one's master) and *madhura-bhakti* (loving God as one's beloved).

The above relations can mostly be developed when God descends in human form having physical accessibility to the devotee. Among all incarnations, Kṛṣṇa is the all-encompassing divine manifestation, with whom all kinds of human relations could be established. The residents of Vraja (Brindavan) looked upon Kṛṣṇa as their child, or friend, or lover. This sense of belongingness overpowered them more than the sense of Kṛṣṇa as the supreme Lord, though they had glimpses of Kṛṣṇa's divinity. The basic difference between worldly relation and divine relation is that in the former the relation is conditioned by some amount of selfishness or expectation, but in the latter case it is totally free from it. It is totally a bond of pure love and affection. Here love becomes sublime, because it is directed towards the divine incarnation of the Lord. Kṛṣṇa responded to the love of the Gopīs in a unique manner, in whichever way they endeared him, and it had purifying effect on them, since their love was directed towards the very embodiment of purity, knowingly or unknowingly. Here the *Bhāgavata* cites the example of a curative drug on the patient taken without the awareness of its curative effect; similarly, in

whichever form concentration on Kṛṣṇa is practised, it has its purifying effect on the person concerned. Thus in the *Bhāgavata*, Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

By feeling alone the Gopīs and even unintelligent creatures like cows, deer, elephant, serpent attained their spiritual consummation in me. They never learnt the Vedas, they never served any teachers, they practised no austerity; but by association with holiness, they attained me.<sup>22</sup>

He further declares:

Hundreds of women attained me, the supreme Brahman, though not knowing my real nature, but loving me as a paramour in whom they took delight.<sup>23</sup>

In the *Bhāgavata* we come across highly erotic episodes relating to Kṛṣṇa and the Gopikās' love which is commonly seen between the paramour and his beloved. There are certain criticisms against this kind of erotic relation. The supporters of the *Bhāgavata* meet the criticisms in the following way.

1. The love relation between the Gopikās and Kṛṣṇa is highly symbolic and is not a historic fact. Gopikās symbolize the jīvātman and Lord Kṛṣṇa, the *paramātman*. Jīva is prakṛti of the Lord, and hence feminine in nature, and Kṛṣṇa is the only *puruṣa*. So intense aspiration of the jīva to commune with the Lord is depicted through erotic love symbolically.

2. This explanation accepts historicity of love affair between Kṛṣṇa and Gopikās, but they defend it by saying that according to the *Bhāgavata*, while Kṛṣṇa was only a boy of ten or eleven years, the Gopikās were much older than he. What transpired between them was only mischievous Kṛṣṇa's innocent boyish pranks, but it was exaggerated by fanciful poetry.

3. According to a third theory, the Gopikās met Kṛṣṇa not in their *sthūla-deha* (gross body), but in their *sūkṣma-deha* (subtle body). They were totally unconscious of their body. They had developed *bhāva-śarīra*, and the whole *rāsa-līlā* is the outcome of Kṛṣṇa's *Yoga-māyā*, a mystic power by which the Gopikās'

gross bodies were at home whereas their spiritual bodies were with Lord Kṛṣṇa, and each Gopikā felt that Kṛṣṇa was with her in *rāsa-kṛīḍā*, and that would not have been possible if Kṛṣṇa was in his gross body in relation with the gross bodies of the Gopikās.

4. The *Bhāgavata* comes forward with its own sublime interpretation. When King Parīkṣit questioned Sage Śuka for ethical justification with regard to Kṛṣṇa's erotic actions which were against social norms, the latter replied by stating that the divine personages go beyond social norms and sometimes their actions are of mysterious nature. Since they are persons of high divine potency, they are not affected by impurity of any actions just as fire consumes everything without being affected by the impurity of any object. But ordinary people should not act accordingly; and if they do, they have to reap the consequences for their actions. If someone swallows poison imitating Lord Śiva's action of drinking poison, then he has to face death. A divine personage always acts selflessly and for the spiritual benefit of others. Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the master of all beings cannot have carnal relation, though apparently it looks like that. The Lord assumes *līlā-śarīra* for the benefit of his creation, and he sports with that body just to attract the souls to him. Just as Kṛṣṇa faced Kāmsa and Śiśupāla through confrontation with his deadly weapons and then raised them to a high spiritual status, even so the Gopikās, who were attracted by his ecstatic beauty and drawn to him by his magic flute, approached him lustfully. Kṛṣṇa responded to them, but through his divine touch totally purified them of their lustful nature, and their passions were raised from *kāma* to *Bhāgavata-prema* of a very high order.

The above pure love-relation, which is of the nature of lover-beloved relationship that existed between Kṛṣṇa and the Gopikās as portrayed in the *Bhāgavata*, had a great influence on the theistic schools of Vedānta, especially on Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. Let me make a case-study of bhakti with regard to two schools, viz. Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) and Bengal Vaiṣṇavism.

*Metaphysical Foundation of Bhakti*

Acceptance of bhakti or jñāna as a means for liberation depends upon the conception of the nature of the ultimate reality in a system. Bhakti is the ultimate means for liberation in all the theistic systems, where the supreme Lord with all his innumerable auspicious qualities is the ultimate reality. Let us take into consideration Śrī Vaiṣṇavism which began as a form of mysticism through twelve Āḷvārs and later on took the shape of a system of philosophical thought as expounded by Rāmānuja. This system of *saviśeṣa-vāda* holds Brahman as the supreme reality which is both transcendent and immanent. It is held to be the indweller of both sentient beings and insentient matter. Ontologically, both *cit* (souls) and *acit* (matter) totally depend on Brahman identified as Lord Viṣṇu or Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. There is an inseparable relationship (*aprthak-siddha-sambandha*) between the jīvas and Īśvara. According to Rāmānuja, while jīva is the *śarīra* (body), *ādheya* (supported) *niyāmya* (controlled), and *śeṣa* (subordinate), God is *śarīrin* (indweller of the body) *niyantā* (controller), *ādhāra* (support) and *śeṣin* (principal). God is the *aṁsin* (whole), and jīva is *aṁśa* (part). Jīvas are organically related to God like the branches of a tree. Jīva has no existence apart from God. Nammāḷvār states in his hymns that jīva is the property of God; and in a most intimate way he tells, "My soul is yours," and "it exists only to serve you." Tirumaliśai Āḷvār says: "I am nothing without thee, Oh Lord, And thou too art not without me."<sup>24</sup>

A loving relation between jīva and Īśvara is established on the basis of God's special characteristics like—*saulabhya* (easy accessibility), *vātsalya* (loving disposition), *kṛpā* (compassion), *sauśīlya* (gracious condescension), *audārya* (generosity) and *bandhutva* (friendly relationship). According to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, jīva is the servant (*dāsa*) of God. It holds that there exists an intimate relation of love and affection between God and man. While the jīva develops loving disposition towards God and prays for protection, God reciprocates with his saving grace, and then

there is union. Explaining the dearness and nearness of the soul (to God), Vaiṣṇava religious texts compare the soul to *kaustubha*, the precious gem worn by Viṣṇu on his chest. The *jīva* has innate potentiality to be reunited with God, but one has to strive hard to attain it; and this can be achieved only by the realization of one's inseparable relation with God and by developing ardent devotion to God; and this in turn can be achieved by practising devotional activities. Hence, in this system, the means to attain God is only either *bhakti* or *prapatti*.

### *Viśiṣṭādvaita*

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, *bhakti* as a means (*upāya*) is defined as the performance of unceasing loving meditation on the supreme Lord (*snehapūrvam-anudhyānam bhaktiḥ*). It is further regarded as knowledge (a mental activity) in the form of love of God (*bhakti-rūpāpanna-jñāna*). It is generated by meticulous observance of one's *varṇa-dharma* and *āśrama-dharma* along with spiritual knowledge. One has to perform duties purely as a divine service for the sake of pleasure of God (*Bhāgavata-prītyartham*) without expecting any reward.

According to this system, *bhakti* is the means (*upāya*) to *mokṣa*, and this is enjoined by the *śruti* and *smṛti* texts. The Upaniṣads, while discussing the *upāya* for *mokṣa*, do not use the term *bhakti*, but use the terms such as *jñāna*, *vedana*, *dhyāna*, *darśana* and *upāsana*. Rāmānuja, after careful study of the Upaniṣads, concludes that the above terms refer to *bhakti* as per the rules of interpretation laid down in the Mīmāṃsā system. It is further argued that the texts of the Upaniṣads such as "Having known Him, one transgresses death (bondage) and there is no other means to attain Him," and "He who knows Brahman attains the highest," convey that *jñāna* or knowledge of Brahman is the means to *mokṣa*. However, it is *jñāna* as developed into the form of steadfast meditation or *bhakti* that constitutes the direct means to *mokṣa*. Rāmānuja further justifies his position by quoting relevant texts



from the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. According to the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, "This Self (Brahman) cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, nor by meditation, nor through much hearing. It is to be attained only by one whom the Self chooses." According to Rāmānuja, the text implies that *śravaṇa* (study), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation) undertaken without having deep love for God cannot be the direct means to God-realization. Only that individual who is the recipient of God's grace can attain him. Then the next question is: Whom does God choose for showering his grace? The answer is: the one who is the beloved of God is chosen for God's grace. But who is the beloved of God? The answer is found in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: the one who has unalloyed and supreme devotion to God is dearest to him. Hence, after quoting these authoritative texts, Rāmānuja establishes that bhakti is the direct means to liberation (mokṣa).

The terms like *upāsana*, *dhyāna* and *smṛti-santati*, frequently used in the scriptures, says Rāmānuja, imply bhakti as referred to in the *Gītā*. When reflection is undertaken repeatedly, it gives rise to constant remembrance (*smṛti-santati*) of God. Further, as the constant remembrance gets intensified, one obtains almost the direct vision of the object of contemplation, viz. *darśana-samānākāra*. This is again called *para-bhakti*. Both *karma-yoga* (disinterested performance of actions such as sacrifice (*yajña*), gifts (*dāna*), and penance/austerities (*tapas*) as divine service without expecting any rewards and *jñāna-yoga* (constant meditation on the self with the control of mind and sense-organs) are only subsidiary to the means of bhakti (i.e. *bhakti-yoga*). According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, *bhakti-yoga* is a continuous stream of remembrance of God like the flow of oil, and this has eight limbs, viz. *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. Bhakti is said to become mature and well developed through the sevenfold discipline of *viveka*, *vimoka*, *abhyāsa*, *kriyā*, *kalyāṇa*, *anavasāda* and *anuddharṣa*. A brief explanation of these is given below.

1. *Viveka*: purification of the body by maintaining purity of food. This consists in the purity of preparation of food, purity of source of food, and the purity of the person who prepares food. (2) *Vimoka*: controlling the sixfold enemy that affects a man, viz. *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (infatuation), *mada* (pride), and *mātsarya* (jealousy). (3) *Abhyāsa*: practice of worship, *japa*, singing devotional lyrics, chanting God's name, visiting holy places, etc. This, in turn, will remind the aspirant to observe the inner presence of the Lord in one's own self as well as in the whole cosmos. (4) *Kriyā*: fivefold duties of life known as *pañca-mahā-yajñas*, viz. (a) *Deva-yajña* (performance of fire-sacrifice like *agnihotra*, etc.), (b) *Ṛṣi-yajña* (fulfilling one's obligation towards the great sages and seers who imparted great knowledge to humanity through scriptures by reading the scriptures and practising at least a little of it), (c) *Pitṛ-yajña* (performance of *śrāddha* and other rites in order to propitiate the ancestors, and hence maintaining linkage with them), (d) *Manuṣya-yajña* (discharging one's duties towards the society by rendering one's service in different fields—towards guests and hence taking part in helping other fellow beings in the society), (e) *Bhūta-yajña* (propitiating five elements as well as flora and fauna. It warns against the exploitation of nature in general). (5) *Kalyāṇa*: cultivation of five inner virtues, which consists of *satya* (truthfulness), *dayā* (compassion), *dāna* (benevolence), *ārjava* (integrity of thought, word and deed), and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). (6) *Anavasāda*: freedom from dejection, despair and depression due to unforeseen, pathetic circumstances. (7) *Anudharṣa*: maintaining equanimity at all times without being subject to elation or jubilation.

Inculcation of bhakti through the practice of the above sevenfold step is also called *sādhana-bhakti* or *para-bhakti*. This is preceded by *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* refers to performance of *nitya* and *naimitika* duties as a propitiation of God without expecting any reward.

*Jñāna-yoga* refers to the knowledge of the ultimate reality and having conviction that the *jīva* is distinct from *prakṛti* and is having inseparable relation with God. Once the *jīva* knows that God is its inner self and is inseparable from him, a deep sense of love for God bursts forth, and this takes the form of unceasing loving meditation on God; then, there arises in the *jīva* the keen desire to see the Lord, and one's heart cries in agony to see the Lord. After the *jīva*'s repeated cries, the Lord out of his grace (*dayā*) enables the aspirant to have perfect visual perception of the Lord, and this is technically called *para-jñāna*. Here, there is an urge from down and grace from above. *Para-jñāna* leads to *parama-bhakti*, or *phala-bhakti*, or *prema-bhakti*. In this stage there is an intense longing and thirst for union. Here the aspirant establishes one's communion with God.

*Bhakti-yoga* as formulated by Rāmānuja to attain *mukti* is quite rigorous and technical. It is difficult for the ordinary men to follow. *Bhakti-yoga* presupposes four requirements (*adhikāra*): (i) The will or intellect has to undergo proper training. (ii) Śāstraic qualification based on one's birth. (iii) One must have philosophical knowledge of karma. (iv) One must have patience to undergo the effects of *prārabdha-karma*. If any one of the conditions is not fulfilled, then one is not eligible to pursue *bhakti*. But the *śāstras* very often affirm that *mukti* is for all people, irrespective of caste, religion, sex, etc. If this be the case, how to reconcile it with the requirements of *bhakti*? To provide an alternative path for everyone to get *mukti*, *prapatti* (surrender) is proposed in the Viśiṣṭādvaita system.

*Prapatti-mārga* is not a novel innovation, though Vedānta Deśika popularized it. It has its roots in the Veda, the Upaniṣad, the *Bhagavad-gītā* and also in the *Bhāgavata*. Even in the writings of the Āḷvārs, we get plenty of references to *prapatti*. In *prapatti*, the essentials of *bhakti* are maintained, but the technicalities are overlooked. Rigorous disciplines like *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, ceaseless practice of *dhyāna*, are not given importance. The most important

prerequisite for prapatti is transformation of heart and total trust and confidence in the saving grace of the Lord. One's merit is not taken into account in order to be the recipient of God's grace (*dayā*). When one feels one's incapacity and surrenders completely to the Lord, *dayā* becomes the right of the *ārtta*. *Dayā* is God's free flow of mercy on the refugee without any bar restricted to man's bank-balance of merit. This is the uniqueness of divine grace. Both the *sañcita-karma* and the *prārabdha-karma* are nullified. In the case of prapatti, grace rushes like a torrent without any delay provided surrender is deep. The performance of prapatti includes the sacrifice of ego (*svarūpa-samarpaṇa*) and renouncing self-responsibility or self-burden (*bhara-samarpaṇa*).

In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, "Śrī", the consort of the Lord, plays a very important role, especially in the case of one who performs self-surrender, a *prapanna*. She symbolizes the link of love between the ruler (Nārāyaṇa) and the jīva (the pleader for mercy) and transforms the ruler into saviour and pleader into a *mumukṣu*. She is inseparable from Īśvara and changes the law of karma into the law of *kṛpā*.

The essential condition of prapatti does not imply giving up one's duties, but giving up the ego (sense of doership), and its goal is dedicating one's actions to God; this is what is implied in the *carama-śloka*. Prapatti has six limbs (*aṅgas*): (1) *ānukūlya-saṅkalpa*: To follow the will of the Lord. It also connotes service to all the jīvas (*sarvabhūtānukūlya*); (2) *prātikūlya-varjana*: Renunciation of what is disliked by the Lord; (3) *mahāviśvāsa*: Absolute faith in the supreme protective grace of the Lord; (4) *kārpaṇya*: Feeling of incapability to follow the other yogas—karma, jñāna and bhakti, and this generates a feeling of helplessness and humility in the jīva; (5) *goptrtva-varaṇa*: Appeal to God for protection; (6) *Ātma-nikṣepa*: It implies self-oblation to the Lord who is the *śeṣin* and conviction that this kind of giving oneself is God's gift to him. On the whole, prapatti implies *ātma-samarpaṇa*, and this implies *phala-samarpaṇa*, *bhara-samarpaṇa* and *svarūpa-samarpaṇa*.

*Bengal Vaiṣṇavism*

The Caitanya school of Vaiṣṇavism (Bengal Vaiṣṇavism), whose chief exponent is Jīva Goswami, holds the view that the supreme Being has two aspects, viz., impersonal and personal. The personal aspect is filled with innumerable auspicious qualities. While the former aspect constitutes the peripheral or secondary aspect of Brahman, the latter constitutes the centre of the supreme Being which is primary in nature. While the former is like the aura of the sun, the latter, the centre of the sun with all its power. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the centre, and Brahman, the impersonal, is *tanubhā* of Kṛṣṇa. While with the former one cannot experience intimacy with the supreme Being, with the latter, one can possess a deep sense of "mineness" expressing one's deep intimate relation of love which forms the essence of devotion. In substantiating their position, the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism quotes a few lines from the *Bhāgavata*:<sup>25</sup>

The holy men who have deep-rooted love for Me see Me in everything and win over Me, as a faithful wife does to a dutiful husband.

Two main stages are distinguished in explaining bhakti, viz. *sādhana-bhakti* and *sādhya-bhakti*. While the former acts as a means (preparatory stage where a set of devotional activities is followed), the latter acts as an end. *Sādhana-bhakti* is divided into two types: *vaidhī-bhakti* and *rāgānugā-bhakti*. *Vaidhī-bhakti* comprises a set of disciplines which are mentioned in the bhakti texts to be practised by a devotee, which help in stimulating love for God. Here, external aids are essential to a great extent. A person with *śraddhā* (faith) has to follow sixty-three forms of devotional disciplines which ultimately can be summarized under *navadhā bhakti* mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*: (1) *Śravaṇam* (listening to the glories of God); (2) *Kīrtanam* (singing God's glory and majesty); (3) *Viṣṇusmaranam* (remembering God by constantly chanting his name); (4) *Pāda-sevanam* (service of the world as God's manifestation); (5) *Arcanam* (worshipping God

in holy images); (6) *Vandanam* (obeisance to the Lord); (7) *Dāsyam* (considering oneself as the servant of God); (8) *Sakhyam* (a feeling of love and comradeship with the Lord); and (9) *Ātma-nivedanam* (dedicating oneself totally to the Lord).

*Rāgānuga bhakti*: When *Vaidhī-bhakti* with all its elaborations is practised sincerely for a considerable time, it first gives rise to the feeling of loving adoration of God by the external factors, and then it gives rise to a natural sentiment of love towards God. At this stage, the devotee is eligible to practise the next stage called *rāgānugā bhakti*. Here an attempt is made to imitate the loving relation of the residents of Vraja, and then produce in oneself the *bhāva* of those associates of Kṛṣṇa. The *bhāvas* or devotional sentiments are five. (1) *śānta* (2) *dāsyā* (3) *sakhyā*, (4) *vātsalyā*, and (5) *mādhuryā*. The Bengal Vaiṣṇavism almost ignores the first one. The imitation of the above *bhāvas* gives rise to *rāga* (attachment) to the Lord.

*Sādhyā-bhakti*: Here *bhakti* or loving service and adoration of the Lord is not due to any external discipline. On the contrary, intimate relation to Kṛṣṇa is a very natural attainment and not due to any imitation. This is called *rāgātmika-bhakti*. It is an end in itself. This *bhakti* is also called *prema-bhakti* or *prīti*. In this kind of devotion, a devotee experiences immense bliss in having intimate love for Kṛṣṇa by having a sense of mineness (*mamatā-bhāva*) in the form of either as "my master" or "my friend" or "my child" or "my lover". Among all forms of *prīti* (love), the unique expression of this love is found in the *kānta-bhāva* or *nāyaka-nāyaki-bhāva* (lover-beloved relationship). Here a distinction is made between *svakīya-bhāva* and *parakīya-bhāva*. *Svakīya-bhāva* refers to the legitimate love relation between Kṛṣṇa and his wedded wives, and *parakīya-bhāva* refers to the illicit love relation between Kṛṣṇa and Gopīs. This form of love relation is higher since it stands for total trust and surrender absorbed in love towards Kṛṣṇa without expecting anything in return. It is like a girl who goes away with her paramour leaving every-

thing in complete trust in her lover, with a sense of absorption in love towards her beloved. It is higher than wifely attitude since wife's dedication does not involve total revolution, abandonment and non-expectation, which constitute the core of the girl's love towards her paramour. *Prema-bhakti* or *prīti* is not the result of practice of *sādhana-bhakti*. Only *śānta-bhakti* is possible by it, but *prīti-bhakti* is the gift of God to *jīva* whomever he chooses. Hence, it is the result of *poṣaṇa* or *puṣṭi* (divine choice or divine grace). The Bengal Vaiṣṇavism explains *poṣaṇa* and *prīti-bhāva* in the following way.

According to this school, Kṛṣṇa, the ultimate reality, is *sat-cit-ānanda* and possesses three potencies, viz. *svarūpa-śakti*, *taṭastha-śakti* and *māyā-śakti*. *Svarūpa-śakti* has three aspects, viz. *shandhini*, *sammīṭ* and *āhlādinī*. *Āhlādinī śakti* is God's inherent potency of bliss. When this power of God is cast upon the devotee, there is a loving devotion and service (*prīti bhāva*) to the Lord, and the devotee is intensely engrossed with the Lord (*rati*), and there is an experience of bliss of love for the devotee and the Lord. In this state, the devotee experiences a state of placidity of the mind (*kṣānti*) by which he remains totally unperturbed by the ups and downs of life, and he loses his attachment to the worldly objects and becomes totally attached to the Lord. This state is free from selfishness. He does not even care for *mukti*. It is only love for love's sake, and one experiences the bliss of love. Here the Lord blesses the devotee by revealing his most unique attribute of belovedness (*priyatva-lakṣaṇa-dharma-viśeṣa*). It is an experience of loving and being loved by him. Here both the Lord and the devotee become *rasikas*. God becomes even subordinate to his devotees.

There are seven stages in the development of *prīti*: (1) *Rati* or *bhāva*: It denotes a natural attachment and absorption in the Lord; (2) *Prema*: A strong bond of belongingness between the *jīva* and the *deva* by the expression, "my beloved"; (3) *Sneha*: Here one melts in love due to the above sense of belongingness. (4) *Māna*:

Sensitiveness due to excessive love; (5) *Rāga*: Intense and eager longing for the Lord associated with enjoyable pain; (6) *Anurāga*: Experiencing continuous novelty in loving God; (7) *Mahā-bhāva*: It is divine ecstasy where a devotee becomes mad after God. This can be experienced only by the Gopikās and divine incarnations like Caitanya, Ramakrishna and others.

### *Aesthetics of Bhakti*

Bhakti as loving devotion to God is the source of the highest aesthetic experience. Love, beauty and bliss are the constituents of the highest aesthetic experience of God. Beauty, love and bliss become the very basis for aesthetic experience of the devotee who loves him intensely. It is intense pure love that makes one's experience beautiful and blissful. God, being beauty, bliss and love, attracts the jīvas, and the result is blissful experience of love. The mutual attraction between the jīva and God can be explained philosophically. The Absolute, out of self-will, becomes many in the sport of love and enters into many as their pervasive love. In devotion to God, the spark of love in the jīva tries to get merged into the source of love, that is God, and in the union of the two, there is the highest blissful experience which can be termed *rasa (rasānubhūti)*.

When love flows towards the Lord, it is called *paramātmārāga*. Here, ordinary love gets divinized. When there is intense longing from the side of the jīva to get merged with the Lord, and when union of love takes place, there is spiritual marriage (*ātma-vivāha*); and hence, Brahman, the absolute, is the "aesthetic highest". In *Brahmānubhava* there is experience of love, beauty and bliss of Brahman, since Brahman is *saccidānanda, satyaṁ śivaṁ sundaram*. Nammālvār calls God as *Bhuvana-sundara*. According to Tirumūlar, "Love is Śiva, when they realize this in love, they abide in Śiva." According to Nammālvār:<sup>26</sup>

He is the solid mass of sweetness itself to the whole three worlds.  
He is honey, He is nectar, He is milk, He is sugarcane.



His crown is decorated with garlands of *tulasī* full of honey blooming with beauty. I worship Him. I am in communion with Him. After all this my grief is dispelled.

Tiruppāṇ Āḷvār, being enchanted by God's beauty, says: "My heart lies captive to the endless beauty of your form of glittering blue! How can I describe your splendour?"<sup>27</sup> Tirumūlar pleads to people to experience the wonder, beauty and glory of the bliss of love of God by striving to reach the still centre:<sup>28</sup>

With the senses stilled as indrawn, surrender to the Beloved. Like a man who lies with a woman in embrace and loving caress, when that becomes this peace and bliss will indeed be yours.

What we understand from the above lines is that when the devotee is captivated by the beauty and love of the Lord, there is bliss of experience in absorption that gives rise to the great *rasānubhūti*. This is substantiated by Sage Nārada, in his *Bhakti-sūtra*. Speaking about the bliss and sweetness of devotion, he says: "Bhakti is nectarine in nature" (*amṛta-svarūpa*), and gaining devotion, man becomes perfect being, immortal and thoroughly contented (*yad-jñātvā pumān siddho bhavati, amṛto bhavati, tṛpto bhavati*).<sup>29</sup> He further holds that by experiencing bhakti alone, one totally gets fascinated, intoxicated and gets immersed in bliss (*yad-jñātvā matto bhavati, stabdho bhavati, ātmā-rāmo bhavati*).<sup>30</sup>

### *Bhakti as a rasa*

The word "rasa" can be traced back to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads carrying the meaning "taste", "juice", "enjoyment", "feeling", "emotion", etc. The Upaniṣad declares: "*raso vai saḥ*". Though several *Purāṇas* and epics are suffused with scenes that can bring forth a sense of deep devotion in the hearer and the reader filling their hearts with peace and joy, even then, there is a great controversy among the Indian aestheticians to accept "bhakti" as a *rasa*. Before discussing the controversy, let me explain in brief, the *rasa* theory.

Sage Bharata, the father of rasa theory, in his *Nāṭya-śāstra* speaks of eight dominant sentiments which are latent in men. They are: *rati* (love), *hāsa* (laughter), *śoka* (pathos), *krodha* (anger), *utsāha* (high spiritedness) *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsā* (disgust) and *vismaya* (wonder). Since they are fundamentally long-lasting, they are recognized as the *sthāyibhāvas*. *Sthāyibhāva*, for its genesis, requires some stimuli, *vibhāva*. *Vibhāva* is of two kinds: (1) *ālambana* (this is in the form of a person), *uddīpana* (attendant circumstances). There are also some passing moods which are called *sañcāri-bhāvas* or *vyabhicāri-bhāvas*. *Sthāyibhāvas* are expressed through some physical gestures called *anubhāva*. When these are dramatically presented either through a drama or a poem, they excite the *sthāyibhāva* in a *sahṛdaya* (a man of literary taste) who attains identification with the artistic representation, and enjoys his own *sthāyin*. Here *sthāyibhāva* is transformed into a state of aesthetic enjoyment named *rasa*. Thus, Bharata defines *rasa* as, "*vibhāva- anubhāva-sañcāribhāva-samyogād-rasa-niṣpattiḥ*."

According to the Indian aestheticians, only a *sthāyi-bhāva* has the potentiality to raise itself to the status of *rasa*, but not the *vyabhicāri-bhāva*. *Rati* or love between a hero and heroine is a *sthāyi-bhāva* (abiding emotion) which can raise to the state of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, but *bhakti*, being only a *vyabhicāri-bhāva* (associated mood) of one or the other abiding emotion, cannot raise to the status of *rasa*. Systems of Theistic Vedānta add a new dimension to the orthodox idea of *rasa*. According to them, *bhakti* is the only *rasa*, and others are only support (*anubhāva*) adjuncts to it (*vyabhicāri*), or embellishment (*alaṅkāra*) of it, or suggestively communicative (*dhvani*) of it.

From the beginning, there are two parallel streams of *bhakti*, viz. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. Abhinavagupta, a great devotee of Śiva, belonging to Kashmir Śaivism, upholds that the bhakta, at the time *sākṣātkāra* or intuitive vision of God, experiences *tanmayī-bhāva* (a feeling of self-identification), *hṛdaya-saṁvāda*

(heart's overflow), *samvid-viśrānti* (self-repose) and *cittadhṛti* (melting of mind) which is equivalent to highest rasa experience. He further holds that bhakti is its own reward, and nothing more is desired by the devotee, who gets melted in devotion. His body trembles with delight; even in such a state, Abhinava holds that bhakti by itself cannot be termed *bhakti-rasa*, and it cannot come under *śānta-rasa*.

According to Daṇḍin, bhakti cannot be listed as one of the rasas; but for Rudraṭa, any mental state, when it is fully delineated in literature, deserves the title rasa (*rasyate iti rasaḥ*). In this way, though bhakti is a *vyabhicāri-bhāva*, it can rise to the status of rasa. There is another argument according to which the abiding nature of *sthāyī* is decided by the poet's treatment of it. That is *sthāyī* (an emotional episode) which stands out distinctly throughout, without being affected by other minor emotional episodes. If this be the case, then bhakti is the most prominently treated rasa in the *Bhāgavata*, without being subsumed by anything else. Hence, bhakti should be treated as rasa.

The credit of establishing bhakti as a rasa goes to Vopadeva. According to him, all the characteristics found in the nine rasas can be transformed to different forms of bhaktas when they associate themselves with Lord Kṛṣṇa. Vopadeva in his work *Muktāphala* establishes *bhakti-rasa* by selecting relevant passages from the *Bhāgavata*. According to Vopadeva and Hemādri, bhakti alone is the basis of all rasas and all other rasas are only different variations of the primary rasa, i.e. *bhakti-rasa*. The heroes and the heroines in the *Bhāgavata* appear to depict different rasas in their relation to Kṛṣṇa. The Gopīs stand for *śṛṅgāra* and *hāsya*; the wailings of Uddhava convey *karuṇa-rasa*. Hiraṇyakaśipu and Śiśupāla reflect *raudra*. Kaṁsa stands for *bhayānaka*, and Nārada for *śānta*. Vāli represents *vīra* and Purūravas for *bībhatsa*. In Akrūra and Prahlāda, we find *adbhuta*. But, ultimately, their human emotions do not affect their essential nature as *bhakta*.

Rūpa Goswami, the direct disciple of Caitanya, belonging to Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, in his work *Ujjvalanīlamanī*, which is a great work on *bhakti-rasa*, states that there are five kinds of bhakti, viz. *sānta*, *dāsyā*, *sakhyā*, *vātsalyā* and *madhura*; and accordingly, there are five kinds of *bhakti-rasas*; and among them *madhura* is the highest. To justify bhakti as a rasa, he analyses it in the following way. *Kṛṣṇa-rati* is the *sthāyi-bhāva*, Kṛṣṇa and his beloveds are the *ālambana-vibhāva*. *Kṛṣṇa-rati* which is a *sthāyi-bhāva* gets transformed into *bhakti-rasa*.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī makes a unique contribution in establishing bhakti as a rasa and also as a fifth *puruṣārtha*. Though he was an Advaitin, he was a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He opines that the highest goal of man is to attain bliss untainted by sorrow, and this can be achieved by *Bhagavad-bhakti*. To him, bhakti can be understood from two perspectives: (i) as an instrument (*kāraṇa-vyutpatti*) where bhakti consists of *navadhā-bhakti* leading towards the goal, and (ii) as an object (*bhāva-vyutpatti*) where the aspirant's whole being gets modified into the nature of the *iṣṭa-devatā* (favourite God). Here *citta* (mind) gets modified into the forms of the Lord; and bhakti goes through three stages: (1) the melting of the mind, (2) its continuous flow, and (3) the resort wherein mind finally rests. Analysing bhakti as a rasa, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī states that the Lord is the *ālambana-vibhāva*, tulasī, candana, etc. are *uddīpana-vibhāva*, nirveda, etc. are *anubhāva*, and *citta* itself is the *sthāyi-bhāva* which ultimately takes the form of the Lord. This *citta-vṛtti* develops into rasa of untainted bliss.

Advaita speaks of two kinds of bhakti, viz. (1) *apara-bhakti* and (2) *para-bhakti*. *Apara-bhakti* refers to *saguṇopāsanā* consisting of *navadhā-bhakti* which is practised by the devotee, but *para-bhakti* refers to *nirguṇopāsanā* wherein bhakta, after freeing oneself from the *āvaraṇa*- and *vikṣepa-śakti* of *māyā*, realizes that one is non-different from the Godhead. From this angle, Madhusūdana defines bhakti as "*Bhāgavad-ākāra-rūpam*".

In this state of bhakti, *bhajya* (object of devotion), *bhajana* (devotion or worship), and *bhakta*—all culminate in one state which is exactly like *rasānubhūti*. Here *rasika*, *rasa*, and *rasana* merge in one harmonious state.

Bhakti being as vast as God himself has many dimensions. In its spiritual dimension it acts as a means and also as an end. It is a means for liberation and by itself it is a highest goal and value. For Bengal Vaiṣṇivism and Madhusūdana Saraswatī, it is the fifth *puruṣārtha*. Along with spiritual dimension of bhakti, one has to take note of its social dimension. They are inseparably connected. In bhakti, love of God and service to society go together. Mānava-seva is Mādhava-seva. Ramakrishna rightly points out, "seeing God in everything is the last word of sadhanā." Love of God and love of all beings go hand in hand. Thirdly, bhakti has its culmination in loving all and serving all. The dictum, "love all and serve all" is founded upon the Upaniṣadic declarations like "*Īśvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ...*", "*eko'ham-bahu syām.*" God out of self-will becomes many. So, all we see is really nothing but the manifestation of the divine. Hence, a bhakta extends his selfless service to all as a kinsman. Śaṅkara, in glorifying the devotee says that he is the true relative of all in all the three worlds. The *Bhagavad-gītā* well describes the characteristics of good devotee, "Friendly, compassionate to all and without any touch of hatred, devoid of possessiveness and arrogance, ever contented and contemplative, alike in happiness and misery: self-controlled, dedicated to God with heart and soul."<sup>31</sup>

According to Rāmānuja there exists *śarīra-śarīri-bhāva* (soul-body relation) between man, God and nature. Both *cit* and *acit* form the body of God. Rāmānuja's concept of *kriyā* and *kalyāṇa* which form the important limbs of bhakti are based on his view of the ontological relation between man, God and nature. These three realities are organically and inseparably connected. "*Kriyā*", for Rāmānuja comprises the fivefold duties (*pañca-mahā-yajña*) of which *bhūta-yajña* (worship of five elements and sub-human

species) and *manuṣya-yajña* (service to men) are very significant for having its social implication. *Bhūta-yajña* has ecological implication. The ecological crisis which the world is facing today is basically due to lack of reverence towards nature. Rāmānuja's concept of *kalyāṇa* implies service to others by the practice of virtues like *satya* (truthfulness), *ārjava* (integrity or purity in thought, word and deed), *dayā* (compassion), *dāna* (benevolence), and *ahimsā* (non-violence).

It will not be an exaggeration to say that bhakti is the panacea for all the social evils. Different types of crisis like spiritual, moral, emotional, economic and ecological, which the present society faces is basically because of man's ignorance about the divine origin of creation and its inseparable relation to God.

Apathy towards ethics and moral values, self-centeredness and greed in men have led to economic crisis. But a devotee who is totally contented and who feels that all are his kinsmen does not yearn to accumulate wealth for himself and his family; he is ready to share everything with others, for he feels God's presence in all the beings. His life becomes a message to others around him, and many get inspired to follow him.

If man faces emotional insecurity today, it is because he does not understand that God is the source of love. A bhakta in his love for God, directs his love towards the whole creation and as a result is free from self-centered love. His love is so much extended that he forgets his small self and there is total emotional fulfilment. Paramahansa Yogananda aptly says, "falling in love with God is the highest romance." A bhakta's universal love is described by Swami Vivekananda by the concept of *vyas̥thi* (the particular) and *samaṣ̥thi* (the universal relation) as follows:

God is the *samaṣ̥thi*, the generalised, the abstract universal whole, and the universe which we see is the *vyas̥thi*, the particularised things. To love the whole universe is possible only by loving the *samaṣ̥thi*, God. Loving the world and doing good will result when we love God, the sum total. In this way everything becomes sacred to the bhakta because all things are His.<sup>22</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi's favourite song of a true Vaiṣṇava summarises what has been described above.

He is a true Vaiṣṇava who knows and feels  
 Another's woe as his own.  
 Ever ready to serve, he never boasts  
 He bows to everyone and despises no one,  
 Keeping his thought, word and deed pure.  
 Blessed is the mother of such a one.  
 He reverences every woman as his mother.  
 He keeps an equal mind and does not  
 Stain his lips with falsehood nor  
 Does he touch another's wealth.  
 No bond of attachment can hold him.  
 Ever in tune with Rāma-nāma, his body  
 Possesses in itself all places of pilgrimage.  
 Free from greed and deceit, passion  
 And anger, this is the true Vaiṣṇava.

### NOTES

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## LIBERATION IN ADVAITA

Paul YF Loke\*

When one speaks of liberation (mokṣa), the question which immediately comes to mind is, "Liberation from what?" Whether it is mukti or mokṣa, the root is *muc=muñc* which means to get released, or to get free. So mokṣa literally means emancipation or freedom. However, to become free, one must first recognize that one is bound. In other words, liberation presupposes bondage (*bandha*). Thus, Advaita says that one must know that one is in bondage; otherwise, there cannot be any desire for freedom. What then is there to bind the jīva?—one might ask.

All schools of Vedānta say that it is not the world, with its manifold names and forms, which binds the jīva. The world around is neutral. In themselves, the objects of empirical existence do not attract nor repel the jīva. Instead, it is the jīva's attachment to the world that binds. In short, the bondage is due to the jīva's vāsanās. This then raises another question, "How did the likes and dislikes come about?" These, according to Advaita, can be traced to the "I", and following this, the "mine", which is due to

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mistaking the body for the Self, or what is called foundational superimposition (*mukhyādhyāsa*). This "seeing something as something else"<sup>1</sup> should be analyzed at two levels. At the primary level, it involves the erroneous identification of the Self with the "I" to form, what is called, the Self-ego complex. Following this, the other limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*), viz. the mind, the senses and the body are superimposed on the Self-ego complex, giving rise to the experiences and corresponding expressions such as, "I am happy" (happiness being a state of the mind), "I see" (seeing being a function of the visual sense), and "I am a man" (manhood being a bodily description). This process is technically called *aham-abhimāna*. At the secondary level, this erroneous identification is extended to one's near and dear or kith and kin, e.g. "my wife", "my children", "my uncle", etc. This appropriation does not end here. The house is said to belong to the individual. It becomes "my house". The office where business is conducted becomes "my office", and the list goes on. This appropriation is technically called *mama-abhimāna*. The source of this attachment is superimposition, which is caused by ignorance (*avidyā*). In other words, it is ignorance which forms the nucleus of bondage. It follows, therefore, that liberation is the elimination of the *abhimāna*, particularly the *mukhya-upādhi* of "I". Indeed, through the ages, many sages and spiritual aspirants have attested to the fact that practically all spiritual disciplines (*sādhana*) aim at the removal of this "I" (*aham*) which is the source of the *jīva*'s problems.

The "I" or ego is said to arise in the *viññānamaya-kośa* (the sheath of consciousness or intellect). *Viññāna* is synonymous with the intellect (*buddhi*). The intellect, which is passive and material in nature, can be compared to a mirror. The mirror will only reflect an object when it is free from dust and dirt. Similarly, the intellect is only capable of reflecting the Self when it is free from all impurities. When this happens, the aspirant is said to experience the mental modification in the form of Brahman or *Brahmākāra-*

*vyrtti*. When the *buddhi* is clouded, the Self will not be reflected therein. In empirical transaction, the intellect will act for the Self. The relationship between the Self and the intellect is perhaps most vividly described in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. In this Upaniṣad<sup>2</sup> the Self is compared to the owner of a chariot, the *jīva*'s body to the chariot, which is drawn by the intellect controlling the horses (the senses) by the reins (the mind). The world is where the chariot goes. The intellect becomes outwardly oriented (*bahihprāvanya*) when it is preoccupied with the mind and the senses. However, when the business of controlling the horses (sense-organs) with the reins (mind) is not there, the driver (intellect) can turn towards the owner (the Self). This inward tendency is called *antahprāvanya*. The intellect, therefore, has the facility of orientation, both outwards and inwards. When the intellect is clouded with impressions from the mind and decision-making, it is no longer pure. However, with spiritual practices (*sādhana*), the intellect gets progressively purified. Finally, when it is crystal-clear, the Self, which is adjacent to it, gets reflected there. Once the Self (Ātman) gets reflected therein, the intellect becomes Self-like (Ātmavat). It is only when the intellect is outwardly oriented, when it interacts<sup>3</sup> with an object through the mind and sense-organ, then it says "I" on behalf of the Self. This is how the intellect assumes the status of the pseudo-Self. However, in deep sleep the intellect merely reflects or mirrors the Self. This experience, albeit a fleeting one, of pure consciousness bereft of the slightest taint of objectivisation offers one a glimpse of one's innate divine nature. The "I" is absent at that time. With no reference point, it has temporarily gone into its causal state, viz. ignorance. The "I" or the ego is therefore an emergent phenomenon. It emerges only when there is a direct or indirect encounter with another pole. In other words, the "I" is a bipolar phenomenon which appears when there is an objective framework. The objective framework in turn is brought about when the sense-organs come into contact with objects both in the waking and dream states. The simple example

of human breathing is illustrative of this. Breathing is by and large a natural process which goes on without intervention of the human will. The "I" is absent in normal inhalation and exhalation. However, for some reason when the person is not able to breathe normally, the sense of "I" suddenly emerges, and we hear the expression, "I am having breathing problem." The "I" has therefore arisen in relation to the breathing difficulty. From our experience, we find that in dream, the subjective "I" is always object-oriented. Without dream objects and dream situations, the dreamer (the "I") will not be there to experience the dream. Thus, we see that although the "I" is only adventitious to our true nature, most people are completely identified with it (except in moments of deep sleep) because of phenomenal involvement.

Having analysed how bondage and the ego have arisen, a very pertinent question still remains and that is: "Why should anyone even want to think about being liberated from this bondage?" Śaṅkara speaks of *jijñāsā* (the desire to know). Who, then, is interested in this saving knowledge (of Brahman), which is the only thing capable of removing the foundational ignorance?

Ultimately, there is the desire to know the cause of suffering (*duḥkha*). The suffering of man is an undeniable fact of life. Generally, the problems of human existence can be classified into three broad categories, collectively called *tāpa-traya* (threefold misery): (1) *Ādhyātmika* is the misery relating to the body and mind of man. No living person can claim to be completely free from bodily ailments or mental illness. Generally, these miseries which are organic in nature are called *ādhyātmika-duḥkha* (the sufferings of the individual); (2) *Ādhibhautika* is the misery which stems from the world around. For instance, the house might be broken in by burglars, or a wild beast might attack the person who is taking a walk through the jungle at night; and (3) *Ādhidaivika* is the misery that arises from unseen sources which are beyond one's control. These include all the natural calamities and disasters such as storms, earthquakes, drought, etc.

When a person suffers from these miseries, particularly when an end to these miseries is nowhere in sight, there will be this desire to look for some permanent solution or way out of these woes. The individual begins to question the very purpose of life. For a start, there may not be the intense desire for liberation, but at least there is an interest in the right direction. The immediate concern is to get rid of the afflictions. This marks the beginning of *jijñāsā* (the desire for knowledge of the Self). So, unless there is the experience of suffering, the aspiration to realize one's true nature, which, according to the scriptures, is free from any suffering, will not be there. Therefore, in the final analysis, the motivation for liberation is twofold in nature. On the one hand, there is what can be described as the push factor comprising the *tāpa-traya*, and on the other, there is the pull factor which promises an ever-lasting bliss.

### *Concept of Liberation*

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the play of human existence is due to man's ignorance of his true nature, which is pure consciousness. As a result, he mistakes the fleeting moments of worldly pleasures for the timeless reality and blindly runs after them. The *jīva*, however, is not condemned to its life of insatiable desires and endless strivings. Advaita promises that there is spiritual freedom. Man can be freed from the yoke of his bondage. He has a choice—the choice between the "good" and the "pleasant" as stated in the *Kātha Upaniṣad*. The good would be to tread the path of knowledge (*jñāna*) as opposed to the pleasant, which is the way of the world. According to Advaita, knowledge is the only antidote to ignorance. More precisely, it is the saving knowledge of the identity of the essential nature of the *jīva* and Brahman, which liberates man from his bondage. Indeed, the scripture tells us that the essence of the *jīva* is pure consciousness, or the Self (*Ātman*). It further declares that the consciousness

immanent in the jīva is not different from the all-pervasive principle, which is the substratum of the world, viz. Brahman.

The concession of reality to the world is similar to the illusion of the rope-snake. It is ignorance of the real nature of the rope, which is the ground for the illusion, that has given rise to the appearance of the snake. Once there is the knowledge that the object is only a coil of rope, the illusion of the snake vanishes immediately. In the same way, once the oneness of the jīva and Brahman is experienced, all illusions about the reality of empirical existence come to naught. Therefore, it is knowledge alone, which is capable of removing ignorance in the same way as light removes darkness. There are two events occurring simultaneously when one speaks of liberation. One is the attainment of knowledge of Brahman, and the other is the simultaneous removal or destruction of ignorance. Thus, liberation can be stated either positively as *Brahma-prāpti* (attainment of Brahman), or negatively as *avidyā-nāśa* or *avidyā-nivṛtti* (destruction of ignorance).

There are, however, two important points to note about both these events. Firstly, it should not be erroneously concluded that the two are related as cause and effect. Secondly, the term "attainment" should not be understood in the usual sense. In its normal usage, the term would mean the attainment of something, or a state, which was not there before. This is not so in the case of Self-realization (Brahman-realization), where the Self or Brahman has always been there. It is ever-attained. The only thing is that the jīva is ignorant of it. Brahman is ever-present as the cause and substratum of the whole world. Therefore, in Brahman-realization, it is only a discovery of what is present all along. The Self is always present, but is veiled from the jīva because of its erroneous identification with the *upādhis* of the body, senses, and mind, which are the products of ignorance. With knowledge, ignorance is removed and the effulgence of the Self, which hitherto has been veiled, is revealed in its full splendour. The attainment

is, therefore, a case of attaining what is already attained. It is not the attainment of something new.

One comes across three analogies, commonly found in Advaita literature, which are used to make the above point clear. They are: *vismṛta-kañṭhābharāṇa*, *vyādha-varḍhita-rājakumāra* and *daśamas-tvamasi*. The first analogy is about a woman who was anxiously looking for her lost necklace only to be told that what she had been frantically looking for was already around her neck. The woman had been preoccupied with so many other things that she forgot the necklace was on her all along. The second analogy is about a prince who was brought up by a group of hunters. The prince eventually grew up thinking and behaving like a hunter. Years later, the prince was finally located and brought back to the palace to regain his rightful place. The discovery by the prince of his true identity is not a case of attainment because he never ceased to be a prince. The last analogy is the story about ten men crossing a river. Having crossed the river, one of them made a head-count to ensure that all had crossed safely. Unfortunately, the person inadvertently failed to include himself in the count. As a result, they thought that one of them had perished in the river. They were crying and wailing over the "tragedy" until a passerby, who found out the source of their grief, immediately conducted a recount. This time, the person who conducted the first count was duly included. When it came to him, the passerby proclaimed, "Thou art the tenth" (*daśamas-tvamasi*). All the three analogies point to the fact that nothing new is attained. Whether it is the case of the necklace, the identity of the prince, or the tenth person, it is only a discovery of what has always been there. Therefore, liberation or the attainment of the knowledge of Brahman is only the realization of an existing truth, and not the attainment of something new.

In the same way, the removal of ignorance can also be understood in two senses. The first is the removal of what has to be

removed, and the second is the removal of what is already removed. To illustrate the first meaning of the term is the example of the removal of a pain in the foot that is caused by a nail embedded in it. The cause of the pain, namely the nail, has to be removed. Otherwise, the pain is going to persist and may get even worse. This removal is an example of removing what has to be removed. The person who is suffering from the pain cannot just wish away the nail that is embedded in the foot. It has to be physically taken out. So, this is the actual removal of something. The second case is one of removing what is already absent. It is similar to the attainment of what is already attained. This becomes clear when we examine the examples of objects being mistaken for something else. We have seen how ignorance can cause one to mistake a rope for a snake, and a lamp-post or a tree for a man. In reality, there is no snake in the rope, nor is there a man in the post or tree. The snake and the man have never been in existence. When the person has the knowledge of the rope, the fear of the snake goes away immediately. The snake is only an appearance brought about by ignorance. It never existed. Therefore, its removal is best described as "removal as it were", or it can be said that the snake is "as if removed". The case of the Self is just like the rope. The Self is ever-existent. It does not have any body, senses or mind. These are all limiting adjuncts wrongly superimposed on the Self, just as the snake is superimposed on the rope. Therefore, the removal that is spoken of here is a case of removal "as it were", through knowledge, of the wrong notion that the world of names and forms is real. This is liberation.

### *Means to Liberation*

There are several views about the means to liberation. There is a view which says that action (karma) will bring about liberation. This is the view of the Pūrva-mīmāṃsā school. Śaṅkara, on the other hand, is categorical in pointing out that only knowledge (jñāna) can lead one to release. This, incidentally, is the position



of most Advaitins. There is a third view which holds that liberation can be realized through a combination of knowledge and action, or what is called *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*. The proponents of this view include Bhartṛprapañca, a pre-Śaṅkara Vedāntin of the Bhedābheda (identity in difference) school, and even some Advaitins like Brahmadata and Maṇḍana-miśra. There are three sub-variants within this view. One of the variants says that action is more important, and knowledge has only an auxiliary role. Another gives equal importance and weightage to both knowledge and action. The third gives importance to knowledge, action is deemed secondary.

#### *Action as a Means to Liberation*

The view of action as a means to liberation stems from the Mīmāṃsakas' understanding and conception of bondage. According to the Mīmāṃsakas, man's bondage is the result of his desire for, and attachment to, the things of the world. This bondage has come about because of the person's actions, which are invariably dictated by likes and dislikes. It is therefore believed that the bondage can be destroyed through the performance of some other actions. So, the person needs only to lead a ritualistic life, diligently performing all the stipulated sacrifices, and this would lead to the destruction of the relationship which the individual has with the world, and release is assured. Such a conception of liberation is called the destruction of the relationship with the world (*prapañca-sambandha-vilayaḥ*). Therefore, unlike the Advaitins who follow the knowledge section (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) of the Veda, the Mīmāṃsakas uphold only the ritual section (*karma-kāṇḍa*). According to the Mīmāṃsakas, the recipe for liberation is very simple. There are essentially four kinds of action. These are: actions which are prompted by desire (*kāmya-karma*); actions which are prohibited (*niṣiddha-karma*); actions to be carried out on specific occasions (*naimittika-karma*), and actions to be performed daily or obligatory rites (*nitya-karma*). Of these, the person

intent on liberation is asked to avoid the first two. Getting involved in desire-prompted actions only brings about attachment which is antithetical to the goal of severing the links with the world. Prohibited actions should also be avoided because sin would be incurred if one engages in such activities. Once a sin is committed, the person has to reap the consequences. This invariably causes the individual to be further bound in the cycle of birth and death. The remaining two actions are, however, encouraged. The chanting of the *Gāyatrī mantra* forms part of the daily worship. Such obligatory rites are prescribed in the *śāstra*, and these should be punctiliously observed. There are also occasional actions such as making offerings and prayers to one's ancestors, which must necessarily be carried out. It is clearly stated in the scriptures that failure to perform these obligatory and occasional duties would also incur sin. Therefore, generally speaking, there are two types of sin; one resulting from the performance of prohibited actions and the other, sin of omission for not carrying out actions prescribed and enjoined in the scriptures. The underlying rationale is that through strict observance of the proscribed and prescribed duties, no fresh sin would be added onto the "karmic tally" of the individual. This in effect allows for the accumulated merits and demerits, which had brought about the present body and circumstances of the aspirant, to become exhausted. Furthermore, with the individual's attention turned away from the world, the attachment to it is progressively reduced. It is evident from the above discussion that liberation, according to the Mīmāṃsakas, is a case of real or actual attainment. This view, incidentally, is shared by the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Vedānta. The Viśiṣṭādvaitins too look upon liberation as a goal to be achieved or attained. Release is therefore said to be *sādhyā*.

### *Knowledge as a Means to Liberation*

For Śaṅkara, it is knowledge alone that removes ignorance, the cause of bondage. He has cited many empirical examples

such as the erroneous cognition of silver in a shell, mistaking a tree for a man, etc., to support his view. For instance, in the example of the shell-silver, the emotion of greed is eradicated only when the person knows that the silver is really a piece of shell. Therefore, only knowledge counts. It removes ignorance and all its associated mental states such as fear, desire, hatred, etc., in the way light removes darkness. Action (karma) can never lead to liberation. To begin with, liberation is eternal whereas the result of an action is temporary and perishable. According to the Mīmāṃsā school, any action will lead to one of the following: origination/production (*utpatti*), transformation/modification (*vikāra*), purification (*saṃskṛti*) or attainment (*āpti*). It is common knowledge that what is produced will have an end. Brahman, however, is ever-attained. We have said that liberation is not a new acquisition, but only a discovery of what is already present in everyone of us as pure consciousness. Therefore, liberation can never be produced. Furthermore, as Brahman is immutable (*kūṭastha*), transformation is out of question. Purification implies the removal of existing impurities. Brahman, however, is devoid of all qualities (*nirguṇa*), and is of the nature of pure consciousness. In other words, purification too is excluded. Action, therefore, can never lead to liberation.

We have seen earlier how action has come about because of man's desires and attachments which are rooted in ignorance. Action, therefore, is a product of ignorance. In view of this, there is no possibility of action leading to the removal of ignorance. Logic dictates that an effect can never destroy the cause which has given rise to it. Furthermore, according to Śaṅkara, when one speaks of the knowledge of an object, it is really the nature of the object that is referred to. For instance, in the visual perception of a pot, the knowledge (of the pot) is the same for everyone who sees it. Thus knowledge is always dependent on the existing object itself. This is called *vastu-tantra*. Action, on the other hand, is about something or a state which an individual would like to pos-

sess or attain. It is for achieving a desired goal. Action, therefore, is dependent on the desire of the person. To achieve the desired result, three options are available to the individual; to act (*kartum*), not to act (*akartum*), or change (*anyathā-kartum*). This is called *puruṣa-tantra*. Brahman is eternal. It does not come about as a result of the performance of some rituals. It is therefore quite clear that action and knowledge are inimical to each other as day is to night. Not only is there a difference in their nature; the result or fruit of action is also totally different from that of knowledge. The fruit of action is dualistic in character, and it admits of degrees and grades. For instance, in the case of happiness, it admits of degrees and is object-related. An individual experiences happiness when a desire is fulfilled, or when a goal is attained. On the other hand, the fruit of knowledge, which is Self-realization or the immediate knowledge of the identity of the *jīva* and Brahman, is non-dual and does not admit of any degrees or parts.

#### *Liberation from a Combination of Knowledge and Action*

This view, known as *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, has three variations. Each of these, which involves a combination of knowledge and action, is based on the interpretation of a particular scriptural text. The three combinations are: (1) Action is more important, and *jñāna* has only an auxiliary role. This view is based on the *Gītā* text, "Janaka, the King of Mithilā and others had attained the state of liberation (*sthitaprajña*) by performing action only;"<sup>4</sup> (2) Knowledge and action are of equal importance. Such a view is based on the text, "Knowledge and action are the means to Self-realization,"<sup>5</sup> found in the *Viṣṇu-purāna*; and (3) Knowledge is more important than action. This third combination is based on the Upaniṣadic statement, "The knower of Brahman attains the highest."<sup>6</sup>

As a means to liberation, the combination of knowledge and action, in all its three variations, is untenable. It suffers from the same defects highlighted in the preceding discussion on karma.

In the introduction to his commentary on the *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkara emphatically declares that the distinction between knowledge and action is "unshakable like a mountain".<sup>7</sup> However, notwithstanding what has been said, action is not without its usefulness in the scheme of practical discipline leading to the knowledge of Brahman. Although Śaṅkara is unequivocal in stating that action can never directly bring about knowledge, he nevertheless accepts the indirect role of action as a means for the purification of the mind making it receptive, and fit for Self-realization. In his commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkara points out that the knowledge of Brahman will dawn on one "whose mind is purified."<sup>8</sup> This is based on a *smṛti* text from the *Manu Saṁhitā*, which speaks of the eradication of sin through austerities as a precondition for the rise of knowledge. It is important to note here that not all actions will lead to mental purity. *Citta-śuddhi* (purification of the mind) will only result from action performed without any desire or attachment to the fruits. The point on the efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge as the only means for the eradication of ignorance, and the need for a fit mind which selfless actions help bring about are stated most succinctly by Śaṅkara when he says, "All these works are useful, and even the scriptures prescribe them, since they serve as means to knowledge. But they have no part in producing the result of this knowledge, viz. liberation. It (liberation) comes only from knowledge, and not from work. Work (carried out as selfless duty, i.e. *niṣkāma-karma*) purifies the mind, and the knowledge of the Self is manifested in such a pure mind. So, work has a role, albeit an indirect one, as a means to knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

### *Qualification for Liberation*

From the above discussion, it is clear that mental purity is an absolute necessity for liberation. Indeed, according to Śaṅkara, a seeker after the saving knowledge of Brahman must be endowed with certain prerequisites. There are four necessary conditions,

which Śaṅkara mentions in the very beginning of his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* while discussing the concept of *jijñāsā* (the desire to know Brahman). The four prerequisites or qualifications (*sādhana-catuṣṭaya*) are: *nityānitya-vastu-viveka*, or *viveka* (discrimination) in short; *ihāmutrārtha-bhoga-virāga*, or simply *virāga* (detachment); *śamādi-sādhana-sampat*, a group of six disciplines, and *mumukṣutva*, an intense desire for liberation.

(1) *Nityānitya-vastu-viveka* refers to the discrimination between the real and the unreal. This is an important attribute because unless the seeker is able to appreciate that, apart from the Self or Brahman, everything else is unreal, detachment which is the next qualification will not develop. A person who lacks this discrimination will never know that there is a higher life beyond the humdrum of empirical existence.

(2) *Ihāmutrārtha-bhoga-virāga* is a mental state of detachment or dispassion. The person who is detached would be quite happy and content with the barest minimum life offers. There is no desire for material possessions or sense-pleasures here, or in the hereafter. The world has lost its appeal on such an individual. This detachment extends beyond the pleasures of this world to include those of the heavenly world.

(3) *Śamādi-sādhana-sampat* is a group of six disciplines (*śama, dama, uparati, titikṣā, samādhāna* and *śraddhā*) which keep the mind and senses inwardly oriented. (a) *Śama* is usually translated as tranquility or peacefulness. *Śama* comes from the root word "*śāntah*" which means having control over the mind. It is the withdrawal of the mind from all sense objects (both external and internal) to prevent the formation of mental states such as love and hate, happiness and grief, etc., which invariably come about through such associations. (b) *Dama* is control of the external organs. The restraint of the five organs of knowledge and five organs of action is necessary for anyone who is serious about salvation and release. (c) *Uparati* is commonly translated as renunciation.

Śaṅkara defines this as "free from all desires or sannyāsa."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the person endowed with this quality (an *uparataḥ*) is one who has turned away from all worldly involvements, including the performance of obligatory and occasional rites. (d) *Titikṣā* is endurance or fortitude. A *titikṣuḥ* is one who is patient and is able to accept and endure opposites like heat and cold, hunger and thirst, etc. It does not, however, mean that the seeker must willfully subject the body to austerities such as the severe restriction of food, foregoing sleep, and exposure to extreme heat or cold. All that is meant by *titikṣā* is that the person who is on the spiritual path should not be overly conscious and concerned about discomforts to the body. (e) *Samādhāna* is one-pointed concentration. An aspirant who cannot focus and is not attentive will not be able to follow the teachings and explanations given by the teacher, which is the first step on the ladder leading to liberation. (f) *Śraddhā* or faith. The seeker must have unshakable faith in the teachings of the Upaniṣads. There is no compromise here. If faith is missing, doubts and vacillations will plague the seeker throughout the whole spiritual journey.

(4) *Mumukṣutva* is the intense desire to be free. As in any pursuit, there must first be a desire for it. However, in the case of the knowledge of Brahman, it is not just desire, but it has to be an intense desire. This type of desire is called *aunmukhya-lakṣaṇā icchā*. It is to be distinguished from *ruci-lakṣaṇā icchā* which is only a casual or vague desire to attain some state or object. The person who has only a casual desire will not go all out for the fulfilment of his desire. Self-realization demands the total and unconditional commitment of the individual. It is necessarily so because of the inherent tendencies (*vāsanās*) acquired over the myriad of births, which keep most people firmly hooked to the sense-pleasures of mundane life. Therefore, unless the individual is intensely motivated and resolute to attain the knowledge of Brahman, the lure of the world will prove too great to resist.

### *Three-Step Approach to Self-realization*

Having acquired the necessary mental purity and spiritual rectitude, the seeker is ready to tread the path of knowledge. According to Advaita, the knowledge of Brahman can be attained through the three-step approach of *śravaṇa* (study of the Vedas), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation). This is based on the advice of Yājñavalkya to Maitreyī, which is recorded in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.

According to Yājñavalkya, "The Self, should be realized, should be heard of, reflection on, and meditated upon."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the assured effectiveness of this approach to realize one's true nature and identity with Brahman is vouchsafed by Śaṅkara in his commentary of the said text, wherein he promises that "By the realization of the Self, my dear, through Vedic study reflection and meditation, all this is known."<sup>12</sup>

(1) *Śravaṇa* is derived from the root "śru" which means to hear. However, *śravaṇa* is not merely hearing, but the attentive listening to the teachings given by the teacher. Underlying this rapt attention is an inward orientation. The student, often with eyes closed, is receptive and taking in every word that the teacher says. This stage of *śravaṇa* is sometimes called *pratyagpravṛtti* (inward orientation) as against *bahihpravṛtti* (outward orientation). The Upaniṣad as a source of knowledge is called *śabda-pramāṇa* (verbal testimony). *Śabda-pramāṇa*, like *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* (perception), can give rise to immediate knowledge (*aparokṣa-jñāna*). The others such as inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), etc., are capable of giving rise to mediate knowledge (*parokṣa-jñāna*). It should be pointed out here that although all the six *pramāṇas* are transfigurations of Brahman, it is only in the case of *śabda-pramāṇa*, i.e. the Upaniṣad, that the element of consciousness is most predominant. This follows from the fact that the Upaniṣadic texts deal only with the nature of Brahman and not with the objects of the world, which belong to the scope of the other *pramāṇas*. It is for this reason that verbal testimony is considered to be the sole *pramāṇa* for giving rise to



the knowledge of Brahman. However, for most people, there are obstacles which prevent the rise of immediate knowledge from the scriptures. The dictate of modern living is hardly conducive to a life of inward orientation and contemplation. The mental constitution is far from peaceful and pure. The fault, therefore, has nothing to do with the *śruti* texts. They did not create the obstacles. It is similar to a light-shade that has been drawn over the window to block the sunlight. The sun, which is always shining, has nothing to do with the shade that has been drawn. The problem, therefore, is with the individual. In particular, it has to do with the individual's mind which is not fit for receiving the saving knowledge.

It is very important that the student fully understands the implications of the scriptures and how they are to be correctly interpreted. Sometimes, the scriptures may appear contradictory. All doubts, which the student has, are clarified by the teacher at the stage of *śravaṇa*. The student is also expected to critically evaluate the scriptural texts to ensure logical consistency, and to ascertain the final import of the Upaniṣads using the six indicating marks (*tātparyaliṅga* or *ṣaḍvidhaliṅga*). These six criteria are: commencement-ending, repetition, uniqueness, result, recommendatory passages or eulogy, and analytical reasoning. At this stage the student is also taught the views of the other systems of thought. This ensures that the final conclusion (the *siddhānta*) is arrived at only after examining all the other possible views (*pūrva-pakṣa*). By doing so, it checks against bias and the development of a one-sided perspective. *Śravaṇa*, therefore, is a purposeful and focused study which is a very important prelude to the later two stages. It provides the necessary framework, because unless the student knows the subject matter well, reflection on it would not be possible. The nature of the teacher-student relationship is a unique one. The teacher knows the student's personality, spiritual needs, strength and weakness. It is this total knowledge of the student which enables the teacher to structure an appropriate course of

study and discipline to be followed. The student, in turn, has complete trust and faith in the teachings and instructions of the teacher.

(2) *Manana*: 'Man' is to think. Therefore, *manana* is thinking. Up to this point, the student would have assimilated all that the teacher has said and taught. However, it is not sufficient. During this second stage, the student is required to evaluate the teachings against his personal experiences, and the views of the other schools. This is crucial because unless the student is completely convinced of the relevance and utility of the teachings for knowing the Self, she/he cannot incorporate them in the spiritual practice. The reflection and inquiry at this stage will take the form of questioning, whether the teaching is suitable, whether it would help bring about the knowledge of Brahman, and how it can be put to practice, by the student. The student has to make a judgement (*nirṇaya*) of what has been taught in the earlier stage. Therefore, *manana* is *nirṇaya-pramāṇa*, and it follows *śravaṇa*, which is *śabda-pramāṇa*. *Manana*, which is essentially an independent mental exercise, is characterized by three elements. They are *yukti* (reasoning), *cintana* (the views of others), and *anubhava* (the student's own experience). The stage of *manana* has been likened to the burnishing of gold. The mental activity or reflection is equivalent to the burnishing process, and the teaching is like gold. Before it is burnished, gold lacks the shine and is not malleable. It is only after burnishing that gold becomes shining and soft, which enable valuable ornaments and jewelleries to be made out of it. Similarly, it is only through careful reflection and cogitation that the seeker becomes fully convinced of the veracity and value of the teachings. The best justification for this thinking and ratiocination comes from our daily experience. It is a fact of life that when one ruminates over an issue repeatedly, clarity grows, and the resulting understanding will be complete and unshakable.

(3) *Nididhyāsana*: *Nididhyāsana* is derived from the root "dhyai" which means to attend to or concentrate. *Nididhyāsana*,

therefore, is devoting oneself entirely to this focusing. It has also been described as contemplation. However, the term does not give the full implication and meaning. At the *nididhyāsana* stage, the student is completely convinced of the veracity and the utility of the teachings. The concern here is how to internalize the teachings, and translate these from mediate knowledge into direct and immediate experience. The student would have been instructed in the *mahāvākyas* such as *tat tvam asi* and *aham brahmāsmi*. There is the intellectual knowledge (*parokṣa-jñāna*) of the identity between the *jīva* and Brahman. However, the student has not realized or known this identity experientially (*aparokṣa-jñāna*). To achieve this perceptual knowledge, the student is expected to devote all his time and energy to maintain the thought that everything is only pure consciousness. The key ingredient in *nididhyāsana* is continuous remembrance. It is a conscious effort to reduce every thought, every cognition and every action to its fundamental reality which is pure consciousness, and to abide in the awareness. It is important to point out here that *nididhyāsana* is not mere repetition that "I am Brahman" as in a chant. Chanting is mainly characterized by the mechanical repetition of the *mantra*. *Nididhyāsana*, on the other hand, is carried out with the understanding and conviction that every thought and cognition is ultimately unreal. For most people, the ignorance is so deep-rooted that this constant reminder is necessary. In his *Vedānta-paribhāṣā*, Dharmarāja points out that it is our latent impressions (*vāsanās*) which cause the mind to helplessly drift towards external objects. Therefore, *nididhyāsana* is essentially a procedure to bring the mind back to focus on the Self whenever it becomes extrovert. The problem here is like the rope-snake illusion. Despite being told that the "snake" is only a rope, some still get a fright when they stumble across the rope again. This could be due to several reasons. It could be that the person was preoccupied with some other thoughts, or he may have completely forgotten what he was told—that the "snake" is only a rope. The point, therefore, is

that even in a relatively simple case of seeing the rope as a snake, it takes time and effort to permanently eradicate and correct the erroneous perception. One can imagine how much more effort is required to eliminate the fundamental ignorance that has plagued man since time immemorial. According to Śaṅkara, the process of *nididhyāsana* is like mastering the skills of gemology (*maṇi-parīkṣā*). The expertise can only be acquired through repeated and continuous handling of gemstones. Eventually, the mind of the gemologist gets saturated with the impressions of the distinctive features of each gemstone. Thereafter, no effort is required to correctly identify and authenticate any gemstone that is presented to him. This ability to do so will be second-nature to the gemologist. This is similar to what happens in *nididhyāsana*. Through the constant attending to, and remembrance of, the truth that consciousness is the ultimate reality, the mental state of the seeker eventually becomes transformed in the form of Brahman. The mind is no longer characterized by limited mental states (*antaḥ-karaṇa-vṛttis*). Instead, it has become partless and limitless.

#### *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* (Knowledge as Brahman)

According to Advaita, liberation (*mokṣa*) is the removal of ignorance which prevents the perceptual cognition of the Self. It is from listening to, and reflecting on, the scriptural texts in the stages of *śravaṇa* and *manana* respectively, that the seeker gets the knowledge of Brahman. However, this is only mediate knowledge gleaned from the Upaniṣadic texts. There is no first-hand experience of Brahman. Perceptual or direct knowledge is absent. We have said that ignorance, be it secular or spiritual, is removed only through knowledge. For this, a pure mind is absolutely necessary. Knowledge presupposes the existence of a mental modification or mental state (*vṛtti*). Having said this, it is important to note that there is a difference in the cognition of an object like a pot, i.e. secular knowledge, and the direct experience of Brahman, i.e. spiritual knowledge.

For the purpose of analysis, the perceptual knowledge of pot can be divided into two stages. The first involves the mind coming out through the sense-organ and reaching the place of the pot. As a result, there arises the mental modification in the form of the pot. The Advaitin calls this *vṛtti-vyāpya*, which means that the object "pot" is associated with a mental modification. In other words, the pot is pervaded (*vyāpya*) by a *vṛtti*. It is the cognition or knowledge of pot, which is the mental modification in the form of pot inspired by the reflection of consciousness in it, that removes the ignorance (*tūlāvidyā*) obscuring the pot-conditioned consciousness.<sup>13</sup> When this happens, the consciousness conditioned by the pot immediately gets reflected in the mental modification of the pot, and there arises the perceptual knowledge of the pot. It is the reflected consciousness element or *phala* that manifests the pot. Now the individual actually perceives the pot instead of just having a mere knowledge of it. There is thus this blend of the pot-conditioned consciousness and the mental modification in the form of the pot, which constitutes the second stage. In short, what we are saying is that perceptuality of an insentient object must satisfy two conditions. One is that there must be the mental modification in the form of object, and the other is the blend of the object-conditioned consciousness with the consciousness element in the mental modification known as *phala*. Therefore, an insentient object like pot is said to be both *vṛtti-vyāpya* and *phala-vyāpya*.

However, the process is different in the case of the perceptual knowledge of Brahman. As in the knowledge of pot, a mental modification is necessary for the removal of ignorance. From the study of the Upaniṣadic texts, there arises the mental modification where Brahman, the pure consciousness, is reflected therein. The blend of mental modification and pure consciousness is known as the knowledge of Brahman, or *Brahmākāra-vṛtti*. And it is this mental modification inspired by the reflection of Brahman in it that removes the primal nescience (*mūlāvidyā*). As the

removal of the primal nescience is associated with a mental modification (just like the pot), it is also said to be *vṛtti-vyāpya*. However, unlike the pot which is an insentient object, Brahman is self-luminous. Therefore, what happens is that once ignorance is removed or destroyed (*avidyā-nivṛtti*), the pure consciousness, which is self-luminous, manifests of its own accord. There is no need for the spiritual element present in the mental modification (i.e. *phala*) to manifest it. This is technically called *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* or the knowledge as Brahman. *Avidyā-nivṛtti* and *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* are co-terminus. What this means is that the Self is not attained only after ignorance is removed or destroyed. In other words, *avidyā-nivṛtti* is not the productive factor of *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* in the sense that thread is the productive factor of cloth. Brahman or pure consciousness is all-pervasive and ever-present. It is not something which comes into being after ignorance is removed. *Avidyā-nivṛtti* is, therefore, not the cause, and *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* is not an effect. Instead, it is like the light of a burning candle that is kept in a closed box. Once the lid is removed, the illumination of the candle immediately becomes apparent. The knowledge of Brahman can be compared to the factor which activates the removal process. The lid is ignorance. Once the lid is removed, the illumination (Brahman) which is ever-present becomes apparent. There is, therefore, no need for the pure consciousness (Brahman) to get reflected in the mental modification for it to be perceptual. In other words, unlike an insentient object like pot, Brahman, which is self-luminous pure consciousness, is only *vṛtti-vyāpya* and not *phala-vyāpya*.

With *Brahma-sākṣātkāra*, the knowledge of the scriptures and the *mahāvākyas*, like *tat tvam asi*, is no longer mediate in nature. The seeker, now known as a *jīvan-mukta* (one who has gained liberation in life), knows beyond a shadow of doubt that Brahman is the ultimate reality. All names and forms are mere illusions. This is *aparokṣa-jñāna* or *svarūpa-jñāna*. It is of the nature of

*pratyakṣa* (perception). The seeker has gone beyond the knowledge of Brahman which is *parokṣa-jñāna* or *vṛtti-jñāna* and is one with Brahman like the subsiding waves becoming one with the ocean.

A final point to note is that only the knowledge as Brahman is real and, therefore, eternal. The knowledge of Brahman, which is only the mental modification arising from the Upaniṣadic texts and inspired by the reflection of Brahman in it, is ultimately false (*mithyā*). It is said to function like the power of clearing nut (*kataka*) that is used to clarify murky water. In the process of clarifying the water, the clearing nut itself gets precipitated along with the dirt. In the same way, the knowledge of Brahman, having removed ignorance, also gets destroyed. This is necessarily so because if it continues to exist along with Brahman, then there will be two eternal entities in existence. Such a position undermines the very foundation of Advaita which categorically denies a second to the one and only reality, Brahman.

#### NOTES

1. *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* (BSB), 1.1.1.
2. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.3.
3. Interaction (with an object, person or activity) leads to attachment.
4. *Bhagavad-gītā*, 3.20.
5. *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, 6.5.60.
6. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.
7. Introduction to *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (verse 2): "Jñānakarmaṇoḥ virodham parvatavat akampyam yathoktaṁ na smarasi kim." (There is a lot of difference between knowledge and action, it is unshakable like a mountain.)
8. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, 1.11: "saṁskṛtasya hi viśuddha-sattvasya ātma-vijñānamañjasaivotpadyate."

9. *BSB*, 3.4.26. He makes the same point in his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.2. "Through sacrifices (ritualistic actions). . . which conduce to purity; and one who, being purified, has a clean mind, will spontaneously attain knowledge."
10. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya (BUB)*, 4.4.23.
11. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2.4.5.
12. *BUB*, 2.4.5.
13. Objects do not have any existence of their own apart from the all-pervasive pure consciousness, which is the ground of the world.



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 SADĀŚIVA BRAHMENDRA'S BHAKTI YOGA
 

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Prema Nandakumar

The Kāverī delta culture remains a unique phenomenon that helped the Bhakti Movement take a great leap forward. Devotion to the Divine has been an inalienable component of Indian culture. For the past two millennia, hymns to the Mystic Supreme have been indicted and one finds them in the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Itihāsas, the Purāṇas and in the Sangam poetry. The Ālvārs and the Nāyanmārs (3rd to 9th c. A.D.) of Tamilnadu introduced pellucid bhakti poetry in a very big way. Soon it spread to all regions. Today this million-petalled phenomenon makes us the proud inheritors of a priceless heritage.

Of the many shades and forms used by the Bhakti poets is the Nāma Siddhānta Approach. The high importance given to the Name of the Lord in Bhakti poetry is well known. Tondar-adi-podi Ālvār opens his celebrated poem, *Tirumālai*, with the triumphant announcement that having learnt to repeat the Name of the Lord, the devotees have been able to dance on the heads of Yama and his minions, as the Name has chased away all fears associated with mortal life. Piḷḷai Lokācārya (12th century A.D.), the eminent teacher who lived in Srirangam, says in his *Mumukṣupadī*:

"Even if He is at a distance, this (the Name) draws close and renders help. It was the Name that streamed forth garments to Draupadī in distress."

The propagation of the Name of the Lord as a *sādhana* may be said to have begun in the Kāverī delta. For more than a hundred years in the 17th and 18th centuries, several saints were engaged in such a *sādhana* on the banks of the Kāverī. Among them, five are considered to be the sages of Nāma Siddhānta. They are Śrīdhara Veṅkaṭeśa Ayyāvāl, Bodhendra, Sadāśiva Brahmendra, Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, and Sadgurusvāmī. Of these again, the first three were contemporaries.

The propounders of the Nāma Siddhānta cult were themselves *tapasvins* and could easily remain submerged in Advaitic consciousness and feel the Lord within and without. However, the common man could not find it easy to follow conventional *yoga* and *tapasyā* like these spiritual personalities. He needed something solid to hold on to and the Name of the Lord was the answer. The Name has been hailed in all scriptures like the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma* and the *Bhāgavata*. Ādi Śaṅkara has written a commentary on the *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma* and noted in his celebrated *Bhaja Govindam* that the thousand Names of the Lord be sung.

The Nāma Siddhāntins take their cue from works like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata* that in this age of Kali, the Name alone can help us cross the sea of birth. Bodhendra who initiated this *sādhana* was the 59th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. He has written important works on the subject like *Nāmāmṛta-rahasya* and *Nāmāmṛta Sūryodaya*. He was firmly convinced that the name of Rāma was indeed the Tāraka-mantra. When he went to Puri and was staying in the house of the devotee Jagannātha Paṇḍita, a South Indian brahmin came to him and told his woe-ful story. When they were staying in a choultry on their way to Benaras, his wife had been kidnapped by a Muslim and had been forced to become a Muslim. He had found her again, and what was he to do now? Bodhendra scanned the *Bhagavan-Nāma-Kaumudī* written by Jagannātha's father, Lakshmi Śrīdhara and

assured the brahmin that the name of Rāma could cleanse us of all sins. Repeating Rāma Nāma with total sincerity and faith, the brahmin and his wife took a dip in the Pushkarini at Puri and the lady emerged even as she had been before the abduction. From now onwards he was known as Bhagavan-nāma Bodhendra.

Śrīdhara Venkateśa Ayyāvāl of Tiruvisainallūr was another great personality and his life is swathed in innumerable legends. One of them which we love to recall is how he fed a Harijan on the day he had to do *śrāddha* (annual ancestral ceremony) at home. The brahmins were upset and would not take part in the tithi, and walked out. Even as Ayyāvāl meditated upon Mahāliṅgasvāmi, two brahmins appeared and said they would take part in the tithi. They were none other than Subrahmaṇya and Vighneśvara! And when Ayyāvāl had to expiate the "sin" of having fed a Harijan with the cooked offerings of the tithi by taking a bath in the Ganges, Mother Gaṅgā's compassion brought her to the well in his house, and she streamed forth to the wonderment of the village assembly. Sadāśiva Brahmendra was a contemporary of these two messengers of the divine.

As we have it today, Sadāśiva Brahmendra's life is one that swirls with legends. But the facts that we have are themselves astonishing enough. He was born about 300 hundred years ago to Somanātha Yogi and Pārvatī Devī of Madurai who were devoted to reciting Rāma Nāma. It is said the couple had a vision in Rameshwaram where they had worshipped Lord Rāmanātha, who appeared in a dream and assured them that they will have a good child. They were soon blessed with a lovely child whom they named Śivarāmakṛṣṇa. Three years later Somanātha left for Himalayas to undertake *tapasyā*.

Śivarāmakṛṣṇa entered the Vedic Pāṭhaśālā at a tender age. His progress was swift, astonishing even the senior Ghanapāṭhis of the Pāṭhaśālā. His teacher directed him to go to Śrīdhara Ayyāvāl of Tiruvisainallūr for further studies. Having been married to a five-year old girl as was the custom in the distant

past, and carrying his mother's blessings, Śivarāmakṛṣṇa went to Tiruvisainallūr. Ayyāvāl was astonished at the absorption in Śāstras shown by the young man. So he took him to the legendary scholar, Paramaśivendra. Paramaśivendra accepted him. Being an "eka-santa-grāhī", Śivarāmakṛṣṇa's absorption of what was being taught to him was complete. Such was the mastery exhibited by him that Saccidānanda Śivābhinava Nṛsimha Bhārati of Sringeri refers to him as "one whose knowledge-power was applauded by his own teacher, Paramaśivendra".

Just as Śivarāmakṛṣṇa was shining forth as this, some ministers of the Mysore kingdom came to Thanjavur in search of a *samasthāna-vidvān*. They approached Paramaśivendra and requested him to send Śivarāmakṛṣṇa with them. The master agreed, as he thought this was a wonderful opportunity for the young man to blossom forth as a leading scholar of the times. At the Mysore court, the King welcomed him warmly and requested him to test scholars who approached the court for monetary help. Since Śivarāmakṛṣṇa was an expert in Śāstras as well as music, none of the scholars who came could really prove themselves well, and were paid very little as a solatium. Some time passed, and a young man from Thanjavur, Gopālakṛṣṇa Śāstī came to Śivarāmakṛṣṇa and was taken as a disciple. The disciple was true to his type and served his master well. One day he expressed a desire to see Paramaśivendra about whom his master kept speaking all the time. Permitted by Śivarāmakṛṣṇa, the disciple went to Thanjavur.

Paramaśivendra welcomed him and asked about how Śivarāmakṛṣṇa was doing in the Mysore court. Gopālakṛṣṇa said:

There is absolutely no doubt that Śivarāmakṛṣṇa is the crest-jewel among your students. However, because he is the Court scholar, his thoughts are concentrated upon defeating other scholars in search of livelihood, as he puts them through gruelling tests. So the scholars do not get paid properly. In any case, was he born for serving a king? If he comes out and engages himself in *tapasyā*, emperors will come and bow at his feet.

Paramaśivendra realised the truth in these words and recalled Śivarāmakṛṣṇa. When told about this by Gopālakṛṣṇa, Śivarāmakṛṣṇa resigned his post immediately and hastened to meet his teacher. Paramaśivendra welcomed him and said: "You have learnt to shut up the mouth of everyone else. But you have not learnt to control your tongue." That was a turning point in the young man's life. Śivarāmakṛṣṇa decided not to utter any word henceforth and received the initiation from his teacher who gave him the sannyāsin's name of Sadāśiva. Sadāśiva went away to Nerūr to undertake *tapasyā*.

Nerūr, isolated and the darling of nature, was an ideal place for performing *tapasyā*. We now see him as an *avadhūta* (sky-garmented) sannyāsin laving in the waves of *ātma-anubhava*, a state of spiritual oneness with the Supreme. Wandering on the banks of Amarāvati or Kāverī, he was totally impervious to heat and cold, pain and pleasure. Among the traditional records about him is one of his giving initiation to the Raja of Puḍucottah in 1738 by writing the Dakṣiṇāmūrti-mantra on sand. The Raja carried the sand on which the Guru had written the mantra in a golden casket and it is being worshipped in the Puḍucottah palace till today. He is their family guru and his statue has been set up under the *sthala-vṛkṣa* of Bṛhadambā Gokaṛṇeśvara Temple in Puḍucottah.

Sadāśiva Brahmendra decided to enter samādhi on the banks of Akhaṇḍa Kāverī at Nerūr. He sent word to the brahmins residing in Nerūr, and the rulers of Thanjavur, Puḍucottah and Mysore. On the appointed day, he entered the cave that had been prepared for him and his disciples covered the place with vilva leaves, camphor, sacred ash and mud. On the 12th day, the Śivaliṅga brought by his disciple from Benaras was installed there. Vijaya Raghunātha Thondaiman, the King of Puḍucottah, built a temple around the samādhi. The place is now a holy spot for pilgrims and annual *ārādhana* is conducted with great devotion.

There is an astonishing occurrence about the Samādhi which happened a hundred years ago. At that time the Sringeri Math was presided over by Śrī Saccidānanda Śivābhinava Nṛsimha Bhāratī. During his pontificate, he wished to master Pariśa-yoga. He travelled to Nerūr in the hope that he would learn the *yoga* from Brahmendra himself in person. After halting in Raṅganāthapuram on the southern bank of Amarāvati, he proceeded to Nerūr in his palanquin. But the palanquin could not move forward. The bearers said that someone was pushing them back. Immediately the Swami got down and walked towards Nerūr, prostrating at each step taken. Entering the temple, he seated himself on the platform in front of the Samādhi. His *tapasyā*, all alone there continued for three days. On the third day, those outside the compound wall heard sounds of a conversation within. Obviously Brahmendra in his disembodied form was clearing the Swami's doubts. At the dawn of the 4th day, the Swami emerged with a garland of forty-five verses composed by him on Brahmendra, his guru. Presently he returned to Sringeri, built a place for himself on the banks of Tungabhadra and retired from the pontificate. He nominated Śrī Candraśekhara Bhāratī to the Sringeri Peetham.

The stotra of the Sringeri Ācārya strives to give a form to the formless, and limn the image of the guru as a vision of knowledge:

His hand is his pillow.  
He is embraced by the damsel,  
Renunciation. The space  
Is his garment.  
To Sadāśiva our homage.

An able propounder of the essence  
Of all the Vedas. Full of compassion  
To those who bow to him. An image  
Of Truth-Consciousness-Bliss.  
To Sadāśiva our homage.<sup>1</sup>

Further on, Śrī Nṛsimha Bhāratī hails him as a teacher who makes it easy as sweet grapes (*drākṣāśikṣaṇacaturavyavahārāya*);

one who purifies the world by his glance; a sea of charity; a transformatory agent who can turn even a greedy person into a self-controlled man. Apparently referring to his own personal encounter, the Swami says:

He gives clear guidelines  
To those who have doubts  
About a scholar's ways and goal  
As spoken in the scriptures,  
To Sadāśiva our homage.<sup>2</sup>

Saluting him as the Emperor of Yogis (*Mahāyogirāt*), the Swami says that Brahmendra was not only the possessor of theoretical knowledge but one who put the Advaita consciousness to practice.

There are two facets of Sadāśiva Brahmendra's works. There are his treatises on Advaita, written in Sanskrit. However, these works are meant for the scholarly elite. R. Krishnamurthy has listed the works:

He (Sadāśiva Brahmendra) wrote brief glosses on the *Brahma-sūtras*, and the *Yoga-sūtras*. These glosses are highly scholarly pieces, and lucid in style and expression. From Appaya Dīkṣita's *Siddhāntaleśa Saṅgraha*, which is a compilation of different interpretations of Advaita as propounded by Śaṅkara, he produced a resume entitled *Siddhānta Kalpavallī*, and another from his guru Paramaśivendra's *Vedānta Nāma Sahasra Vākya*. He produced a work entitled *Yoga Sudhākaram* which is a commentary on Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*. His other works are: *Ātma-vidyā-vilāsa*, *Śiva-mānasika-pūjā* and *Advaita-rasamañjari*. *Advaita-rasamañjari* in fifty-two śloka expounds the core of Advaita philosophy. Apart from these, there are works noted as *Paramahaṁsacaryā*, *Bhāgavata-saṅgraha* and *Sūta-saṁhitā Sārasaṅgraha*.<sup>3</sup>

Singaravelu Mudaliyar's *Abhidhāna Cintāmaṇi* also lists his *Dvādaśopaniṣad-dīpikā*. Most of Brahmendra's works were published in the early years of the last century by Sri Vani Vilas Press, Srirangam. The work, *Ātma-vidyā-vilāsa*, speaks of a self-realised yogi. The sixty-two verses could well be a description of

Brahmendra himself. The *Yoga-sudhākaram* is another work which conveys truths tested by experience:

A yogi, having given up the multitude of Śāstras and also the worldly duties in their entirety, remains like an unquivering lamp, by resorting to the external bliss.

Treading along the path of Vairāgya and climbing the palace of philosophy lit by the lamp of knowledge, the king of ascetics lives happily with mukti. Having the directions as his garments and adorning himself with *Nirāśā* (absence of desire), the serene sage triumphs, holding the begging bowl in his hands and resting under the tree.<sup>4</sup>

The *Śiva-mānasika-pūjā* is an enthralling monologue with the Divine. For yogis like Brahmendra who lived in a continued state of divine consciousness (Śivānubhava), the Divine was a part of their being. But how was this state attained? And how to teach others the methodology of reaching this plane? Brahmendra assumes himself as the aspirant in search of the *anubhava* and proceeds to tell us the manner in which we should aspire for the Divine. The formal rituals of worship become infructuous when the deity is Śiva himself.

Oh Sarveśvara! can anyone say that he has lit the *dīpa* to You when You are the "Sarveśvara", and the repository of mental poise? When You are the embodiment of eternal effulgence, how can the lamp shed its lustre in front of You?"<sup>5</sup>

So the aspirant in the path of Yoga should learn the discipline of *mānasa-pūjā*, worshipping with the mind. This is very difficult compared to the worship done with material objects. Here the mind has to be brought under total control, freed from desire, lust and the million sicknesses that plague it. Then only is the proper worship of the Divine possible. And that worship has but one ritual: complete surrender at the lotus feet of the Lord. Ask no questions. Allow the Divine to take possession of your body, mind and soul. Let this mind be devoured by Him (*kabalitametat*)!

Let 'bhakti' originate in me to worship Him, Parabrahman who is sweet to the universe; who enjoys with Pārvati; whose heart has been made supple with love, and whose duty is to protect His 'bhaktas'.<sup>6</sup>



It is obvious from his works of exegesis and philosophy that Sadāśiva Brahmendra was an in-depth scholar of Advaita Vedānta, and had mastered the needed scriptures and Purāṇas at an early age. Perhaps these were written during his days as a remarkable scholar in the Mysore Court. His latter life was, of course, that of an *Avadhūta-sannyāsi*. Obviously, Brahmendra had achieved oneness with Brahman through the sheer leap of knowledge, *jñāna*.

Speaking of the discipline which leads to such oneness, Krishnachandra Bhattacharya says:

All religion makes for the realization of the self as sacred, but the religion of Advaita is the specific cult of such realization understood explicitly as self-knowledge, as sacred knowledge, and as nothing but knowledge. Without rejecting any other *sādhana*, it prescribes knowledge as its distinctive *sādhana* and regards it as self-sufficing and requiring no supplementation (*samuccaya*). The self is to be known—accepted in the first instance in faith, which as confirmed, clarified, and formulated by reason would be 'inwardized' into a vision.<sup>7</sup>

Brahmendra had gained Advaita at-one-ment with Brahman, but the vision percolated to the common man as simple songs that are sung to this day. Thus, while the scholar in Brahmendra remains for the scholars, the poet in him rules over the vast kingdom of devotees to this day. This is the divine paradox exhibited by great Advaitins. While the self remains withdrawn from all outer activities, an innate compassion wells up unconsciously in the yogi that this at-one-ment with Brahman must be made available to others as well. There is an electric spontaneity about the songs of Sadāśiva Brahmendra because his Advaita was very much a positive experience of the Brahman-bliss that crowns Existence and Consciousness. As another great yogi of our times, Sri Aurobindo, has observed:

...when the heart and life turn towards the Highest and the Infinite, they arrive not at an abstract existence or non-existence, a Sat or else a Nirvana, but at an existent, a Sat Purusha, not merely at a consciousness, but at a conscious Being, a Chaitanya Purusha, not merely at a purely impersonal

delight of the Is, but at an infinite I am of bliss, an Anandamaya Purusha; nor can they immerse and lose his consciousness and bliss in featureless existence, but must insist on all three in one, for delight of existence is their highest power and without consciousness delight cannot be possessed. That is the sense of the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful.<sup>8</sup>

There is also another reason for Sadāśiva Brahmendra inditing his wonderful hymns which have become part of the South Indian *bhajana-sampradāya*. He was wandering on the banks of Kāverī at a time when classical music was blossoming in a wonderful manner. One could not escape listening to the soulful music for the very fields and woods reverberated with music. It was the gift of the Bhakti Movement. The Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs had shown how Deva-gāna was possible and was the only music that was desirable. When Brahmendra lisped in self-forgetful ecstasy or murmured while seated in the whorled caves of Brahmānubhava, the numbers came. Śrī Nṛsiṃha Bhāratī has referred to this aspect in his *Śrī Sadāśivendra-stava*.

Creator of lovely poesy,  
 Capable of chasing away fears  
 That haunt us,  
 One with a golden body,  
 To Sadāśiva our homage.

Teacher of Tāraka-mantra  
 With a face that defeats  
 The pride of the moon,  
 Immersed in Tāraka-japa,  
 To Sadāśiva our homage.<sup>9</sup>

Sadāśiva Brahmendra shows very clearly that the erudite scholar can also be the sweet singer. When Jñāna attains fruition, it becomes Bhakti, said C. Rajagopalachari. When such a flow occurs, dry intellectualism withdraws from the arena completely. It is henceforth nothing but the auspicious Name of the Supreme, a state of joyful auspiciousness for the soul. Such is the

Śiva-anubhava: experience of divine auspiciousness. This is insinuated in Brahmendra's *Śiva-mānasika-pūjā*. In this poem the Advaitic scholar asks for the streaming of devotional poesy within him (*udetu bhaktir-me*). Brahmendra's prayers were not in vain. Incandescent poetry gushed forth and acted as water brought to a parched land, inundating the Kāverī countryside. This too was the Lord's doing. He wished to make the devotee a conduit to teach the common man an unfailing pathway to the Divine through Nāma Siddhānta.

The songs of Sadāśiva Brahmendra fall into two categories. Ten of them hail the formless Divine, viz. Brahman; the rest sing the praises of divinities like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Gaṅgā. Whether singing of Nirguṇa or Saguṇa-Brahman, the melody of the songs immediately draws us into a rarefied atmosphere of pure devotion. The "experience" (*anubhava*) whether of the Formless or of the Form is equally charming because it is the experience which gets recorded. The goal is a personalised attainment and that is left to the aspirant. For one who had immersed in Brahman, this recollection is not for himself but for the listener; for the aspirant who wants to at-one-ment with Brahman, this utterance is a pathfinder.

Generally, it is understood that one needs something to hold on to when engaged in *bhakti-yoga*. The devotee needs a deity whom he can invoke, worship and love. This is the basis of songs of devotion. How can one hold on to something which is Not, which has no form, nor movement? If Brahmendra has been able to make us sing his hymns of Brahma-anubhava, it shows how concrete his emotions are, and how a mere retelling can be nectarean, and how wonderful the original ecstasy must have been! The sublime poem, *Khelati Pindande* is a magic witness to Brahmendra's style that makes the Nirguṇa-Brahman an experience. He has a clear vision of what is happening and makes us watch too and grow into the experience of the Divine's play in the world of his own manifestation:

The Lord is playing in this world of matter and the beyond!  
 He calls out: I am the Swan, I am the Swan, the Swan I am,  
 the Supreme!  
 I am the Supreme Soul, I am the All, I am Brahman, Brahman I am!  
 He plays in the skin, eye, ear, tongue and nose: the fivefold spots  
 of vital airs.  
 Sound, touch, taste (sight, smell) that have as friends Sattva,  
 Rajas and Tamas.  
 His is the play in intellect, mind, heart and ego as also in earth,  
 water, fire, air and sky.  
 He moves around as the Paramahansa, one who created Brahmā,  
 Viṣṇu and Śiva.<sup>10</sup>

Illusion has no place here for the idea never is brought in. The world is true enough because the Supreme is true, and the manifestation never is unless He wills it and allows the play of varied forces in this manifestation. Brahmendra takes us straight to the opening words of the *Īśā Upaniṣad*: "All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement, in the universal motion."<sup>11</sup>

The song explicates the idea in all its lines and concludes that the Supreme is envisioned as wandering in the Paramahansa's garb, the Paramahansa being one who knows, "I am That" (*Aham Brahmāsmi*): all joy, he whirls around saying *Haṁsaḥ So'ham* (I am that Swan) repeatedly. The *Īśā Upaniṣad* has an explanation for the Ānanda which accompanies this swirling of the Self in the manifested creation:

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?<sup>12</sup>

Not grief but the very positive emotion of Ānanda. Only, this Ānanda is untainted by any worldliness. It is the Brahmānanda of the Being that has come face to face with the Supreme. "*Khelati Pindande*" is but one example of the easy manner in which Brahmendra could bring Upaniṣadic truths into the life of every man.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the four instruments of the Indian religion which have sustained Sanātana Dharma from times immemorial: an ever expanding number of authorised scriptures, the priesthood, the guru and *kuladharmā*. The *guru-paramparā* for the Indian is a sacred institution, for the guru is the visible divine who chases away the darkness of ignorance from the disciple. In fact, the Paramācārya put it simply:

There is no one higher than the guru. We must come to have full faith in him. If we truly believe that Īśvara himself has come to us in the form of our guru, there is no need for us to worship Īśvara apart from the guru. It is the faith based on such belief, such devotion to the guru, that will take us across the ocean of *saṁsāra*.<sup>13</sup>

Such a guru brings an assurance when he teaches the disciple. Caught in the confusions of earthly living, our minds do list up questions endlessly. There is then the unspoken fear in our minds when we draw closer to Advaita experience, for we hug our ego fondly and will not give it up easily. What will happen to me if I am no more "I"? How can I be what I am if I am lost in the universal self, like the salt doll which has lost itself when fallen into the ocean? It is the guru who removes this veil of fear that suffocates us when we take to the path of Advaita anubhava. Raja Rao, the novelist has given a graphic picture in *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) of how the disciple feels when caught in the meshes of *saṁsāra* and thinks that is the truth, and how the guru inculcates the truth-vision into us:

The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two—and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood . . . and looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wherever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality, you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent—you are—the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, 'Ayyo!' 'Oh! It's the serpent!' You run and roll and lament, and have compassion for fear of

pain, others' and your own. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One—The Guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. "It's only the rope". He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent..."<sup>14</sup>

The ideal guru makes such a statement of assurance when the disciple shudders with a million doubts. Brahmendra's song, *Nahire nahi sankha* is one such poem:

There is no fear of any kind, not even a little of it.  
 All those who meditate upon the Beginningless, Indestructible, the One,  
 the Eternal, the Brahman, the Peace, (for them there is no fear)  
 Those who give up the sorrows of life and go in search of the Existent One  
 in the form of Bliss (for them there is no fear)  
 Those who study the song imbedded with Vedic truths, delivered by the  
 Supreme Teacher (for them there is no fear),

The grace of the guru is very important in this *yoga-vidyā*, and Brahmendra says he was himself helped to become a Brahman-knower by the grace of his guru, Paramaśivendra (*Brahmaivāhaṁ kila gurukṛpayā*). What is the teaching? The song, *Tadvajjīvatvam Brahmani* puts it in a nutshell, bringing in a few major similes used in philosophical treatises on Advaita:

The Jiva's nature is that of Brahman (the origin).

Like the moon's double in the water,  
 Or the reflection in a mirror.

Like the form of a man in a tree stump,  
 Or flowing water in the sun's rays.

Like silver seen in a conch-shell,  
 Or a snake in the rope.

This the Advaya-vidyā of the great Teacher,  
 That dispels Ignorance and Illusion.

Brahmendra was not a prolific composer, but the few he gifted us cover immense areas of our ancient culture. Just as *Khelati Pindande* brought out the concept of the all-pervading Universal,

and *Nahire Nahi sankha* the need to cast out fear in spiritual life, *Cintā nāsti kila* is a capsule advice to aspirants. Worry, that bane of happiness, simply withdraws if one cultivates equanimity. Those who overcome enemies like lust and bring their pride-borne senses under control (*khaṇḍita-sarvendriya-darpāṇām*) need not worry about anything, anymore! All that they need to do is to feel happy in the company of the devout. Remember, Brahman pervades all, says another song *Sarvam Brahmamayam*! Nothing more need be said except the advice: keep meditating "I am That" (*Hamsadhyānam*).

In the background of Brahmendra's life, we know that the statements in the three songs, *Poornabodhoham* and *Ānanda Pūrṇabodhoham* and *Saccidānandapūrṇabodhoham* constitute his spiritual autobiography. Always swimming in bliss (*sadānanda*), beyond the customs and rules of caste and status (*varṇāśramācāra-karmātidūroham*), incorruptible by pelf, Brahmendra calls himself the Brahman hailed by the Upaniṣads repeatedly (*śrutyantaśata-koṭiprakāṣitabrahmāham*), a mere witness who has lost the sense of "me" and "mine". Brahmendra's state is not merely the state of knowledge, but the knowledge which is ever and always Bliss, proclaims the song, *Ānandapūrṇoham satatam*. The song assures us that this state is the very essence of Advaita (*Advaita-sāra*), and the third song salutes his guru for making this experience possible, *Paramaśivendraśrīgurubodhitvam*.

When Sadāśiva Brahmendra could achieve the feat of making Advaita experience the subject of songs which have become very popular, it is not surprising that his songs on Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Gaṅgā keep us in thrall. It may be pointed out that he uses a minimum of Purāṇic references in these songs, and often they seem to be a bridge to draw us into Advaitic oneness with the Supreme. The songs on Rāma have a rare sweetness and seem to have influenced Tyāgarāja in a big way. While Tyāgarāja has opened one of his kritis with the words, *Bhajare Raghuvīram* after Brahmendra whose song beginning with these words is

famous, T.S. Parthasarathy feels *Khelati Mama hṛdaye* inspired Tyāgarāja's *Nadachi nadachi* in Kharaharapriyā rāga. "Tyāgarāja copies the idea that Ayodhya is really the *dahara ākāśa* where Ātmārāma shines along with Sītā who is the embodiment of peace." Among the Telugu brahmins of those days (both Brahmendra and Tyāgarāja belonged to this community), the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* was very popular. Brahmendra's song projects the symbol within the legend in a trice:

Rāma plays in my heart.

He is the guide who helps us cross the immense ocean of desire,  
And annihilates the demons, cupidity and hate.

Consort of Vaidehī who is Peace, he resides  
In Ayodhyā that is the still centre of the heart.

He guards the kingdom of Realised Souls,  
And is the image of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

Apparently, Kṛṣṇa took the lion's share of Brahmendra's attention. The songs on Kṛṣṇa are so musical and soul-enthralling that one wonders whether it is not actually the Flute-play from Brindavan that is heard in them. Taking a cue from Ādi Śaṅkara who called upon us to worship Govinda, Brahmendra asks us to worship Gopāla, in *Bhaja re Gopālam*. The childhood, boyhood and youth of Kṛṣṇa from the Daśama-skandha of the *Bhāgavata* flash before us lightning streaks in these songs: few, but roses! The song, *Smara vāram vāram*:

O mind, daily meditate on Nanda's son!

How he stole milk and ghee from the huts  
Of the cowherds, and wandered in the spaces  
Of Gokula and Brindavan.

His flute-play is sweet nectar; his play  
Sustains this creation; and brings it to end  
Only to recreate it.



He is the parrot caged in the hearts  
Of Realised souls; one who put to end  
The demons Dhenuka and Baka."

Meditating upon Kṛṣṇa's image, the song, *Brūhi Mukundeti*, is verily the life-force of Nāma Siddhānta. A song strung with the divine names of Kṛṣṇa as Mukunda, Keśava, Mādhava, Govinda, Kṛṣṇa who ever gives joy, the Beloved of Rādhā, Rāma, Cloud-dark, lotus-eyed, Rider of Garuḍa, Wielder of the Nandaka sword and Discus, dear to Akrūra! No translation can indicate the way our hearts dance when meditating with songs like *Mānasa Sañcarare*, *Gāyati Vanamālī* and *Krīḍati Vanamālī*. Repeated recitation illumines the significances of the poem too.

Brahmānanda is that experience which overwhelms the mind when it gains at-one-ment with Brahman by meditating on the soul-ravishing form of Kṛṣṇa. This at-one-ment becomes possible because Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme, has chosen his devotee as in *Krīḍati Vanamālī*. The cow-shed, *goṣṭha*, is the heart of the realised soul which is full of illuminations (the Vedic *go*), and the Lord has chosen this place as his residence. That is why Vāsudeva brought him over here when he was born in the prison in a heartless city. "Wearing a garland of fresh flowers, He is playing in the *goṣṭha* and He is adorned there by a garland of Realised Souls (*Paramahamsavara kusumasumālī*)".

Then there is his homage to Mother Gaṅgā, *Jaya Tuṅgatarāṅge Gaṅge*. It is a salutation to the mother of all rivers, who is more than a river, who shines as an image of the flowing grace of the Divine.

Victory to thee, Gaṅgā,  
Lofty-waved!

You purify the universe  
Created by Brahmā;  
Cut down the bonds  
That keep men in thrall.

You chase away the sins  
Committed by wicked men;  
Your waters are residence  
For shoals of tortoises.

Your services have been hailed  
By realised souls.  
You have received praise from  
Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śaṅkara.

These lovable hymns of Brahmendra prove that he was no distant scholar but very much part of the milieu of his times, giving them spiritual guidance and showing them a practical way to reach Brahman-consciousness. Their enduring popularity also proves that Sadāśiva Brahmendra is a Guru for all our tomorrows.

#### NOTES

1. Vv. 15–16. All translations from this hymn are by Prema Nandakumar.
2. Verse 31.
3. *The Saints of the Cauvery Delta* (1979), p. 60.
4. Translated by V.S.V. Guruswamy Sastrigal.
5. Translated by R. Krishnamurty.
6. Ibid.
7. "The Advaita and its Spiritual Significance", *The Cultural Heritage of India Vol. III* (1969), p. 250.
8. *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1955), p. 661.
9. Verses 24–25.
10. All the kritis of Brahmendra in this essay have been translated by Prema Nandakumar.
11. Translation by Sri Aurobindo.
12. Ibid.
13. Translated by R.G.K. *The Guru Tradition* (1991), p. 15.
14. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1968), p. 335.

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THE GĪTĀ ON RENUNCIATION AND  
SELF-SURRENDER

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S. Revathy\*

In the introduction to his celebrated commentary, *Gūdhārtha-dīpikā* on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī points out that the very purpose of the *Gītā* lies in presenting the means to liberation. For this reason steadfastness in action consisting of rites and duties (*karma-yoga*) and steadfastness in knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*) are taught in the first and the last six sections. As there is an unmitigated conflict between action and knowledge, they cannot be combined. Hence steadfastness in devotion to the Lord is declared in the middle six chapters. Loving devotion to God has the characteristics of both action and knowledge. This devotion is of three kinds—mixed with rites, pure and mixed with knowledge. It is this *karma-yoga* associated with the aspect of devotion, i.e. the attitude of surrender that is being highlighted by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the 18th chapter of the *Gītā*. This last chapter designated *Mokṣa-sannyāsa-yoga*, besides clarifying the difference between *sannyāsa* and *tyāga*, deals with *karma-yoga*,

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emphasizing *svadharma*, *jñāna-yoga*, emphasizing meditation and *bhakti-yoga*, emphasizing devotion. The Lord has said that the supreme devotee is he who has attained wisdom, is always in unison with the Absolute and has one-pointed devotion to God. It is apparent from this saying that loving devotion is the very best means to liberation.<sup>1</sup> The last chapter thus centres around *sāttvic* renunciation and self surrender.

## I

Performance of duty with a spirit of non-attachment (*niṣkāma-karma*), abstention from works urged by desires (*kāmya-karma*) and those forbidden by the Vedas (*niṣiddha-karma*) serve as the first step to attain liberation. The mind on being purged of impurities acquires a competence for discernment of the permanent and the transient. This is followed by the renunciation of all desires to enjoy the fruits of actions either in this world or in a hereafter. This spirit of disinterestedness is known as *vaśikāra* which signifies absolute control of mind and senses. The fourfold control of body and mind (*śama, dama, etc.*) known as the four *sādhana*s enriches the mind and opens up the way to renunciation. Total renunciation reinforces the will to attain *mokṣa*. Conative control undertaken prior to acquisition of true knowledge, or to the emergence of will to know the Self, has been mentioned earlier in verses like "He is a *sannyāsin* as also a *yogin*" (*BG*, 6.1). Arjuna entertains a doubt that this type of control being still matter-bound may admit of a qualitative diversity. Hence in the final chapter of the *Gītā*, we find Arjuna asking Lord Kṛṣṇa as to the exact nature of *sannyāsa* and *tyāga*. Both these words mean renunciation, and they have been discussed in the entire *Gītā*. Arjuna is not very keen in knowing which is superior—whether *karma-yoga* or *sannyāsa*, but he is eager to know the difference, if any, between *sannyāsa* and *tyāga*, two words that Lord Kṛṣṇa has been using sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes differently, throughout his teaching.

Persons who have not attained knowledge of the self and have not developed the desire to know the self are eligible only for empirical activities. But they are also occasionally found to renounce some work in favour of another. This control of behaviour is known as *sannyāsa* as it also involves renunciation. Arjuna is keen in understanding the qualitative differences of such conduct on the basis of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Also he is eager to learn about the truth of *tyāga*. Are the meanings of these two words, *sannyāsa* and *tyāga*, different as between a pot and a cloth, or are they two species under the same genus like "Brāhmin" and "mendicant". If the former is adopted, then Arjuna wishes to know the truth about *tyāga* as distinct from *sannyāsa*. If it be the latter, then he desires to know the conditions which give rise to this generic difference. In answering him, the Lord sums up the teachings that have been put forth in the earlier chapters. Citing the views of some people,<sup>2</sup> Kṛṣṇa says that sacrifices like Iṣṭi, Paśu, Soma, etc., that are enjoined for the achievement of definite results ultimately do not purify the mind. They are called *kāmyas*, desire-fulfilling works. This view holds that the elimination of all *kāmya-karmas* with their results is known as *sannyāsa*.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* text, "Men of spiritual birth desire to have the knowledge (*vividiṣanti*) of Brahman by the study of one's Veda, by the performance of sacrifice and the offering of gifts and by austerity in the form of fasting,"<sup>3</sup> prescribes the duties relating to the stages of the celibate, of the householder and of the hermit, and it is injunctive in character. These are *nitya-karmas* that have been enjoined both for knowledge and for the quest thereof. They purify the mind and generate the will to know. Therefore, seekers of truth must perform *nitya-karmas* as works dedicated to God. But *kāmya-karmas* are to be renounced along with their fruits.<sup>4</sup>

Another view holds that renunciation of fruits of all work, whether *nitya* or *kāmya*, is *tyāga*.<sup>5</sup> All works irrespective of their nature are to be performed only for purification of mind. The

desire to have the knowledge of Brahman (*vividiṣā*) arises only from a pure mind. Thus it may be known that the first half of the *Gītā* text explained above speaks of renouncing all desire-oriented actions (*kāmya*) along with the desire for results and only enjoined duties (*nitya-karma*) are to be performed as they produce the desire to know Brahman. The second half of the verse implies that the desire to know follows from the performance of both *nitya-* and *kāmya-karmas*. The only difference lies in this that in performing *kāmya-karmas* the aspirant must abandon all desire for fruits. Thus renunciation of desire for fruits of all *kāmya-karmas* is known as *sannyāsa*. Performance of rites for purification of mind without any craving for the fruits thereof is either *tyāga* or *sannyāsa*. Hence the two words do not have meanings that belong to two different classes unlike the words "pot" and "cloth", but the words are interchangeable.<sup>6</sup> Lord Kṛṣṇa then proceeds to give his definite ruling on the subject of renunciation of actions motivated by achievement of fruits. This kind of renunciation is of three kinds depending upon the predominance of the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* in the persons who perform the acts. (a) performance of actions, but renunciation of motives; (b) renunciation of works, but existence of motives; (c) renunciation of works as well as of motives. Of these, the first belongs to the *sattva* category and is desirable, and the second being *rājasic* or *tāmasic* in nature is to be avoided. It becomes *rājasic* when performed with grief, and *tāmasic* when it stems from an error. The third is practised by those who have transcended the realm of matter and have no obligation to perform duties. Thus renunciation of motives purifies the mind and generates the will to know. Then one embarks upon the study of Vedānta. When there arises the knowledge of the self, even the study of scriptures is not needed. This is called *vividiṣā-sannyāsa* (renunciation of the seeker). It merely involves adoption of the sole means of study with the renunciation of all other actions. In the case of those who, owing

to the practice of these means in their past lives, are born wise, there is renunciation of both actions and motives. This is known as *vidvat-sannyāsa* (renunciation of the wise).

Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the importance of obligatory rites like *yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas*, and asserts that they should not be given up because they purify the mind. So are the *kāmya* works imperative, in the view of Lord Kṛṣṇa, provided the performer forsakes attachment and desire for fruits. The question then arises that, if *yajña*, *dāna*, etc. purify the mind, they would do so even if performed with a desire for fruits. Similar consideration applies to *kāmya-karmas* too, and hence they would also purify the mind. It is true that *kāmya-karmas* also purify the mind being essentially of a religious nature, but the purity they generate may be conducive to the enjoyment of the particular fruits of those rites and not for the rise of knowledge. The *Vārtika* puts it thus:

*Kāmyas* do purify the mind, but that purity is only for a proper enjoyment of their fruit. Surely through such a body as that of a village hog one does not enjoy the results befitting Indra.<sup>7</sup>

In the view of Lord Kṛṣṇa, those rites that generate purity, facilitating the rise of knowledge alone should be performed by aspirants eschewing motives, though the same may cause bondage, when performed with a motive. The obligatory rites, therefore, are never to be renounced. Such a renunciation is said to arise from ignorance or from *rajas*, when a work is given up out of apprehension of physical strain. But he hastens to add that the same rites, when performed as duties renouncing attachment and craving for fruit, ranks in *sattva* variety, and is highly commendable and is called *sāttvic* renunciation. Although the injunctive texts do not refer to any fruits for obligatory rites, yet they must be performed as duties. Now, if obligatory rites are not associated with any fruit, how is it possible to perform them without attachment for fruits? It must be understood that obligatory rites do have incidental results. As Āpastamba states: "A mango tree

which is grown for the sake of fruits, incidentally provides shade and fragrance, in the same way, when righteousness is practised, (other) desirable ends follow as a natural consequence."<sup>8</sup>

Glorifying sāt̄tvic renunciation which is nothing but *karma-yoga*, the Lord states that he who practises this kind of renunciation with the sole aim of purging his mind of evil thoughts, discriminates between self and not-self and is freed of all the evil effects of *rajas* and *tamas* which stand in the way of true knowledge. His mind is conditioned by an all-pervasive purity of thought, and his entire conduct is one of dedication to God. Such a one enriched by this holy quality becomes ripe for the rise of knowledge. Control of mind and body, non-attachment and submission to a preceptor are the predisposing factors generating in him reflection and meditation on Vedāntic sayings. They facilitate the dawning in him of the truth of the great saying of the Upaniṣad "*aham brahmāsmi*". At that stage he transcends all obligations to perform duties. He becomes completely indifferent to the quality of works. He has fulfilled himself. So says the *Muṇḍaka* text: "When that Self, which is both the high and the low, is realized, the knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all of one's actions become dissipated."<sup>9</sup> Since sāt̄tvic renunciation leads to such a high level of consciousness, it has to be adopted at any cost as the most desirable means. The text of the *Gūā* sums up as follows:

One whose mind is completely free from attachment, whose senses are under control and who has given up desires, achieves the highest success in life, viz. that state of consciousness which facilitates realization of reality, by renouncing all activity.<sup>10</sup>

So far about sāt̄tvic renunciation. We shall now refer to the Lord's instruction of *karma-yoga* emphasizing *svadharma* and devotion.

## II

There is a clear-cut division of work among the four social orders, based on the difference of their natural *guṇas*. Accordingly,



their duties also are prescribed on the basis of their innate qualities. There are other kinds of duties also which nature imposes on man. Arjuna, therefore, as a kṣatriya must fulfil his military responsibilities and should not take to mendicancy enjoined for Brāhmaṇas. Even though such war-like acts result in death and destruction of friends and relatives, they do not generate sin. For, a kṣatriya's duties involving valour, chivalry, etc. are by their very nature free from sin flowing from destruction of human life. Although they cause an emotional strain, they cause no sin to him. Instead, performance of duties extraneous to one's native quality will lead to fearful consequences. Arjuna is being taught that he must not forsake the duties like fighting and jyotiṣṭoma rite, which come naturally to him, for the simple reason that they involve violence. Kṛṣṇa thus emphasizes the importance of *svadharma*. It is necessary not only for the sake of purity but for the sake of social harmony also. All these works are conditions precedent to purification of mind. Indeed, all activity, be it native or extraneous, suffers from the basic flaw of materiality. For instance, no war can be fought without destruction of life. Thus all works have the general defect of materiality and specific defect like violence, etc. They should not be forsaken till the attainment of self-realization. What the Lord wants to emphasize is that those who have realized the truth, whose minds are pure, can and should renounce all mundane activity, but not others, who should perform all duties ordained for them even though they are seemingly sinful. Not only this, an aspirant of liberation, whatever may be his particular stage of life should perform the duties enjoined for his social order and stage of life, motivelessly and in a spirit of dedication to God. So says the *Gītā*, "A human being achieves success by adoring through his own duties Him from whom is the origin of entities and by whom is all this pervaded."<sup>11</sup> This verse reiterates the truth of the Upaniṣads<sup>12</sup> that the Lord is the indwelling spirit that rules and guides. Therefore, He should be worshipped; should be appeased by performance of duties,

ordained for the social order to which an individual belongs and for the stage of life which he is in. Through His grace success in the form of purity of mind is ensured, and it makes one fit for realizing the identity of the inner self with the supreme Self.

Lord Kṛṣṇa then proceeds to speak of *karma-yoga* emphasizing the aspect of devotion, i.e. the attitude of surrender. A person who has purified his mind by performance of works, dedicating its fruits to God, in the process, develops a sense of absolute surrender to God. When a person of spiritual birth attains this stage, he naturally takes to renunciation, as it is not prohibited in his case. But eventually his liberation must be ascribed to divine grace bestowed on him as a reward for his self-surrender and not to renunciation of works. If, however, a kṣatriya or any other person reaches this stage, he is expected to perform duties prescribed for him, for he does not have the competence for renunciation. But this will not stand in the way of his eventual liberation provided he dedicates himself to Lord Vāsudeva who is God himself. Through his grace he attains the highest state of immortality. Such an individual who has thus dedicated himself to God is incapable of performing any forbidden deed, and even if he does, by the grace of God no sin accrues to him.

Self-surrender, dedication to God, is thus the only means to liberation and not execution of works or renunciation thereof. Hence Arjuna, as a kṣatriya, should offer all his works to the Lord irrespective of whether they are secular or religious. He should know that the Lord is his only resort. He should eliminate all other ideas from his mind and fill it with the idea of God. If God rules Arjuna's mind, he will overcome all the difficulties like desire, anger, etc. very easily through divine grace. Instead, if he disobeys the Lord's commands, he will perish, taking to renunciation for which he has no eligibility.<sup>13</sup> According to Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna's prejudice against war arising from his aversion to the prospect of killing of friends and relatives is based on error.

He should realize that he is not a free agent. God and his own nature will make him do what he is trying to avoid. As a matter of necessity, he will have to fight in spite of his wishes.

To save Arjuna from mastering the *Gītā* in all its aspects which is rather an arduous task, Lord Kṛṣṇa, also out of his abundant affection for him, instructs the sum and substance of this lore. *Karma-yoga*, he says, is a secret culminating in renunciation. *Jnāna-yoga*, the way of wisdom, flows from it and is, therefore, a great secret. The way of worship and love (*bhakti-yoga*) is being taught as the most secret of all the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa.<sup>14</sup> By way of conclusion the Lord exhorts Arjuna to forsake all dharmas and take refuge in him. All rites should be laid aside by Arjuna, for, they do not afford him any protection. Lord Kṛṣṇa is the only saviour. He is the presiding deity of ritualism of all forms. Hence Arjuna should seek the unique refuge in him with the firm conviction that it is only by securing divine grace that he can achieve success. He should worship Lord Kṛṣṇa incessantly for, the latter is the infinite principle of bliss. With the exclusion of all ideas of phenomena, and all thoughts on matter, Arjuna's affection for God is to be heightened. When it is said that all rites should be abandoned and one should seek refuge in God, it only means that resort to the Lord is as effective as the sum total of all rites. This is the essence of the concluding verse of instruction in the *Gītā*, which reads:

*sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja  
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.*<sup>15</sup>

The word "*dharma*" in this verse, according to one view, does not refer to its original meaning of scriptural rites or virtue, but refers to all kinds of work. But the context shows that the verse is not designed to preach renunciation. On the contrary, it applies to what is enjoined in general for celibates, householders, forest-dwellers and mendicants to take refuge in God alone, ignoring

the rites and duties, even if they stand enjoined. In the same way, the specific mention of abandonment is to be understood as elucidation, but not as a command or injunction.

The Viśiṣṭādvaitins consider this verse as one where the Lord advocates *prapatti-mārga* or self-surrender. Vibhīṣaṇa, is a noble illustration of the implication contained in this *carama-śloka*, the gospel of *prapatti-mārga*.

Thus, the 18th chapter highlights the instruction that surrender to God is the essence of all scriptures. The *Gītā* instructs about dedication of works to God and not renunciation, because even renunciation will be futile without self-surrender. Hence, the *Gītā* concludes with this instruction.

#### NOTES

1. Introductory verse No.39 of *Gūḍhārtha-dīpikā (GD)* of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the *Bhagavad-gītā (BG)*, with *Gūḍhārtha Tattvāloka* of Bachcha Sarma. Ed. by Vasudev Laxman Shastri, Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1983.
2. *BG*, 18.2.
3. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
4. *GD* on *BG*, 18.2, pp. 674–75.
5. *BG*, 18.2.
6. *GD* on *BG*, 18.2, pp. 676–77.
7. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Vārtika* on *Sambhanda Bhāṣya*, 1130. Q. in *GD*, p. 681.
8. *Āpastamba Dharma-sūtra*, 1.20.3, Q. in *GD*, p. 685.
9. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.8.
10. *BG*, 18.49.
11. *Ibid.*, 46.
12. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3.1.1; 3.4.1; *Śvetāsvatarā Upaniṣad*, 4.10; *MU*, 1.1.8.
13. *BG*, 18.57–58.
14. *Ibid.*, 64.
15. *Ibid.*, 66.

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RAMBLING THOUGHTS ON TAMIL  
SIDDHAS AND ADVAITA

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T.N. Ganapathy\*

This article is an off-shoot of my earlier one on "The Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas and Advaita: A Study in Parallelism" published in Volume 26, Number 1 of the *The Voice of Śaṅkara* (2001). In the present article which is a rambling thought, I intend focusing on the Advaita elements in the philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas. This focusing does not mean that the Tamil Siddhas have been influenced by the Advaitic thought and philosophy or vice versa. It simply means that some of the ideas and concepts of Advaitic thought are *also* found in Siddha thought. This study is simply an expression of the dictum that to think differently does not mean that one should not reach identical conclusions. Since I find a lot of parallel view-points between Advaita and Siddha philosophy, I have ventured (in my other works on Siddhas) to call Siddha philosophy as Siddha-Advaita.

Siddha philosophy is based on Tāntric Yoga. The aim of the Tāntric *yogin* is to be absorbed in the eternal, undifferentiated

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super-consciousness. According to the Siddhas, by the process of breathing, every living being (*jīva*) is doing a *japa*, that is the utterance of a *mantra*. The breath of every person in inhaling makes the sound *saḥ* and in exhaling that of *aham*. These sounds make *so'ham*, I am He. Throughout day and night every living being performs this *japa* constantly but unconsciously. This is called *ajapa-japa* or in Tamil *acabai*. This super-conscious state of the soul is called *vedānta-turīyam* by Bhogar in his *Śivayoga Jñānam-12* (verse 1). This is a state of a mystical equation between the self and the Absolute as enshrined in Advaita.

Bhogar uses the term *samādhi* to mean a state of Brahman knowing Itself, that is, it means self-knowledge or *ātma-bodham* of which Śaṅkara speaks. Self-knowledge is one's original identity or oneness with Brahman. The term *samādhi*, according to the Siddhas, also means an experience that is completely indescribable. The Advaitic expression to this state of experience is *anirvacanīya*.

The state of *turīya* is explained by the Siddhas as a state "beyond the beyond" called *atītam* in Tamil. Their description of the *turīya* state is almost identical with that of Advaita thought. The expression "beyond the beyond" stands for the fact that the ultimate supreme consciousness, called Absolute or Sat-cit-ānanda is beyond the three thresholds of man—the threshold of the world, the threshold of time and the threshold of man's limiting consciousness. The phrase "beyond the beyond" also suggests that the nature of Reality is inexpressible, trans-linguistic and beyond relations, which is more or less the same view held by Advaita.

Further, this expression also makes a distinction between the God of religion and the Absolute or Brahman, which distinction is the bed-rock of Advaita Vedānta. According to the Siddhas, if the Absolute is beyond all relations, it cannot be the God of religion. It can be only Īśvara of the Advaita. For the God of religion implies the relation between the worshipper and the

worshipped. This relationship creates a rupture in the oneness of the Absolute. If the Absolute, according to the Siddhas, is beyond relations, it must be one; that is, it must be a state of "not two-ness," a state of *advaitam*. When the Siddhas say that the Absolute is "one", it is not a "one" of the many. Bhogar in his *Jñāna Pūjāvidhi-13* (verse 12) suggests that the Absolute can never be fully defined or finally grasped by the various religions of the world, because It is not a God of religion. The Siddha feels that rigid theism has been responsible for a good deal of unnecessary controversy and hostility among the followers of different religions. To be free from any religious identification, they call the Absolute as "Thatness" or "Suchness" or *Idu* or *parāparam*. In other words, the conception of Śivam of the Tamil Siddhas, which is the same as the idea of Brahman of Advaita, is grammatically and philosophically an impersonal conception.

According to the Siddhas, the state of the Absolute can be grasped only by *jñāna* and not by *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is related to a theistic conception of God. The theistic conception of God is the basis of the multiplication of religions. According to Śivavākkīyar, if we accept the theistic conception, we have to accept the conception of a personal God. He asks a pertinent question: Can there be a personal God for you different from the personal God of mine? If that be the case, then there are two Gods; can God be two? The theistic conception, according to the Siddhas, has given rise to two (mis)conceptions—the concept of a personal deity and the concept of a creator (God) forever distinct from his creation.

When discussing *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga*, Bhogar uses a significant expression "boundless *pratyāhāra*," (in Tamil *aḷappariya pirattiyākāram*, verse 1, of Bhogar's *Aṣṭāṅga Yogam-24*). This means a state of intensified consciousness where one disunites from the senses. This powerfully reminds one of Śaṅkara's expression: "...with eyes, he is without eyes; with ears, without ears; with speech, without speech; with mind, without mind..." In the

*Tirumandiram* we come across such expressions as "seeing without eyes," "hearing without ears," "an eye that does not see," "an ear that does not hear." Just as poets speak of "still colours" and "many coloured noises," the mystics speak of "tasting words" and "hearing a light;" they also say that they are able to "hear the grass as it grows."

In one of the verses (verse 11) of the *Upadeśa Jñānam*-156 Bhogar says: *curuṭi muḍindu idam maṇandu ceralāmē*. This means "To unite at the place beyond the Vedas by giving them up". This is a significant expression since it explains the Siddha view regarding the Vedas. It is commonly said that a Siddha is one who has burnt the *śāstras*. In this verse Bhogar says that one can give up the Vedas when the soul has reached Reality which is beyond the Vedas. This means that, when a Siddha has attained a stage of realization, he has gone beyond the Vedas and therefore not bound by the injunctions of the Vedas. The Vedas are only guide-posts to realization, and after reaching the goal of deliverance, the guide-posts are redundant and therefore should be given up. This verse reflects the Vedāntic dictum that "Vedas are not Vedas to one who is enlightened."

Just as Advaita speaks about the enquiry into Brahman, the Siddhas also speak of it. In this connection let us see the translation of verse 97 of *Upadeśa Jñānam*-156.

Vedānta speaks about the enquiry into Brahman;  
 Vedānta is the lucid expression of *dharma-śāstras*;  
 The eighteen and the great sixty-four arts  
 Speak about the enquiry into Brahman.  
 Since the ninety six expresses the enquiry into Brahman,  
 You cherish it; the ignorant man  
 (Seeking) knowledge other than enquiry into Brahman,  
 Will be sunk in great delusion.

Its summary is: Vedānta is an enquiry into Brahman. The *dharma-śāstras*, the eighteen *Purāṇas*, the sixty-four arts and the



ninety-six principles speak of the enquiry into Brahman. One who does not undertake this enquiry will wallow in delusion. In this connection Bhogar says (in verse 119 of *Upadeśa Jñānam*—156) that once the root cause of *māyā*, delusion, is understood, the phenomenal world loses its significance, and this is what is achieved by the learned people who transcend it. That is, the creation of *māyā* is only the phenomenal world, the world of thine and mine. The noumenal world, the world as it is, is not due to *māyā*. Delusion due to one's *citta*, *buddhi* and *ahaṅkāra* is one's way of looking at reality. That is *māyā*, a principle of materialization. That is, reality or world as such is not illusory. If there is delusion, it is not the world (or universe) itself, but our perception of it that constitutes the delusion. According to the Tamil Siddhas, the universe is the field of *sādhana*. Rightly perceived, the universe reveals, not veils, Brahman. Here we find a difference between the Advaita world-view and the Siddha world-view.

In another verse Bhogar criticizes the intellect (verse 121 of *Upadeśa Jñānam*—156). He says that the intellect is not a tool for knowing the ultimate Reality; for it separates the self from the Absolute. In truth the self in the person (*jīvātman*) and the Self of the Absolute (*Paramātman*) are one and the same. Only the monkey-minded intellect makes the separation between the two, the *jīva* and *Śiva*. The nature of the intellect is to dissect, to divide, to cut asunder what in reality is one and the same. Therefore one should discard the intellectual approach to Reality and seek it through wisdom, for It is *cit* itself, that is, Sat-cit-ānanda.

The idea of *jīvan-mukti* of the Tamil Siddhas is very close to the Advaita conception of it. A *jīvan-mukta* is one who attains liberation while being alive, the liberated-in-life. In Advaita philosophy, the condition of a *jīvan-mukta* is described as the disembodied state; but in the Siddha doctrine a *jīvan-mukta* does not die to attain liberation, but is transformed into the very mode of liberation, viz., *divya-deha*. That is, the Siddha seeks liberation

in a transformed body. In Siddha philosophy, there is no *videha-mukti*, post-mortem liberation, where the body-mind complex falls off, but only *jīvan-mukti*.

According to Advaita, Vedāntic study (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*) and contemplation (*nididhyāsana*) constitute the proximate means to liberation. Of the three, Advaita lays stress on meditation as important. In Siddha philosophy meditation is the only important step. It means persistence in fixing one's attention. It is deep absorptive concentration which takes one to the final goal of oneness with the infinite, or what the Tamil Siddhas call *Śiva-aikya*.

The aim of Yoga, according to the Siddhas, is to reach the one ultimate Reality, not by speculation, nor by devotion, but by meditation or *dhyāna*. The Siddhas call this Yoga as *laya-yoga*. In order to achieve concentration, *laya-yoga* suggests various stages of control. They are: *yama* (abstention), *niyama* (observance), *sthūla-kriyā* (*prāṇāyāma* or breath-control), *pratyāhāra* (sensory control), *dhāraṇā* (holding concentration), *dhyāna* (deep concentration) and *samādhi* (super-concentration). On its practical side, Advaita adopts the discipline of the eightfold means of Yoga as laid down in Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*. Of all these disciplines of concentration, the Siddhas, especially Bhogar, lay great emphasis on *prāṇāyāma*.

Though the Tamil Siddhas differ from Advaita with regard to the *māyā* principle, viz., in treating the world as real, they agree with the Advaita of Śaṅkara in upholding *jñāna*, accepting the concept of *jīvan-mukti*, the Brahman-Ātman equation, and Yoga discipline. Since we find certain Advaitic elements in the Tamil Siddha philosophy, we may call the latter "soft Advaita" distinguishing it from the "hard Advaita" of Śaṅkara.

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THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF  
ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

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K. Srinivas\*

Every philosophy sets forth certain ideals to be emulated. Sometimes the ideals set forth by a particular philosophy remain utopian, for they can neither be experientially realized nor be translated into concrete realities. Contrary to any utopian ideal, a dystopian ideal is that which can be experientially realized by individuals in their lives, and has its own purpose and meaning. Mere reification of ideals, which are of no practical consequences in one's life in particular and society in general, amounts to nurturing philosophical idealism of a dogmatic kind. The genuineness of any philosophy lies in its ability to contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the life-world shared by every one of us in the realization of the purpose and meaning of life. Both the Indian and the Western philosophers shared such a view. In this context it would be most appropriate to quote the statements of Vācaspati Miśra and Ludwig Wittgenstein who represent the Indian and the Western philosophical traditions respectively. According to

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the former: "A philosophical system is expounded for the sake of the ordinary people who are in need of it and who are, therefore, eligible for it."<sup>1</sup> In a similar fashion, the latter remarked: "What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life."<sup>2</sup>

It is traditionally believed that philosophy as a reflective enterprise is basically concerned with the essential meaning of life, and subordinate human activities. Here the expression "essential" refers to that distinguishing, distinctive, universal and innermost feature of human beings. Of course, the inner most feature of human beings is explained and interpreted variously in different philosophical systems. This paper is an attempt to show that the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta does not leave any scope or room for the reification of ideals set forth by it. The ideals set forth by it can be experientially realized by every individual in this very life, if one wishes to. All that the philosophy of Advaita reminds us is the fallen state of human individual. But it also prescribes a method by means of which one can regain one's original status. In order to regain one's original status, one has to pass through the various stages of life. Thus it is the method of Advaita rather than its final goal, which is of paramount significance to social life of every individual. After all, it is the individuals who constitute a society. Therefore, the development of individual personality necessitates the collective development of the same individuals who constitute a human society. In other words, the self-regarding activities of the individuals necessarily contribute to the other-regarding activities. Against this background I propose to discuss the social relevance of Advaita Vedānta.

## II

*Prima facie*, one may wonder whether the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta has anything to offer, substantially, for the

betterment of society, for it teaches the philosophy of renunciation, and treats the world of phenomena as illusory (*mithyā*). Consequently, it is held by many that the sole ideal of Advaita being the realization of the Self (Ātman), it is nothing to do with society or social activity as such. Although it is difficult to convince the stubborn critics of Advaita, especially those who defy all the canons of reason by indulging in the *argumentum in hominem*, it must be mentioned here in order to clear their doubt, that Advaita makes a distinction between, if I am allowed to use the terminology of Kant, phenomenal (*vyāvahārika*) and noumenal (*pāramārthika*) realities, which can be traced back to the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. From the point of view of the noumenal, the phenomenal appears to be a mere illusion.<sup>3</sup> But it is real for those who have not transgressed the limits of the phenomenal. One has to bear this point in mind while dealing with the cardinal doctrines of Advaita. Also, one has to realize that there is a distinction between the method of Advaita and its final goal. What really concerns us when we deal with the social significance of Advaita is its method rather than its ultimate goal. The method of Advaita is out and out experiential in its nature. What is experienced is rationally examined and evaluated insofar as this world of phenomena is concerned. In this regard Advaita is as realistic as any other philosophy. None can deny this fact.

It is in this world of phenomena we talk of relations of various types. As finite empirical beings, we involve ourselves in the various worldly activities. Also, as responsible moral agents we cannot avoid actions of one sort or the other. If we do so, it amounts to gross dereliction of one's duty, which goes against the very spirit of Advaita Vedānta. When we deal with ethical and social problems, which are necessarily phenomenal in their nature, we should not misapply the concept of "identity" of Brahman or the Absolute and the *jīva* or the finite individual to deal with these problems. This results in escapism. According to the philosophy of Advaita, the "identity" between Brahman and

the *jīva* is something to do with the noumenal reality, but not with the phenomenal one. Apart from that, such an "identity" is beyond thought, and is indeterminate. It cannot be brought under the purview of the canons of formal logic. Therefore, the "identity" between Brahman and the *jīva* is not a positive concept of thought, but a negative one. It can only be understood as "non-difference". Thought can make use of something positive, which can be both definite and determinate to it. Therefore, one should not misuse the "identity" of Brahman and the *jīva* in solving the problems of the phenomenal world.

Since the method of Advaita Vedānta is experiential, one can ask the question: Is not the "identity" between Brahman and the *jīva* a presupposition of our finite experience? What is wrong in employing such a presupposition in tackling the problems of day-to-day world? There is nothing wrong in employing this presupposition to develop ethical and social philosophy on the basis of Advaita metaphysics. This is what is precisely done by the practical Vedāntins like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Rama Tirtha. But the "identity" between Brahman and the *jīva* must be treated as a mere presupposition of finite experience. It is true that our finite experience presupposes the oneness of the Absolute and the finite individual. But this oneness does not belong to the world of phenomena. Any attempt to bring down the noumenal in order to explain the phenomenal would only result in the destruction of the latter.<sup>4</sup> The statement, "All of us are essentially same" is not philosophically illuminating. Such a statement can be made only by a priest or a prophet in a religious congregation. Hence, one cannot apply what belongs to the noumenal realm to the matters pertaining to the phenomenal one. If one claims, for the sake of argument, that essentially all human beings are one and the same, we cannot expect any social structure or organization in this world of phenomena. Contrary to this, we come across differences among men, and the various social groups. Following the noumenal, should we realize this unity here itself?

The result would be the complete destruction of the phenomenal world, wherein we see the differences of sorts.

As it is mentioned elsewhere, the method of Advaita is out and out experiential, and its logic is the result of this experiential method. The method belongs to the phenomenal world and it represents the way in which people react to their natural as well as social surroundings. It is with the help of a method we reach our goal or fulfil our aim. The method on the theoretical side helps us in arriving at a particular result by actually employing it. Like any other philosophy, Advaita Vedānta as a philosophy of life has profound theoretical base. Its theoretical base is rooted in the teachings of the Upaniṣads, which constitute the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* of the Veda. This does not mean that the authority of the Veda is blindly accepted by the Advaitins. The philosophical pre-suppositions of Advaita are rationally justified and experientially encountered. They enable every rational individual to distinguish appearance from reality, and the eternal from the non-eternal. The phenomenal world, which is the hub of all social activity, has to be experientially transcended in order to realize the eternal reality. Although Advaita preaches renunciation at the highest level, it does not mean that one must shirk his/her responsibilities as a social being while living in the society as a moral individual. The philosophy of Advaita is often misunderstood and misinterpreted by many as something to do with otherworldly gains. In fact, it offers solutions to many a social problem. The twin goals of Advaita are the attainment of happiness and elimination of misery. These goals can be attained by every individual by meticulously following the fundamental teachings of Advaita. While highlighting the practical character of Advaita, Max Müller wrote:

For all practical purposes, the Vedāntist would hold that the whole phenomenal world, both in its objective and subjective character, should be accepted as real. It is as real as anything can be to the ordinary mind. It is not mere emptiness as Buddhists maintain. And thus Vedānta philosophy

leaves to every man a wide sphere of real usefulness, and places him under a law as strict and brings as anything can be in this transitory life. It leaves him to a deity of worship as omnipotent and majestic as the deities of other religions. It has room for almost every religion, nay, it embraces them all.<sup>5</sup>

One of the chief traits of Advaita Vedānta is that it infuses hope into despair by rejecting the nihilistic approach of Buddhism. As against the pessimistic attitude towards life, Advaita holds that of all the births human birth is something most precious. In fact, it is a grand opportunity given to every human being to realize the ultimate experientially. Human life is basically rooted in the Being (*sat*), and it cannot be isolated from it. In this context, it is absolutely necessary to clear some of the difficulties faced by the readers in interpreting the notion of "real" (*sat*) in Advaita. The real in Advaita is opposed to unreal (*asat*). The former is that which possesses uninterrupted existence, and the latter does not have existence of any sort. The phenomenal world as a product of *māyā* is neither real nor unreal. It is not real in the sense in which Brahman is real, for the phenomenal world can be contradicted by experiencing Brahman. Similarly, it cannot be treated as unreal like sky-lotus, which is totally non-existent, for it is experienced. Therefore, it is technically known as *sadasad-vilakṣaṇa*. The experience of phenomenal world is treated as a positive experience (*bhāva-padārtha*). According to the philosophy of Advaita, one has to transcend the limits of the phenomenal world only to realize something higher.

Another salient feature of Advaita is its thoroughgoing pragmatism as far as the world of phenomena is concerned. The knowledge of the phenomenal world can be obtained only by means of observation and by the active participation of the individuals. Our knowledge of the phenomenal world is relational, for this world contains the various forms of existence. And all these forms are known by means of observation. In a way, it is the participatory world in which the subject of experiences constantly comes into contact with the objects of the phenomenal



world. The objects of experience may be natural or social in their nature. Thus Advaita promotes a spirit of adventurousness. The phenomenal world of objects may presuppose a world of higher reality, but one cannot *a priori* say what kind of features this higher reality would possess. It may be true that the lower presupposes the higher, but it cannot be deduced from the lower. It is known only when lived in that experience.

The philosophy of Advaita makes us realize that we experience conflicts of various kinds in this world of phenomena. We can overcome these conflicts only when we rise sufficiently high. To "rise high" means to shed the ego or the small self, which is the root cause of all these maladies at the empirical level. Conflicts cannot be settled at the level of conflicts themselves. To settle a conflict, one has to go beyond it. In other words, one has to rise above these conflicts by broadening one's outlook to mitigate them. Such an approach is absolutely necessary for a balanced economic, political, and social life of individuals in any society. One cannot resolve a conflict permanently by making some adjustments here and there. One may temporarily succeed in overcoming a conflict, but it finds its way out in some other form. If we are so much attached to the lower forms of existence, then it is very difficult for us to rise above. Consequently, we have to bear with these conflicts that crop up in our day-to-day life-world. When someone climbs up the ladder to reach the top, he has to discard each rung of the ladder to reach the top. Therefore, what is dissatisfactory has to be given up.

According to the philosophy of Advaita, individual morality invariably leads to social morality, in spite of the fact that moral life is not an end in itself. The phenomenal world necessarily requires an ethical code of conduct to maintain harmonious relations among the members of the society. Therefore, every individual ought to be a moral individual in order to be a responsible moral agent. It is in this world of phenomena one has to discriminate between right and wrong, for otherwise the social life of

the individuals would be affected. Right and wrong, good and evil, pleasure and pain are unavoidable by us as empirical individuals. We have to experience them in some form or the other. One cannot escape from them. To invoke polar argument here, there cannot be right without wrong, good without evil, and pleasure without pain. One has to face these dualities in this world of phenomena. The most striking feature of evil and error is that they may go unnoticed, at times, as evil and error, and may simply pass as good and right respectively. Such is the nature of the phenomenal world. We may overcome evil, error, and pain temporarily, but cannot keep them away for ever, for they are part and parcel of our empirical life. Evil, error, and pain rain on the rich and the poor alike. In this world of phenomena, action is given primacy over everything else. The phenomenal truth is understood only in the light of action. This does not mean that reason plays a second fiddle to action. Behind every responsible human action, there is a hidden hand of reason. One must not forget this truth.

### III

It is interesting to note that the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta has passed through three important stages of development in the history of humankind, and is passing through the fourth stage. The first stage of its development represents the age of Upaniṣads wherein the sages made sincere attempts to rationally explain the nature of the Self (Ātman), world, individual self (jīva), and the ultimate force behind the universe. The sages experientially encountered the sublime truths. Thus, there is a gradual shift from *karma-kāṇḍa* to *jñāna-kāṇḍa*. The emphasis is no more on the rituals or the attainment of heaven as a coveted goal, but spiritualism of a distinctive type. The second stage is marked by the systematic exposition of the Upaniṣadic philosophy by Bādarāyaṇa in his *Vedānta-sūtra* wherein the quintessence of the Upaniṣads is

highlighted without any apparent contradiction. The third stage of the philosophy of Vedānta represents the commentaries written by Śaṅkara on the *prasthānatraya*, namely, the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the *Vedānta-sūtra*. The ingenuity of Śaṅkara as an important preceptor of Advaita not only consolidated the grand theory of Advaita, but also influenced the generations of people in ever so many ways. Śaṅkara not only discredited Buddhism for its pessimistic and nihilistic attitude towards life and reality, but also exposed the futility of ceremonies and rituals for attaining mokṣa as propagated by the Mīmāṃsakas. According to him, the philosophy of Advaita stands for both *abhyudaya* or social welfare and *niḥśreyas* or spiritual progress. In its fourth stage of development, which is at present experienced by us, the philosophy of Advaita has been given a new orientation to suit the needs of the modern man. It is in this stage that the pragmatic purport of the philosophy of Advaita has been consolidated.

It is firmly felt by the neo-Vedāntins like Vivekananda and Rama Tirtha that the philosophy of Vedānta, for centuries, has been worked out only at spiritual level. Hence it must be brought closer to the fabric of social life of the individuals to show its relevance to the socio-economic conditions of a society. The application of the basic principles of Advaita to one's social life would certainly transform the attitude of the individuals towards society. Therefore, the philosophy of Vedānta must be brought into the lives of the people, into the life of society, and into the national life. Then only the philosophy of Vedānta becomes completely practical in its character. The question that often baffles us is: Can a modern man, who is influenced by the scientific form of rationality, realize the significance of Vedānta? It is a fact that the various demands of social life in the modern age make individuals both mentally and physically strained. This results in tension. How can one overcome this tension, which is the result of social life? It is not certainly by ignoring our social responsibilities, but by employing the method of Advaita. The neo-

Vedāntins insist that to practise Vedānta one need not go to caves or forests. The Vedānta finds its expression in this very life-world shared by every one of us. To quote Swami Vivekananda in this context:

Knowledge of Vedānta has been hidden too long in caves and forests. It has been given to me to rescue it from its seclusion and to carry it in the midst of family and social life. The drum of the Advaita shall be sounded at all places—in the bazaars, from the hilltops and in the plains.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the philosophy of Advaita very much finds its place in this world of busy life, and is accessible to the common man. Taking the cue from the central teachings of Advaita, Vivekananda interpreted the doctrine of *māyā* as a fact experienced by us in this world of phenomena, but not as an explanatory concept. To put it in the words of Vivekananda:

*Māyā* is not a theory for explanation of the world: it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that every wherever we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow and everyone who smiles have to weep, and vice-versa.<sup>7</sup>

According to him, when one says that the world is a product of *māyā* what is understood from this statement is that the phenomenal world is a fact of contradictions. Therefore, there is no scope for us to arrive at complete or absolute truth in this world of phenomena. The truth that we arrive at in this world of contradictions is relative and contextual. This is the nature of the lower truths.

Swami Vivekananda held that if all human beings essentially share the same nature, then all of them must be treated equally. In other words, equal rights must be extended and guaranteed to all human beings irrespective of their external differences in terms of caste, creed, religion, region, race, and so on. Such an attitude towards human beings and nations necessarily promotes self-confidence in them; and is treated as the first step towards human

progress. He derived his notion of universal brotherhood from the Advaitic ideal that every individual is essentially the same as the Absolute (Brahman). Therefore, every individual shares its divinity. He held that: "man is man all the world over, then same wonderful human nature is everywhere represented."<sup>8</sup> As a practical Vedāntin, Vivekananda strongly voiced against social as well as racial discrimination. He derived the ideal of national solidarity from the teachings of Advaita by holding that: "I am Indian, every Indian is my brother."<sup>9</sup> Vivekananda envisaged an ideal society in which the people belonging to the lower strata of the society must be raised to the higher. As he said: "Everything goes to show that socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, is coming on the boards. The people will certainly want satisfaction of the material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food."<sup>10</sup>

According to Vivekananda, man is individual in being universal, but not in being particular. On the basis of this assumption he felt that there is every need to reconstruct a society, which can provide equal opportunities to every individual for the development of one's personality. His concern for oppressed masses is so conspicuous in his speeches and writings. By giving what is due to the individuals in the form of equal rights would certainly enable the individuals to maintain their identity by exhibiting their inner talents. Thus Vivekananda developed his social philosophy, which is out and out humanistic, in tune with the basic teachings of Advaita.

According to the philosophy of Advaita, religion becomes an important aspect of human life while one is actively engaged in the activities of the world. The spirit of Advaita ideal is well explained by Swami Vivekananda, when he said: "Of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call religion."<sup>11</sup> Apart from those needs that satisfy our physical body, there is also a need that comforts and consoles human beings when they are in utter distress. It is none

other than religion. This need becomes part and parcel of human life. The survival of religion as an important phenomenon speaks for itself. One does not require any other evidence to prove its necessity. However, Vivekananda was circumspect enough to distinguish a true religion from an institutionalized one. The general tendency to oppose a particular religion or religious worship is due to the fact that people identify religion with institutions. The religious sectarianism sets limits to true religion. It is something unwarranted. One has to rise above these sectarian tendencies to see religion in its right perspective in the sense that it must be a real saviour of humankind. To quote Vivekananda in this context: "When we come to the real, spiritual, and universal concept, then, and then alone, religion will become real and living, it will come into our very nature, live in our every moment penetrate every pore of our society and be infinitely more a power of good than its has never been before."<sup>12</sup>

What is vindicated from the account given above is that Vivekananda made sincere attempts to show how the ideals of the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta can be realized in our day-to-day life.

Like Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha too attempted to bring the whole life of an individual under the purview of Vedānta. He held that one cannot turn a blind eye to the existing social conditions around, and go about silently working out for one's salvation. If a nation or a society is sinking, it will carry along with it the spiritual aspirants too. They are not an exception to the laws of nature. One must make Vedānta more and more vibrant in everyday life. In fact, practical Vedānta is the perfect attitude of the mind that stands for freedom, peace, fearlessness, strength, and happiness. After all, this is the life lived in tune with the laws of nature and with all fellow humans. According to Rama Tirtha:

Practical Vedānta constitutes living realization and not blind belief in authority, incessant labour and not stagnant indolence, work as a source of joy and not as drudgery, real feeling for fellow beings, appropriate adaptation.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the first postulate of Vedānta is that faith founded on authority is not faith at all. The true spirit of Vedānta is enjoyed only when we put its fundamental principles to rigorous test. In a way, Vedānta solicits doubts, questions, criticism, observation, experimentation, and verification. In other words, claimed Rama Tirtha, one must approach the fundamental tenets of Vedānta the way in which one approaches physical sciences.

Freedom is one of the most important aspects of human life according to a practical Vedāntin. One must be given freedom to accept or reject a particular form of belief or even religion on its own merits. As Rama Tirtha put it:

You are living today, you shall have to judge and criticize and examine matters for yourselves. Be free, free to look at everything by your own light. If your ancestors believed in a particular religion, it was perhaps very good for them to believe in that, but now your salvation is your own business, your redemption is not the business of your ancestors.<sup>14</sup>

Similar views are also found in the writings of Vivekananda too. To quote his message here:

Theory is very good indeed, but how are we to carry it into practice? If it be absolutely impracticable, not theory is any value whatever, except an intellectual gymnastic. The Vedānta, therefore, as religion must be intensely practical, we must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives.<sup>15</sup>

It is the most common belief of the people that Vedānta teaches renunciation, which is a form of asceticism. And an ascetic is a pessimist. Such an understanding and interpretation of the Vedāntic notion of renunciation are highly deplorable. What Vedānta teaches us is, held Rama Tirtha, one has to get rid of those desires that may lead to error, pain, anger, and confusion of mind. One has to perform one's task diligently with a sense of detachment. Therefore, one must possess a balanced mind. One who possesses a balanced mind is neither elated in pleasures nor dejected in sorrows. More than anything, he is devoid of fear, anger, and attachment. This is the true essence of Vedānta.

## IV

To conclude: it is beyond doubt that the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta is both culturally and socially significant. It is culturally significant, for it is recognized as a native philosophy of Indian sub-continent, and is socially significant for it influenced the lives of many great personalities, who made use of their Vedāntic wisdom to transform the social life of the individuals in ever so many ways. In the foregoing sections, we discussed the way in which the Vedāntins like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Rama Tirtha interpreted the cardinal doctrines of the philosophy of Advaita to suit the basic needs of common man. As they rightly held, there is only one Self, which permeates in all living creatures. Therefore, to love and respect others is to love and respect one's own self.

The distinctive feature of the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta is that it recommends self-examination or soul-searching. One has to examine things for oneself in the light of one's knowledge and experience. Therefore, the merits and demerits of every phenomenon have to be judged according to one's conscience. When it comes to the question of One reality appearing as many, as put forth by Advaita, the natural fall out of this statement is that those who aspire for the vision of Reality are supposed to identify themselves with the One and all. In other words, it is the vision of seeing all the beings as one's own self that makes one work for the good of all human beings. A genuine welfare society can be realized only when the Vedāntic ideals are followed meticulously by every individual. While explaining the significance of utterances in his famous article entitled "On Denoting", Peter Strawson, a British analytical philosopher, remarked that knives do not cut, but we have to make use of knives to cut something. Similarly, the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta is there, but it is left to us whether we use it or not. Just as one cannot say that a particular knife is blunt without using it, one cannot say that the philosophy of Advaita has no social relevance without employing its precepts in our day-to-day life.



## NOTES

1. Īśvara Kṛṣṇa, *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, ed., with text, and English translation, S. S. Suryanarayana Sastry (Madras: University of Madras), verse 1.
2. Cf. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).
3. J. L. Austin in his *Sense and Sensibilia* made a sharp distinction between illusion and delusion. In the case of the former, something appears as something other than what it is; while in the case of the latter, something is conjured up out of nothing. This distinction has to be kept in mind when we treat māyā as an illusion. It projects the supreme Reality, Brahman, as something other than what it is. And this "something" in the form of phenomenal world is experienced by all of us.
4. P. T. Raju, "The Cultural Significance of Advaita Philosophy" in *Cultural Heritage of India*, ed., Haridas Bhattacharyya (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Institute of Indian Culture, 1983), p. 16.
5. Max Muller, *The Vedānta Philosophy* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1985), pp. 161-2.
6. Roman Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda, and the Universal Gospel*, tr., Malcolm Smith (Almora: Advaita Ashram, 1965), p. 162.
7. Swami Vivekananda, *Jñāna Yoga* (Almora: Advaita Ashram, 1930), p.64.
8. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Almora: Birth Centenary Edition, 1963), vol. 1, p. 386.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 413.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
11. Swami Vivekananda, *Jñāna Yoga*, p. 1.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
13. Swami Rama Tirtha, *The Complete Works* (Lucknow: Rama Tirtha Pratisthan, 1988), vol. IV, p. 228.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
15. *The Complete Works*, vol. II, p. 291.

## HINDU PHILOSOPHY

Charles Rathkopf\*

Hindu philosophy is sometimes regarded by Western scholars as one that ignores the problems of this world in favour of metaphysical wisdom. Apparently, it proves enlightening only in those areas where enlightenment itself is concerned. The great phenomenological developments within the tradition are overlooked or passed off as mere summaries of Vedic doctrinal analysis. On the contrary, proper analysis of Hindu thought shows that its phenomenological background is a reflection of the extent to which it has developed intricate and remarkable theories concerning the nature of the human condition and the nature of the physical world. In particular, the Advaita Vedānta tradition as espoused by Śaṅkara provides exceptional analysis of classical Western philosophical problems, with an undeniable tendency to carry them one step further. Advaita's views on the problem of the "I-consciousness" and the ego are particularly indicative of its true background in classical philosophy.

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Many of the misconceptions about Hindu philosophy in general are not without due cause. All philosophical systems that stem from the Vedic tradition, whether orthodox or heterodox, incorporate an idea that was absent in Western theology and philosophy until quite recently. In very broad terms, the Hindu idea of liberation, or becoming one with the Ultimate, is confusing to the Western thinker. It operates within a fundamentally different framework. Consequently, Western thinkers are deprived of a proper background for the analysis of such theories. It is precisely this difficulty that has led to the critique that metaphysical wisdom overshadows pragmatic wisdom in Hindu philosophy. The Advaita tradition is supremely helpful in bringing clarity to this problem. It shows a mastery of phenomenology that dates back over fourteen centuries, while the phenomenology of the West is still in its developing stages. In fact, Advaita begins by grounding all postulations in the basic phenomenological distinction between what is real and what is not real. The problem of I-consciousness and the ego cannot even be approached without first establishing this distinction.

In order to establish what is real, we need to qualify what is meant by "real." Where Hindu thought is concerned, the word "real" implies a meaning of what is ultimately real. The Hindu idea of ultimate reality cannot really be equated with the Western idea of God. The two ideas are related, but operate on different planes. Generally, when the term "God" is used, it refers to a theological God. In the Hindu tradition, the Ultimate is impersonal, formless, nameless, and without any descriptive qualities. We can only say that it is infinite in every sense of the word. Such a description of the Ultimate is the foundation of what can be called monism. It is important to distinguish monism from both monotheism and agnosticism. Monism insists that logic does lead to the realization that the ultimate reality is eternal and non-dualistic, although it does not necessarily give us the ability to understand its nature.

The ultimate reality has many names, but is most generally referred to as Brahman. Advaita suggests that levels of reality do exist, but Brahman-in-itself transcends these levels. While all other levels of reality exist only with specific restrictions, Brahman has no qualifications whatsoever. In the West, some modern existentialists have developed parallel descriptions. Heidegger, for instance, calls this reality Being, with a definitive capital "B". This reality exists within, without, and through the world as experienced by humanity. Brahman is commonly described as pure Existence, pure Consciousness, and pure Bliss. In Sanskrit, these are *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*. The "*sat-cit-ananda*" is the lamp that lights all existence. (Raju, 278)

Śāṅkara's favourite definition of Brahman is that it is beginningless, endless, and changeless. This time-related definition is useful here because it leads us directly to the next level of existence according to Advaita.

Brahman is often described in romantic-visionary language as an infinite ocean in which everything floats. If this analogy is followed, then the whole of the physical universe could be compared to an insignificant iceberg. Eventually, it will melt back and become absolutely indistinguishable from the greater body of water. The term used for this "iceberg," or "second tier" reality is *māyā*. *Māyā* is a world with many qualifications and restrictions, namely the causal space-time continuum. Also referred to as the apparent world, *māyā* is the world all humans know and the world that *most* humans are confined to operate within. It is essential to note here that the physical world called *māyā* is not the one that Brahman has manifested and presented to humanity. Rather, it is the reality which humans project upon Brahman. The human capacity for understanding, in its state of vast ignorance or *avidyā*, does not conceive of Brahman as Brahman. Instead, it conceives Brahman as the physical universe.

Despite the immeasurable ignorance of humanity in comparison to Brahman, there does exist an integral, but indescribable

relationship between Brahman and *māyā*, which is equally important to establish. Brahman simultaneously is greater than and equal to *māyā*. To illustrate this point, Śaṅkara, let us suppose, asks a student of philosophy, "What is that pot?" If the student said it was just a pot, he would be correct according to Śaṅkara. If he decided to respond with more of an analytical approach, and answered that it was clay, Śaṅkara would also say he was right. The student could have also taken the metaphysical approach and answered that the pot was indeed Brahman. Again, Śaṅkara would agree. *Māyā* is a qualified reality then, only to the extent to which it is qualified by human perception. If human perception was also infinite, the world of *māyā* would cease to exist and humanity would be subsumed into that state of pure consciousness, or Brahman. (Hamilton, 127)

The next level of existence is that of the human imagination. Returning to the iceberg analogy, this reality is akin to the afternoon shadow the iceberg casts upon the surface of the water. While the uninformed observer might describe it as a "spot" on the surface, there is not actually anything there. Furthermore, the existence of this shadow is far more finite and ephemeral than the iceberg itself. While humans can cognize *māyā* as it is, they can also cognize another, lower level of reality. For instance, when a person is awake and perceives a bouquet of flowers in front of her, the senses combine to create a colourful, varied, sweet smelling thing that has a certain feel and a certain weight. This is called immediate perception. It is an instantaneous process. However, this person can also cognize the same bouquet in her imagination or in a dream when it is not actually, physically present. Such intangible perceptions can, under the right circumstances, serve as an exact match to the more real cognition. Perhaps the flowers smell even sweeter late at night while one dreams of them. This is a case of immediate perception. It does not involve the direct use of the senses. Such immediate perception, according to Advaita, is indeed a true experience, but it

does not share the same level of reality as the empirically verifiable bouquet. Obviously, it also does not share the same level of reality as Brahman.

It is also possible for this person to imagine or dream of something that does not exist in the physical world of *māyā*. For instance, in either dream or waking imagination, this person could perceive the same bouquet of flowers singing to her. This category is covered extensively in Śaṅkara's assessment of the problem of perceptual error. The problem of perceptual error lies in the tools we as humans use to perceive reality.

Advaita sees humans as having two absolutely basic components that are inextricably linked. The first, and more important part, is called the Self. The Self, or *Ātman* in Sanskrit, is absolutely the same thing as Brahman. We only use a different word because the context is different. The essence of Brahman that resides in every individual being (*jīva*), which is separate from Brahman only in the world of ignorance (*māyā*), is called *Ātman*. Because Advaita takes an uncompromising stance on the monistic nature of reality, it cannot accept any real distinction between *Ātman* and Brahman.

The other component of humanity is called the mind-body-sense complex. This categorization may seem perplexing to the Western thinker, because in the Western tradition a hard line is usually drawn between mind and matter, even when the word "mind" refers to something more than the physiological one. In the Advaita Vedānta tradition, mind and matter are of the same nature. The line is drawn only between this category and the Ultimate. So perceptual error is a result of using this mind-body-sense complex rather than accessing the *Ātman* within us. The mind-body-sense complex, then, is the root cause of human ignorance of the Ultimate. This ignorance of the Ultimate, called *avidyā*, (Raju, 273) prevents the world from being completely united with Brahman. Because we erroneously perceive the physical universe as reality, it becomes a true experience for us, even though it remains in the other-than-real category.

The issue can be illustrated in more concrete terms. For example, perceptual error can be analysed at the simpler level of the visual sense organ. On a dark evening while walking through a park, it is quite possible for one to mistake a coil of rope at a distance for a coiled snake, ready to strike. Empirically, only the rope exists, but phenomenologically, the rope-snake also exists. (Prabhavananda, 286) It can produce chemical changes in the body as a result of our fears of the non-existent snake. These feelings and changes in the body *are* empirically verifiable. This is why Śaṅkara argues that all perception is a form of true experience. Humans make the same perceptual error in regard to the nature of the cosmos.

The pure consciousness, or Ātman, is seen as the light by which we perceive everything. Without this fundamental "metaphysical subject," knowledge of anything would be impossible. This subject is a "transcendental *a priori*" principle. (Balasubramanian, 9) There exists nothing else by which Ātman can be revealed. Consequently, humans perceive everything other than their own consciousness as the object. This epistemological distinction between subject and object is actually a false one relative to the existence of Brahman. Ātman and Brahman are ontologically the same, but humans perceive them as different. This problem is viewed by the Advaita school as the most fundamental cause of the human condition. Again, it is a problem of perceptual error.

In the process of doing this subject-object distinction that results, as shown, from perceptual error, we do another strange thing to our mental framework. The cognitive gymnastics of the human mind (or mind-body-sense complex) creates what can be called the ego, or the I-consciousness. We separate ourselves from the pure existence of Brahman and claim to be private, individual beings (*jīvas*). The superimposition of the I-consciousness on our own existence is called *ahamdi*. (Raju, 210) *Ahamdi* is vitally important to understanding the Advaita view of the world that we perceive. When we separate ourselves from the eternal exis-

tence, it must follow that we superimpose this false individuality on all objects in the universe. We have no problem saying "I am he," or "I am she," referring ourselves to a third person that is external and distant, but we can never say "I am you." It doesn't make grammatical sense. How can "I," simultaneously be "you?" If I am one separate entity, then so must you be. In addition, so must the chairs that we sit on, and the table that appears in front of us.<sup>1</sup> Extension of the superimposition of false individuality is called *ahamkāra*. (Raju, 210) As we can see, even the syntax of the English language is a reflection of this built-in tendency.

The question of how this I-consciousness is related to the problems of the world remains. We can now deal directly with providing some answers. The goal of human life according to Advaita is realization of Brahman in this life. Unlike other Hindu philosophies, Śaṅkara believes that this realization of the Ultimate is something to be attained in this lifetime. What is required for this realization? Extinction of the I-consciousness. Of course, Advaita is much more specific than this. It proposes that the only viable solution for overcoming our foundational ignorance is knowledge. This is why in Śaṅkara's ladder model, *jñāna-yoga* is placed above both *bhakti-yoga* and *karma-yoga*. But there are also prerequisites for attaining this knowledge. Because we know that it is an extremely small number of people that do attain liberation (*mokṣa*) in this life, we can assume that the majority of us are still in the stages of fulfilling the prerequisites.

Fulfilling the prerequisites is also described as developing the proper mindset. To obtain this mindset, one must follow, according to Advaita, rigorous moral discipline. However, the guidelines for moral discipline centre round the highest ethic it proposes: namely, extinguishing the ego. A brief analysis of the four basic components of the moral discipline will further illustrate this point.

The first component is discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral: in other words, it means knowing the difference



between the Self and the not-Self. The not-Self comprising the mind-sense-body complex on the one hand, and the pluralistic world constituted by the five elements on the other, must be distinguished from Brahman-Ātman. The second component is renunciation of the fruits of our actions. This does not mean to imply running away from the world. Advaita is only suggesting that placing unnecessary value on the cares of this world, the fruits of our labor, leads us away from purification of the mind. Such attachment dirties the mind and makes it more difficult to remove the ego-sense. The third component in Advaita's guide to moral discipline is the cultivation of six moral virtues: (1) control of the senses, (2) control of the mind, (3) renunciation, (4) fortitude, (5) concentration and (6) faith. Control of the senses as a moral virtue is well explained by Patañjali, the great author of the *Yoga-sutras*. He describes the mind as politician or a diplomat that resides between the Self (Ātman) and the senses.<sup>2</sup> It can be made to serve either of the two. If the supreme ethic is extinguishing the ego, then controlling the senses is a necessary virtue as it frees up the mind to be directed by Ātman. Giving this power to Ātman leads us toward realizing the oneness of everything, since Ātman is actually Brahman itself. Giving free reign to the senses, on the other hand, can only build our notion of false individuality. Control of the mind is obviously an extension of the same idea. This virtue assumes that we must give up control of the mind ourselves. If it is not "me" controlling the mind, then it must be Ātman/Brahman. The opposite of this virtue would be believing that the mind is controlling the mind. Even though this is an impossible scenario according to Advaita, it seems logical to us. Placidly accepting that we as individuals have power over the mind, reinforces the false ego. Instead, we should realize that the mind could not exist at all if not for the Self, and it is the Self that gives us the power to realize our true nature.

Renunciation here is a little more vague than the renunciation of the general second component. Although they are related ideas,

renunciation as a virtue emphasizes the cultivation of an attitude of renunciation. Its effect is the same. If we live with a constant attitude of renunciation of everything in this life, even our very bodies, then our focus will automatically be adjusted toward the Self and the extinction of *ahamdi*.

Fortitude as a moral virtue means having strength in our quest to purify the mind and ready it for the eternal knowledge. This virtue admits that extinction of the ego is an extremely difficult task and that it requires an active strength or fortitude to push ourselves constantly toward this end. Concentration is a related virtue. If the mind is to remain subservient to the Self and thereby continually diminish the ego-sense, we require great concentration. Going back to perceptual error, the entire physical universe (*māyā*) stands as an infinite maze of erroneous subject-object distinctions that all distract us from the goal of extinguishing the ego.

Faith is also related to fortitude and concentration. If we doubt that Brahman and Ātman are one and the same, we are simultaneously giving strength to the logic of the individualized self (*jīva*). It is exactly this logic that has us wrapped up in ignorance (*avidyā*) and makes us perceive ourselves and the world as separate entities. Just as a cricket batter must have faith that he can make contact with the ball, we must have faith that Brahman and Ātman are one and the same so as to continue diminishing the idea of I-consciousness. If the cricket batter constantly doubted his ability to hit the ball, his mind would never have the chance to focus on swinging.

The fourth and final component of Advaita moral discipline is having an intense longing for liberation. Liberation can be described both positively and negatively. In the positive sense, it means attaining pure bliss. This is the bliss of the infinite reality, Brahman. It cannot be achieved without complete extinction of the ego-sense. In the negative sense, it means freedom from bondage. The bondage that this description refers to is no different from the limitations we have as a result of having I-consciousness.

So, Advaita maintains that liberation (mokṣa), or the ultimate goal of human life, cannot be attained without the eternal knowledge to rid us of our foundational ignorance (avidyā). This eternal knowledge cannot be attained without first having the proper mindset. For the most part, people operate on this stage of preparing the mind. Preparation of the mind requires moral discipline, and the core of moral discipline, the supreme ethic as it were, is extinction of the ego. Everything we do in this life, as it pertains to the physical universe, eventually boils down to this idea.

Since we are now in the ethical realm, it is important to address some ethical problems. Ethics is normally seen as the study of principle-guided action. Problems always arise however, no matter how masterful are one's set of moral principles, due to differences in ethics. There never has been, and probably never will be, a set of universal ethics. Ethics, by its very nature, is doctrinal. Even if it does not originate from scripture or text, as soon as one develops a system for ethics, it has limitations. Śaṅkara might say that this is true of everything in the world of māyā.

Not surprisingly, this truth is confirmed by modern science in the second law of thermodynamics. This law says that every system must decay overtime and lose its efficiency. Similarly, a set of ethics developed by a philosopher at the time of Śaṅkara may not have the same degree of applicability today as it did in the days it was developed. Often new problems require new ethics. Advaita suggests that any ethical system is a product of the mind and therefore a part of the mind-body-sense complex, which itself is ephemeral and limited. No system of ethics could possibly lead to the goal of mokṣa. Ethics itself is a part of our ignorance (avidyā) as it functions and is meaningful in the *vyāvahārika* realm. So, if any ethical system must decay due to its inherent limitations, ethics is not the final path of the wise. Accordingly, Śaṅkara refutes the Mīmāṃsā school of philosophy that requires only karma, or right action, to attain mokṣa. He believes that

right action and ethics are helpful and even necessary, but they alone cannot bring us to the goal. At every stage, ethics is, and therefore involves tension. What, then, is left for life in this world? There is only one supreme and non-doctrinal ethic for Advaita, extinction of the ego. It is the only trans-*ahamdi* ethic.

The beauty of this concept is hidden without acknowledgment that extinction of the ego is a process. It is true, according to Advaita, that once this task is accomplished, we have only to gain right knowledge and we experience an automatic merger with the eternal, but as stated above, most people do not attain the merger in this lifetime. Therefore, all of one's life is a struggle to extinguish the ego. Removal of *ahamdi* is a process through which almost all of us must strive throughout this lifetime. So it is here that Advaita really emphasizes all its pragmatic wisdom. All concerns of this world, whether they be in the realm of social justice, personal conduct, mental outlook, or cultural values, are all tied in to this central point.

The ego idea represents a false claim to our individuality, to being different from, or separate from, our neighbours. It follows, therefore, that any act which contradicts this claim will bring us one step back towards right knowledge, toward consciousness of the inner reality. If we recognize our brotherhood with our fellow men (and women); if we try to deal honestly, truthfully and charitably with them; if we work for equal rights and equal justice politically and economically; and for abolition of barriers of race and class—then we are in fact giving the lie to the ego-idea and moving towards awareness of the universal, non-individual existence. (Prabhavananda, 293)

Swami Prabhavananda describes Śaṅkara's extinction-of-the-ego theory as a fitting perspective for confronting modern problems such as race and class. Long before Swami Prabhavananda and even long before Śaṅkara, the Hindu tradition has addressed the ego problem as it relates to the problems of this physical world. There is a famous story in Hindu mythology which helps make the point clear.

Thousands of years ago, the demon Bali grew strong and overtook Lord Indra and the rule of heaven. Even with total power over heaven, Bali's desires for power grew stronger and stronger. Unable to bear that her Lord Indra had been defeated, a woman named Aditi prayed to Viṣṇu for help. Viṣṇu found her cause just and made himself incarnate as her son, Vāmana. So Viṣṇu went to King Bali in the guise of a meek Brahmin boy of very small stature. Bali had once vowed that if any Brahmin were to beg, he would grant them their wish. So Vāmana begged of Bali for a piece of land only as big as he could cover in three strides. Finding no harm in the request, Bali granted him the land immediately. Hearing this, Vāmana, who is only Viṣṇu, and assumed the form of a giant. He strode the entire earth in two strides and then asked Bali where to put the third step. Bali answered that the only other space he could give was the top of his own head. So Viṣṇu stood on it, and buried him in the underworld where he now remains. (O'Flaherty, 178)

This avatāra story illustrates an ancient Hindu morale that teaches the triumph of virtue over egoism and greed. When human ego swells too large, it oversteps moral boundaries. The present-day problems facing humanity at large can be attributed to a very similar condition. Since the industrial and colonial eras, humanity granted itself more power than previously imaginable. In doing so we have erased cultures and species around the globe. One of the reasons for such destructive patterns is the predominant philosophy. Dualistic and heavily rationalistic thinking have helped give merit to the attitudes and reasoning behind such behaviour. In retrospect, we must realize this philosophical imbalance and work to introduce, (or reintroduce) some alternative philosophical models. While contemporary thinkers are coming up with new and viable modes of thought to help move human societies into the next era, it is a mistake to ignore the past.

Śaṅkara's Advaita provides brilliant insight into such evolutionary thinking. It provides both ethical and metaphysical

paradigms that seem more than appropriate for dealing with modern dilemmas. Especially in the light of the growing emphasis on ecological understanding, Śaṅkara's monism and extinction-of-the-ego theory are undoubtedly moving us in the right direction. Advaita leaves no room for doubt that Hindu thought is replete with modes of thinking that apply not only to life in this world, but life in this world today. Confusion has arisen in recent history, because the predominant philosophy emphasized opposing attitudes with far more egocentric undertones. Advaita emphasizes the search for unity and the transparency of the mind/ego, which has been so concretized by more popular theories. In doing so, Advaita provides a perspective on life that others have missed completely. Especially, when facing the contemporary human predicament, Advaita is both spiritually rejuvenating and practically helpful.

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ON THE NATURE OF THE  
PHENOMENAL WORLD

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N. Veezhinathan

In order to account for the rise of the phenomenal world, the Advaitin advocates the theory of transfiguration (*vivarta-vāda*). According to it, the cause appears as the effect without itself undergoing any change whatsoever viewed in the light of this theory, Brahman-Ātman appears as the world, and being the substratum of the appearance of the world, it is its transfigurative material cause (*vivarta-upādāna*). The universe has no independent existence apart from Brahman-Ātman.<sup>1</sup>

The author of the *Vedānta-sūtra* establishes<sup>2</sup> the *vivarta-vāda*, and as a preliminary he critically examines the theories put forward by the Buddhist, the Vaiśeṣika, and the Sāṅkhya regarding the origin of the universe. Sarvajñātman, a younger contemporary of Śaṅkara, briefly sets forth in his *San̄kṣepa-śarīraka* the arguments of the author of the *Vedānta-sūtra* against their theories.

The Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika schools of Buddhism advocate the theory of aggregation (*saṅghāta-vāda*). According to this theory, the external world is an aggregation of four kinds of atoms—earth, fire, water, and air. The internal world is an aggregation

of five groups or skandhas: *rūpa*, *viññāna*, *vedanā*, *sañjñā*, and *saṃskāra*. The sense organs along with their objects constitute the *rūpa-skandha*. Knowledge of the form 'I' stands for the *viññāna-skandha*. The states of mind such as happiness, misery, or the absence of the two which arise respectively from experience of objects that are pleasant or unpleasant, that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant, represent the *vedānā-skandha*. Determinate knowledge (*savikalpa-pratyaya*) is *sañjñā-skandha*. Desire, aversion, pride, *dharma*, *adharma*, etc. constitute *saṃskāra-skandha*.<sup>3</sup>

The author of the *Vedānta-sūtra* considers this theory in the *sūtra-samudāya ubhaya-hetuke api tadaprāptiḥ*.<sup>4</sup> He points out that neither the atoms nor the groups (skandhas) can achieve the groupings as assumed by them; for, they are insentient. The schools of Buddhism do not admit any permanent and intelligent being who could bring about the groupings. Hence the theory of aggregation does not hold good.<sup>5</sup>

The Vaiśeṣika puts forward the theory of creation. According to this theory, something originates from something else, as cloth from threads. When a piece of cloth is woven, we have in it the threads in conjunction; and over and above the conjoined threads, there is the cloth which has come into being afresh. This new product was not in existence before its production. It has come into being as a new creation from its prior non-existence. This doctrine is called *ārambha-vāda*, and is also designated as *asat-kāryavāda*. And in this theory, when an object (say) cloth is said to come into existence, what is meant is that the object not existing before its production comes to have the relation of inherence (*samavāya*) with its inherent cause.<sup>6</sup> On this basis, the Vaiśeṣika school attributes the creation of the world to the conjunction of the primal atoms. Every object in the world is only the combination of atoms. When the world is to be created, there is movement caused in the atoms owing to the will of Īśvara, and two atoms join together to form a binary compound (*dvyanuka*) which has invisible size and minuteness. Three such binary



compounds produce a triad (*tryaṇuka*) which has visible size and visible length. To the question how visible size and visible length in a triad arise from the invisible size of the binary compounds, the answer given is that it is due to the number of the constituent atoms.<sup>7</sup> When material things from binary compounds are produced, their qualities also are produced, their nature being determined by the qualities of the respective causal substances. Thus the white colour of the threads woven into a cloth gives rise to the white colour in the cloth. It should be noted here that the white colour of the cloth is not only different from the cloth, but also different from the white colour of the threads. On this ground, the Vaiśeṣika school criticizes the Advaitic doctrine that Brahman-Ātman which is sentient is the cause of the world. It argues that if Brahman-Ātman which is sentient is the cause of the world, then sentience must be present in the world also. But this is not the case. Hence Brahman-Ātman which is sentient is not the cause of the world.

The author of the *Vedānta-sūtras* refutes this objection from the Vaiśeṣika's own standpoint. Sarvajñātman summarizes the arguments of the author of the sūtras, and independently criticizes the conception of the production of an effect not existing before its origination. And his arguments may be stated as follows: the origin of an object not existing before its rise is described as the relation of inherence of the object, cloth to its inherent cause, viz. threads. Sarvajñātman argues<sup>8</sup> that this view is untenable on the ground that while the inherent cause is existent, the object with which it is said to be related is non-existent. An object can be related to an existent entity alone. And a non-existent entity cannot be related to an already existent entity. Sarvajñātman, therefore, concludes<sup>9</sup> that the production of an object not existing before its origination is incompatible. And, on this ground the theory of creation or *asatkārya-vāda* stands discredited.

It now remains to answer the objection of the Vaiśeṣika, viz. that Brahman-Ātman which is sentient cannot be the cause of

the world. For, if it were so, sentience must be present in the world. The answer to this objection is given in the *Vedānta-sūtra—mahad-dīrghavadvā hrasva-parimaṇḍalābhyām*.<sup>10</sup> Sarvajñātman sets forth the answer given by the author of the sūtras thus: the author of the sūtras declares that just as visible size and visible length arise in the tertiary compound produced from the binary compounds which have only invisible size and minuteness, even so it is reasonable that the universe which is insentient could originate from the sentient principle.<sup>11</sup> The criticism of the Vaiśeṣika school is thus unsound.

Now the theory of transformation which is advocated by the Sāṅkhya school is to be examined. This school accepts two ultimate entities—*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and further holds that *prakṛti* which is insentient spontaneously transforms itself into the universe. This, the author of the *Vedānta-sūtras* refutes<sup>12</sup> on the ground that the insentient *prakṛti* cannot evolve itself into the form of the universe. In ordinary experience it is found that an insentient object (say) clay does not change into pot without the causal operation of a potter. Hence, *prakṛti* cannot transform itself into the world, unless there is an ultimate intelligent principle to bring about the transformation. No object ever changes itself, and on this ground the theory that *prakṛti* transforms itself into the universe is unreasonable.<sup>13</sup>

Sarvajñātman points out that the concept of transformation itself does not stand to reason. In the Sāṅkhya system, production is not creation, but only transformation which consists in the manifestation of what is already existent in a latent form. The object is existent in an unmanifest form and causal operation manifests it. Hence this theory is also termed *sat-kārya-vāda*. Sarvajñātman holds that in this view causal operation is futile. He argues that it cannot be said that causal operation brings forth the existent object; for, the object is already existent and as such it need not be produced.<sup>14</sup> It cannot be said that causal operation manifests the object by giving rise to some qualities in the object;

for, according to *sat-kārya-vāda* the qualities are also existent and hence they need not be produced. It might be thought that the causal operation manifests the object by removing some defect in the object; for, defect also is existent in the object and, being so, it cannot be removed.<sup>15</sup> Hence, Sarvajñātman concludes that causal operation is futile according to *sat-kārya-vāda*. He proceeds to point out<sup>16</sup> that even if it is admitted that causal operation manifests the objects, then there arises another difficulty. According to *sat-kārya-vāda*, the causal operation is always existent; if so, it should be held that it always manifests the objects. Hence there can be no dissolution and no states of deep sleep and swoon. If, on the other hand, the causal operation is held to be non-existent, then there can be no creation in the sense of transformation. Hence the concept of transformation does not hold good.

The defects in the theories of aggregation, creation, and transformation have led the Advaitin to formulate the theory of transfiguration (*vivarta-vāda*). According to this theory, Brahman-Atman gives rise to appearances which, though entirely depending on it, affect it no more than the silver does the shell in which it appears. The cause produces the effect without itself undergoing any change. Brahman-Ātman without itself undergoing any modification gives rise to the appearance of the universe, and being the substratum of the universe, it is viewed as the source of the universe. The principle that accounts for the illusory presentation of Brahman-Ātman as the universe is avidyā. Hence it is mainly owing to avidyā that Brahman-Ātman becomes the source of the universe. Sarvajñātman, therefore, holds<sup>17</sup> that Brahman-Ātman, depending on avidyā which is inspired by its reflection is the source of the universe. And avidyā superimposed on Brahman-Ātman is a mere accessory to the latter in bringing the universe into existence. It should be noted here that when it is said that Brahman-Ātman is the source of the universe, what is meant is that it is the substratum of avidyā and its modification, the universe.<sup>18</sup>

Now there arises the doubt whether avidyā is the cause of the universe or not. Sarvajñātman holds that avidyā is the cause of the universe, but it is to be understood in the sense of transformative material cause (*pariṇāmy-upādāna*). And being so, it serves as an accessory to Brahman-Ātman in bringing the universe into existence.<sup>19</sup>

Now what kind of causality is recognized in respect of Brahman-Ātman, the pure consciousness? Is it efficient causality alone, or material causality, or both? Sarvajñātman merely states<sup>20</sup> that Brahman-Ātman is the efficient and the material cause of the created objects; and he does not elaborate this point. Śaṅkara in his commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra—prakṛtiśca pratijñā-drṣṭāntānuparodhāt*<sup>21</sup> elucidates this point; and it is essential to deal with this here.

Śaṅkara observes that Brahman-Ātman is to be admitted as the material and the efficient cause, as this view alone would not be in conflict with the statement putting forth the thesis and the illustrative instances. The statement putting forth the thesis is the following: "Have you ever asked for that principle which could be known only through instruction, and by knowing which that which is not heard becomes heard; that which is not reflected on becomes reflected on; that which is not known, known?"<sup>22</sup> This passage conveys that through the cognition of one thing everything else, even if unknown, would become known. Now the knowledge of everything is possible through the cognition of the material cause, since the effect is non-different from the material cause. The illustrative example is: "Oh! My dear, as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification (the effect) being a name only which has its origin in speech, while the truth is that it is clay merely."<sup>23</sup> This passage refers to the material cause. Similar statements putting forth the thesis and illustrative instances which are to be found in all Vedāntic texts are to be viewed as proving that Brahman-Ātman is the material cause of the world.

That Brahman-Ātman is at the same time the efficient cause of the world, we have to conclude from the circumstance that there is no other guiding principle. Ordinarily, material causes such as lumps of clay and pieces of gold are dependent, in order to shape themselves into vessels and ornaments, on extraneous efficient causes such as potter and goldsmith; but besides Brahman-Ātman as material cause, there is no other efficient cause on which the material cause could depend. For, the scripture says<sup>24</sup> that prior to creation Brahman-Ātman was one without a second. Moreover, if we admit a guiding principle different from the material cause, it would follow that everything cannot be known through the knowledge of the material cause. Therefore the statement putting forth the thesis as well as the illustrative instances would be contradicted. Brahman-Ātman thus is the efficient cause, because there is no other guiding principle, and the material cause, because there is no other substance from which the world could originate. Being the substratum of avidyā, Brahman-Ātman is viewed as the material cause. And being the substratum of desire, will, and action which are the transformations of avidyā and which are required for the creation of the world, Brahman-Ātman is viewed as the efficient cause.<sup>25</sup> Both material causality and efficient causality are projected by avidyā.

The Advaita theory of causation, namely, the *brahma-vivarta-vāda*, which is different from both the *prakṛti-pariṇāma-vāda* of the Sāṅkhya school and the *aṅu-ārambha-vāda* of the Vaiśeṣika school, has been set forth by the author of the *Vedānta-sūtras* as his final conclusion in the aphorism—*tadanayatvam ārambhaṇa-śabdādibhyaḥ*.<sup>26</sup>

Now a question arises regarding the view that the Advaita theory of causation is only *vivarta-vāda*. And that is: the author of the *sūtras*, no doubt, adopts the *vivarta-vāda* in the aphorism—*tadananyatvam ārambhaṇa-śabdādibhyaḥ*. But in the previous aphorism—*bhoktrāpatter avibhāgaḥ cet syāllokavat*,<sup>27</sup> he holds the theory of the transformation of Brahman-Ātman into the

universe (*brahma-pariṇāma-vāda*), on the analogy of the modifications of sea-water into foam, waves, and bubbles. Thus when two conflicting theories have been put forward, the question arises: how are we to decide that the theory of transfiguration alone is the conclusive view of the author of the sūtras, and not the theory of transformation?

Śaṅkara in his commentary brings out the true import of the aphorisms, and Sarvajñātman summarizes his arguments which may be stated as follows: an objection is raised as regards the view that Brahman-Ātman is the source of the universe. The Upaniṣadic text "All this is Brahman"<sup>28</sup> which states that Brahman is the source of the universe affirms that Brahman and the universe which consists of experients and the objects of experience are identical. The result of this argument is that the distinction between experients and objects of experience which we find in ordinary experience and which is the basis of all activities, sacred or secular, would cease to exist, as the two by being identical with Brahman, would be identical. Moreover, Brahman-Ātman cannot be taken to be absolute, as its absolute nature would be contradicted by the existence of the universe which we perceive.

The author of the *Vedānta-sūtra* first answers the objections raised in the foregoing paragraph by admitting the theory of the transformation of Brahman (*brahma-pariṇāna-vāda*) on the analogy of the modification of sea-water into waves, foams, and bubbles. This he states in the aphorism *bhoktrāpatter avibhāgaḥ cet syāllokavat*. He says that just as foams, waves, and bubbles in the sea, which, by being the modifications of the sea-water, are identical with the sea, and yet different from each other, so also the experients and the objects of experience constituting the world, by being the transformations of Brahman, are identical with it and yet different from each other. The theory of transformation of Brahman into the universe thus preserves activity, sacred or secular, which, according to men of average intellect requires *real* difference in the form of experients and the objects of

experience.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as the universe is identical with Brahman, the absolute nature of Brahman also is maintained.

Then in the aphorism—*tadananyatvam ārambhaṇa-śabdādi-bhyaḥ*, the author of the *Vedānta-sūtra* refutes the objection referred to above by adopting the *vivarta-vāda*. The Upaniṣadic texts themselves suggest the theory of transfiguration. The text, "Have you ever asked for that principle, which could be known only through instruction, and by knowing which, everything else, though unknown would become known"<sup>30</sup> declares the knowledge of everything, i.e. the effects, by knowing the one, i.e. the cause. And another text, "Clay alone is true, and its modifications are names only; they exist through speech only,"<sup>31</sup> states that the entire body of products has no existence apart from its cause. By extending this line of explanation, we conclude that the entire body of products has no existence apart from Brahman.<sup>32</sup> It is only illusory. The absolute nature of Brahman would be contradicted only when there exists the universe apart from Brahman. Since the world has no independent existence apart from Brahman, the absolute nature of Brahman is maintained. The world, although illusory, is real till the rise of the direct experience of Brahman. Hence empirical activity also could be preserved.

Of these two theories, the theory of transfiguration alone is the final view of the author of the *Vedānta-sūtras*; for, the absolute nature of Brahman can be maintained in this view alone, as it holds the universe to be illusory. The theory of transformation, on the other hand, holds the universe to be identical with Brahman, but it admits of difference also. Hence in this view the absolute nature of Brahman could be maintained only in a provisional way. From this, it should not be concluded that the acceptance of the theory of transformation serves no purpose and as such it is futile. As has been indicated above, the theory of transformation is admitted to satisfy men of average intellect, who hold that the universe must be *real* in order that empirical activities may be carried out; and the theory of transformation holds the universe

to be a real transformation of Brahman. Apart from this, the theory of transformation serves as a prelude to the theory of transfiguration which treats Brahman as acosmic. This presupposes the view that Brahman is cosmic; and the theory of transformation alone presents Brahman as cosmic.<sup>33</sup> On this ground, the Upaniṣadic texts and the author of the *Vedānta-sūtras* maintain the theory of transformation. And the theory of transfiguration alone is the conclusive view of the author of the *Vedānta-sūtras*.<sup>34</sup>

So far it has been said that Brahman itself without undergoing any change appears as the universe. The latter is known (*drśya*) and to that extent it cannot be unreal; for, the absolutely unreal 'the hare's horn' is only words. Nor can the universe be regarded as real on its own right; for, it is insentient and hence depends entirely upon Brahman for its being. Thus the universe is not finally classifiable as either real or unreal. The Advaitin, by postulating a reality behind the universe, differentiates his doctrine from the *śūnya-vāda* of the Mādhyamika. The latter holds that the world is non-existent. The Advaitin, on the other hand, holds that the world is neither existent nor non-existent, but different from both existent and non-existent.

Now it is objected that although the doctrine of Advaita is not similar to the *śūnya-vāda* of the Mādhyamika, yet it is not alien to the *viññāna-vāda* school of Buddhism. The latter admits the reality of consciousness alone. What is of the nature of consciousness is indeed indivisible; but by those whose vision is confused it is seen to be, as it were, differentiated into the perceived object, the perceiving subject, the proofs, and then the perception itself. And the latter are false. The Advaitin also maintains that Brahman alone which is pure consciousness is real, and it appears as the universe consisting of the knower, objects, proofs, and the empirical knowledge, that is, the mental state. And the universe is not real. It is, therefore, argued that the *viññāna-vāda* and the doctrine of Advaita are similar.



Sarvajñātman refutes the objection by contending that, though the two doctrines seem to be similar, yet there are some characteristics which clearly mark the difference between the two systems. In the first place, the Advaitin holds that the four factors, namely, the knower, the object, the proof, and the empirical knowledge are different among themselves, while the Vijñānavādin denies any difference among them.<sup>35</sup> In the second place, these four factors are projected by the beginningless avidyā abiding in the eternal Brahman, and they are real till the realisation of Brahman. But the Vijñānavādin neither admits an eternal Brahman nor the beginningless avidyā. Also, he does not admit the reality of the universe. The third ground that suggests the difference between the two systems is this: Brahman which is pure consciousness is eternal and is different from empirical knowledge or the mental state which arises from the contact of sense-organs with objects and which is insentient. And Brahman itself is the witness; and without depending on any sense-organ, it perceives the universe. The Vijñānavādin, on the other hand, holds the insentient mental state itself to be consciousness and as it depends on the sense organs for its origination, it is mutable. Moreover, unlike the Advaitin who holds it to be eternal and unitary, he admits it to be momentary and manifold.<sup>36</sup> From this it would be clear that the doctrines of Advaita and the Vijñānavāda differ so markedly that there can be no identity between them.

In order to complete the account of the nature of the phenomenal world, it is necessary to consider one more objection which is as follows: the world of objects is declared to be not real. It follows from this that the scripture also is not real, as it belongs to the world of objects. Then, how can it convey the true nature of Brahman?

Śaṅkara in his commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtras*<sup>37</sup> points out with suitable illustrations that scripture, though not real, can convey the true nature of Brahman. Sarvajñātman briefly sets

forth Śaṅkara's arguments as follows: the *Aitareya-Āraṇyaka* text<sup>38</sup> declares that the perception of aperture in the centre of the sun's disc is not real; but it indicates that he who perceives so will shortly face death. And death is real. Again, death which is real occurs sometimes as the result of the mere suspicion that a venomous snake has bitten.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the *Chāndogya* text, "If a man who is engaged in some sacrifice undertaken for some special purpose sees in his dream a damsel, he is to infer therefrom success in the sacrifice,"<sup>40</sup> states that dream is an illusion and yet it is indicative of future good or evil that is real. From this it is clear that an event in dream, though not real, indicates an actual future event. In the same way, scripture, though not real, can convey the true nature of Brahman.<sup>41</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Vedānta-sūtra-bhāṣya* (hereafter *VSB*), 2.1.14.
2. *Vedānta-sūtra* (hereafter *VS*), 2.1.14.
3. N. Veezhinathan, ed. *The Saṅkṣepaśārīraka* (hereafter *SŚ*) with Introduction, English translation and notes, Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1985, 2.69 ff.
4. *VS*, 2.2.18.
5. *SŚ*, 2.169.
6. *Ibid.*, 3.204.
7. *Ibid.*, 2.72.
8. *Ibid.*, 3.202-3.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.210.
10. *VS*, 2.2.11.
11. *SŚ*, 2.71.

12. VS, 2.2.1.ff.
13. SS, 2, 76.
14. Ibid., 3.211.
15. Ibid., 3.213.
16. Ibid., 2.215.
17. Ibid., 1.323, 332.
18. Ibid., 1.325.
19. Ibid., 1.332.
20. Ibid., 1.532.
21. VS, 1.4.23.
22. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (hereafter *CU*), 6.1.3.
23. Ibid., 6.1.4.
24. Ibid., 6.2.1.
25. SS, 3.251–2.
26. VS, 2.1.14.
27. Ibid., 2.1.13.
28. *CU*, 3.14.1.
29. *VSB*, 2.1.14; see also SS, 2.58.
30. *CU*, 6.1.3.
31. Ibid., 6.1.4.
32. *VSB*, 2.1.14.
33. SS, 2.58–64.
34. Ibid., 2.56.
35. Ibid., 2.27.
36. Ibid., 2.28–29.
37. *VSB*, 2.1.14.
38. *Aitareya-Āraṇyaka*, 3.2.4.7.
39. SS, 1.337. 338; 2.227.
40. *CU*, 5.2.9; see also *VSB*, 3.2.4.
41. SS, 1.338.

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## VIVEKANANDA AS A POST-ŚAṄKARA ADVAITIN

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G. Mishra

Śaṅkara left this Advaita Philosophy in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of these places and scatter it broadcast before the workaday world and society.

*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, VII., p.162 (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1922).

It was Śaṅkarācārya, who firmly rehabilitated the Advaitic non-dualism back to the rails of traditional Upaniṣadic ethos after the historical onslaught of the Buddha who decried the Vedic precept and practice. Buddha's aversion for the Vedas was so massive that he took up a posture antagonistic to anything that is Vedic, even though he seemed to be only against rituals. It was not certain whether Gautama really wanted to reject non-dualistic reality as we find he has propounded śūnya in the model of Advaita Brahman.<sup>1</sup> In the history of Vedānta, Śaṅkara has been criticized as a Buddhist in disguise whereas historically he appears to have challenged Buddhism. While bringing back the Upaniṣads into the lively thinking of Indians, Śaṅkara is very clear about the fact that it is by knowledge alone one can be freed from the fetters of

transmigratory existence and such knowledge would arise from śruti and śruti alone. He asserted that the final liberation depends on the knowledge of attributeless Brahman which is the true nature of the cause of the world. Without resorting to the śruti-pramāṇa, it is impossible to conceive of this reality on account of its excessive abstruseness.<sup>2</sup> In post-Śaṅkara period, this idea is reiterated many times in different ways. Vidyāraṇya calls it as *prabalamāna*, a stronger means of knowledge. It was during this period that Vedānta streamed out into many schools and the Indian philosophical history witnessed the emergence of the systems like Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Śuddhādvaita, etc. All through these, there is continuity, consistency and novelty in the Vedāntic thinking in its propagation and practice, and it still continues to be a living school. Thinkers after thinkers have enriched this system by their contributions, systematic study and elucidations.

The theistic schools which were opposed to the Advaita questioned its Vedic validity from various angles, from the concepts like māyā-avidyā, Brahman and the nature of the world. Rāmānuja and Madhva, who were the proponents of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita respectively, refuted the views propounded by Śaṅkara and claimed their schools to be superior in logic having Upaniṣadic basis. In post-Vidyāraṇya period, Vyāsatīrtha, a Dvaita exponent attacked the Advaita tenets in his famous *Nyāyāmṛta*. The tradition of Advaita responded to his challenges with the advent of Madhusūdana who in his *Advaita-siddhi*, stood up to reply to the philosophical interventions of Vyāsatīrtha. Caitanya's Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, with its theistic tenets developed a sharp critic against Vedic ritualism and Vedantic non-dualism.

Though there are certain principles common to all schools of thought in Vedānta, Śaṅkara stands on a different pedestal as he champions the idea that in the journey towards truth one has to gain the discerning knowledge as given in the śruti texts and see the truth beyond the worldly appearances. The culmination of such knowledge is the realization that he is not different from

Brahman. In the interaction between Vedānta and Buddhism, there is massive influence of the former on the latter, and there are also strong differences. The Mādhyamika Buddhism, with which the thinking of the Buddha came to be identified later on, treated the world and worldly experiences as totally illusory. Śaṅkara, on the other hand, maintained that this illusory world was pervaded by the absolute truth in every sense. Śaṅkara, like Buddha, was addressing his philosophy for the benefit of the people; it was not meant for a particular caste or creed since under the holistic banner of Advaita no such distinctions can be really sustained.

The modern period, which saw the revival of the Vedāntic ethos, tried to come to terms with the apparent complexities that were felt in Śaṅkara's thinking. Ram Mohun Roy, who led the renaissance movement followed by Vivekananda, tackled this problem in a different way, and while accepting Śaṅkara in his broad postulates, disregarded the transcendental character of the reality in attempting to develop more clearly the idea of reality, the non-qualified Brahman as the focus of all human effort and activity. Here for the purpose of this article, I shall deal with the contribution of Vivekananda who enriched the Advaitic thought through his speeches in English to meet the needs of the contemporary generation.

#### *Vivekananda and His Interpretation of Advaita Vedānta*

In expounding and restructuring Vedānta, Vivekananda started with the teachings of Śaṅkara and allowed adequate space to dissenting opinions of other schools. There are two things which catch the attention of any serious reader of Vivekananda, and these are: (1) his notion of śruti as a means to liberation and (2) discovering the practical dimension of Śaṅkara's thinking. Early in his life, he was influenced by Ram Mohun in his understanding of Vedāntic thought. He admired the Brahmo-samaj for its reformative ideas, and attitude about caste, creed and sex, but was dissatisfied by its anti-scripture and anti idol-worship stances

as they ran counter to his yearning for divinity. All through his life, he championed the idea that Advaita saved India from materialism twice, once through the teachings of the Buddha and the second time through the teachings of Śaṅkara. He said, "By Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon and by Śaṅkarācārya, the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalized and placed before Indians the wonderful coherent system of Advaita."<sup>3</sup>

A comparison between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda suggests that Vivekananda was a more committed Advaitin than his Guru, who was sympathetic and also encouraged theistic worship. Though Ramakrishna did not deny the transcendental Brahman, he believed that the Absolute could be equally manifest as the immanent God. Vivekananda was attracted to Advaita as a school of philosophy fused with its non-sectarian and trans-social character. In Advaita, Vivekananda discovered enormous humanistic concern and immense space for accommodating diverse schools of thought. In doing so, his understanding also allowed worship, and we could see that it lies somewhere in between Ram Mohun, who decried Hindu polytheism and Ramakrishna who enunciated various forms of worship. In his *Lectures and Discoveries*, Vivekananda says:

... there is more merit in the dualistic method; it helps many men who are weak. But then I think of the other side, how long will the world have to wait to reach the truth if it follows this slow, gradual process.

... pure truth cannot be realized by all. Men have to be led to it generally. In India I work both ways. In Calcutta I have these images and temples.... but on the height of the Himalayas (the Advaita Ashram at Mayavati) I have a place where nothing else shall enter but pure truth.<sup>4</sup>

This reminds us of two paths—fast-track *vihaṅgama mārga* and the long and time-consuming, *pipīlika mārga* discussed in Vedāntic texts. The fundamental premise for him was that non-duality is the unavoidable goal of the human religious quest and that movement in religious thought is a growth not from error to

truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. Vivekananda distinguishes between the path and the goal. In the light of this broad position, he sees the possibility of accepting all religious doctrines, not as an act of patronizing, but with full conviction that they all lead to the same conclusion.<sup>5</sup> He believed that reason and usefulness are important in the sustenance of religious faith. He was also aware of the fact that reason always shifts its base whereas realization lasted forever. That is why he maintains that the realization of God comes through being and becoming; through experience and *not theoretical knowledge* (born of śruti). He was of the opinion that the realization of God was more valuable than the mere knowledge of God. Here he seems to have been influenced by the Yoga school which deals with the limits to knowledge. While knowledge may be deemed to lead to God, God realization is untranslatable into human cognizable language. For Vivekananda, the idea of oneness suggested by Advaita Vedānta has implications for the individual as well as the cosmos. Individualistically, it is intuitive in nature and at the cosmic level, it is the immanent spirit of the Universe.

#### *Vivekananda on Śruti Pramāṇa*

With the emergence of renaissance, the scientific temper gained adequate prominence, and old beliefs and practices were thoroughly questioned. Raja Rammohun Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen and others, in their practices and predilections, strongly favoured rationalism, and it resulted in the denial of authoritative nature of the Vedas and such other texts. Its other consequence was that it also denied the role of reason and the intellect in the religious quest of a person, upholding personal experience as unquestionable. Vivekananda, being a product of that age, was not free from such influences. In keeping with the idea of *apauruṣeya*, Vivekananda asserted that Ṛṣis are not the creators of the truth in the Vedas; they are but seers or discoverers of truths. The Vedas embody a collection of spiritual laws discovered



at different times. He drew a comparison between Vedic truth and scientific truth. Just as the law of gravitation existed before it was discovered and continues to exist even if it is forgotten, so is it with the Vedic laws that govern the spiritual world. In order to bring home this idea of immanence and to commend that the Vedas contain the eternal laws existing in all souls, he described the Vedas as "expired" than "inspired."<sup>6</sup> In the spiritual journey of an aspirant, Vivekananda asserted that scripture works as a map. According to him, the Vedas document the spiritual discoveries of others and the methods by which such discoveries are made, and they need to be subjected to close scrutiny before being accepted. He said:

The man who asks you to believe everything, degrades himself, and if you believe, degrades you too. The sages of the world have only the right to tell us that they have analysed their minds and have found these facts, and if we do the same we shall also believe, and not before. That is all there is in religion.<sup>7</sup>

The proof of the truth is the direct knowledge of the individual, and if verified it gains in validity. Time and again he calls for the verifiability of the religious truths, notwithstanding the Vedas. He considered verification to be the only proof of religious truth. He said:

Each must verify for himself; and no teacher who says, "I have seen but you cannot", is to be trusted, only that one who says, "you can see too." All scriptures, all truths are Vedas in all times, in all countries; because these truths are to be seen, and anyone may discover them. He is a man who sees religion, to whom religion is not merely book learning, not argumentation, nor speculation, nor much talking, but actual realization, a coming to face to face with truths that transcend the senses.<sup>8</sup>

He was of the opinion that even as one person's eating has little value for another, so is the experience of one person to the other. He was of the strong view that there is a necessity of everyone becoming a ṛṣi and making a first hand verification of the experiences of others recorded in the Vedas. These texts were

not written for the intellect or for the understanding through a process of rational enquiry and analysis. He was firmly rooted in his opinion that it was only the Vedas which assert the need for going beyond them as per the Vedic dictum, *yatra vedāḥ avedāḥ bhavanti*. They are written for the adult who is in the childhood state of his religious growth, and hence he must outgrow reliance on them.<sup>9</sup> He compares the Vedas to the hedges around a small plant the confines of which it must eventually outgrow.

Vivekananda did make a distinction between scriptural knowledge (or revelation) and realization. For him, the knowledge of śruti cannot be the means to liberation.<sup>10</sup> He said: "We can read all the Vedas, and yet will not realize anything, but when practise their teachings, then we attain to that state which realizes what the scriptures say, which penetrates where neither reason, nor perception nor inference can go, and where the testimony of others cannot avail."<sup>11</sup> He strongly felt that textual knowledge is not adequate, but must in some way or the other be further applied to produce the desirable end. While interpreting *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, he felt that the first two are only preliminary. Once he said: "You may reason it out and understand it intellectually, but there is a long way between intellectual understanding and the practical realization of it. Between the plan of a building and the building itself, there is quite a long distance."<sup>12</sup> So in order to realize one need to have meditation, this is *nididhyāsana*. He says, "It must be heard, apprehended intellectually and lastly realized. Cogitating is applying reason and establishing this knowledge in ourselves by reason. Realizing is making it a part of our lives by constantly thinking of it. Realization will come as a result of this continuous cogitation."<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the fourfold requirements (*sādhana-catustaya*) he holds a view which is different from that of Śaṅkara. He says:

The pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of truth, so all these disciplines are for the purification of the heart. And as soon as it is pure, all truths flash upon it in a minute; all the truth in the universe will manifest in your heart, if you are sufficiently pure.

The great truths about atoms, and the finer elements, and the fine perception of men were discovered ages ago by persons who never saw a telescope, or a microscope, or a laboratory. How did they know these things? It was through the heart; they purified the heart.<sup>14</sup>

Vivekananda seems to have entertained different and at times opposite views on the authority of the Vedas. In his speeches in the West, he seems to have been motivated by a more liberal and scientific attitude whereas in India he endorsed the tradition. An example of the latter is as follows:

In India, everything necessary for the perfection and freedom of the human beings could be found in the Vedas. Śruti is presented as the final word on spiritual truth, beyond which there is nothing to be known or said. There is no religious idea anywhere, he claims, that cannot be found in the Vedas. All that needs to be done is to apply the dicta of the śruti to the changing needs and conditions of societies.<sup>15</sup>

There are several instances of his varying stances in regard to the Vedas which make it difficult to conclusively state his considered view on the Vedas. As Rambachan says:

This is not surprising in the light of his contention that conclusive and liberating knowledge is not gained by enquiring into the texts of the Upaniṣads. The closest he comes to a justification of such texts is in his view that they tell us of the spiritual findings of others and the processes by which we discover and verify such findings for ourselves. The difficulty is that in some of his extreme assertions, he even denies them this limited value and function. This becomes apparent in his argument that the Vedas are properly understood only when one has lifted oneself to the same level of direct perception as its authors that they were not written for the intellect and cannot be understood through reasoning. Such statements negate their preliminary value, which one assumes to depend on the possibility of some understanding of their claims and methods. If such an understanding cannot be sought through the faculty of intellectual reasoning, then scripture seems to be totally deprived of usefulness.<sup>16</sup>

### *Reason, Revelation and Realization*

Vivekananda seems to be obsessed with the fact that even the religious propositions can be certified only through actual reali-

zation. He wanted to uphold the supreme value of this realization and thought that the highest point of the Advaitic truth lies in its realization. He wrote:

Talking is one thing, and realizing is another. Philosophies, and doctrines, and arguments, and books, and theories, and churches, and sects, and all these things are good in their own ways; but when realization comes, these things drop away. For instance, maps are good, but when you see the country itself, and look at the maps, what a great difference you find ! So those that have realized truth do not require the ratiocination of logic and all other gymnastics of the intellect to make them understand the truth; it is to them the life of their lives, concretized, made more tangible.<sup>17</sup>

To conclude this part of the essay, I would like to point out that in doing Advaita, Vivekananda owes a lot to Śaṅkara. Vivekananda took Śaṅkara's philosophical position as the foundation and built a modern edifice through a creative reinterpretation. However such an exercise throws up certain points of divergence, not in the fundamentals, but mostly in the domain of application. For Śaṅkara, the appearance of the world is due to ignorance and the knowledge gained through the inquiry of the śruti is the only means to counter the ignorance. Such knowledge is possible for a person equipped with *sādhana-catuṣṭaya*. The knowledge derived from śruti is simultaneous with the advent of knowledge, and there is no need to invoke any other action apart from that. Here is the first difference between Śaṅkara and Vivekananda. While the former treats the śruti knowledge to be final, for the latter it is only a hypothetical knowledge awaiting confirmation. For Śaṅkara, the relation between Brahman and śruti is like that of a misconceived object and the appropriate means for knowing it. For Śaṅkara, all other pramāṇas have for their field of operation the objects outside the domain of Brahman. Each pramāṇa has its own field of operation, and is capable of generating knowledge which does not require another pramāṇa. In the same way, śabda or Upaniṣads as pramāṇa give rise to Brahman-knowledge which does not require any other source of action. For Vivekananda,

however, the Vedic statements are to be confirmed by direct realization. Here he makes a distinction between theoretical religion and its practical implications, śruti and *anubhava* respectively. For Vivekananda, the Vedānta constitutes a method rather than a *pramāṇa*. When Vivekananda says that one can go beyond Vedas, what he means is that there exists a superior means of understanding, and that is realization. Whereas for Śaṅkara, the transcendence means that for a person who has attained the liberating knowledge, the śruti ceases to be a *pramāṇa*.<sup>18</sup> For Śaṅkara, once, the world is understood as empirical and transcended, śruti which is a part of the world is also transcended. For Vivekananda, in the process of understanding itself one transcends śruti, since the aspirant moves forward to realize Brahman after hearing the śruti and its contents.

I also draw upon the idea of the traditional *prasthānas* in Advaita, *Vivaraṇa* and *Bhāmatī*, in order to evaluate the position of Vivekananda as a post-Śaṅkara Advaitin. As is well-known, the Upaniṣads prescribe *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* to be the direct means of Brahman realization. That is, one has to undertake hearing, reflection and contemplation of śruti for attaining the knowledge of Brahman. According to *Vivaraṇa*, the *śravaṇa* (hearing) of the passages aided by *manana* and *nididhyāsana* is the cause of the immediate knowledge of Brahman. He holds the view that since the self is always immediate, the śruti text gives rise to the immediate knowledge or direct realization of Brahman. The hearing will give us the mediate knowledge if the object is mediate, and since the self is the most immediate one, śruti would give rise to the direct realization of the self. According to *Vācaspati*, the śruti passages can give us only the mediate knowledge of Brahman, and it becomes immediate through mind. For *Vācaspati*, the true nature of Brahman-Ātman could be known from the Upaniṣads, but that could only be mediate; and they become immediate through mind. Hence it is only in the state of *nididhyāsana*, there

is direct realization of the self. In the light of the discussion given above, we find that Vivekananda can be more on the side of Vācaspati than that of Prakāśātman. Through the example of map and almanac, Vivekananda seems to suggest that the śruti knowledge is only symbolic and that it becomes concrete when realized.

### *Vivekananda and Practical Vedānta*

In a series of four lectures he delivered at London in November 1896, Vivekananda developed the idea of practical Vedānta which was conceived as a social gospel and concrete plan of action. For Vivekananda, Vedāntic idealism without social relevance is empty, and the social life without the Vedāntic idealism is blind.<sup>19</sup> He points out that Advaita worked so far on the spiritual plane only and this is the time for making it practical. In this he saw the action plan of a realized soul, a *jīvanmukta*. He conceived of a God in the service of man. In a letter he writes:

...millions of rupees have been spent only so that the temple doors of Varanasi and Vrindavan may play at opening and shutting all day long—now the Lord is having his toilet, now he is taking his meals—all this while the living God is dying for the want of food, for the want of education.<sup>20</sup>

Thus we may safely conclude that the humanism preached by Vivekananda is rooted in Advaita. It is strengthened by the Vedāntic premise that self-realization is tantamount to the realization of God. This stems from the understanding that a person should respect the divinity both within himself and in others. A transformed consciousness reached its fruition only in transformed inter-personal relationships.

The theory of evil was a deep-rooted philosophical question in the mind of Vivekananda from his early childhood and he found an answer in the system of Advaita. Advaita made him believe that the world was a mirror of ourselves—neither good nor bad, but a bit of both. A. P. Sen, explaining Vivekananda's views on practical Vedānta, says:

Human actions simultaneously produced good and bad results which in effect meant that there could be no good without evil, no pleasure without pain. Philosophically, this led to a position where one was forced to accept either the relativity of phenomena or their utter falsity. At one level, the good and bad were only relative experiences; at another level, this very relativity made them ultimately meaningless.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of God in Advaita as immutable and impersonal has implication to ethics according to Vivekananda. For him, an overwhelming sense of right or wrong should not in any way dilute man's search for God. Man is always capable of sinning and also capable of rising above it. This comes from the realization that he is essentially divine, an integral part of the reality, the Brahman. Echoing the ideals of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda points out "say not man is a sinner; tell him that he is God."

Another practical application for monism, which differed from traditional Advaita, was suggested by the German indologist, Paul Deussen, who thought himself to be a disciple of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer thought that Advaita alone could provide a solid foundation for moral philosophy. Vivekananda was influenced by such thinking and held the view that the Vedāntic ideal of *karma-yoga* was the most prominent moral relativism. He says:

Why should we do good to the world ? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves. ...The only help is that we get moral exercise. The world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually.<sup>22</sup>

Vivekananda vouchsafed that it was Vedānta which contains the roots of ethics. In his Wimbledon lecture he said:

The Vedānta philosophers discovered the basis of ethics. Though all religions have taught ethical precepts, such as "Do not kill, do not injure; love thy neighbours as yourself," etc., yet none of these has given the reason. Why should I not injure my neighbour? To this question there is no satisfactory or conclusive answer forthcoming, until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas. So the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and all-pervading, therefore infinite. There cannot be two infinities, for they would

limit each other and would become finite. Also, each individual soul is a part and parcel of the universal soul, which is infinite. Therefore in injuring your neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes.<sup>23</sup>

### *Vivekananda as a Contemporary Advaitin*

Unlike Sri Aurobindo who denigrated Śaṅkara's model of Vedānta, Vivekananda found that this philosophy alone is the most sublime accomplishment of the human mind and could provide a promising basis for a reinstatement of Hinduism. He saw in Advaita Vedānta the bond that linked together the diverse varieties of Hinduism. He interpreted Advaita as coterminous with Hinduism itself. He restated the doctrines with some differences. The phenomenal reality is a mere appearance, the inexplicable product of nescience or māyā. The sole reality is Brahman, which is pure spirit, identical with man's true self. The realization of this is final emancipation and the end of transmigratory existence. Like Śaṅkara, Vivekananda strongly asserted that renunciation is required to achieve such an end since one has to abandon all secular as well as religious ceremonies in pursuing spiritual life. But his greatness lies in discovering the ethical dimension of Advaita Vedānta and its practical applicability to individual and society. For him a man having Brahman-realization will have unlimited potentialities like Brahman itself. This will give him boundless self-confidence and irresistible power. He will thus become capable of working efficiently for the spiritual recovery of India, and this will bring about a national reconstruction.<sup>24</sup> In this way Vivekananda derived a practical consequence from Advaita centering on nationalism.

We also notice the influence of positivism on Vivekananda. He not only repeated the Vedānta doctrine of individual identity with God or Brahman, but also taught that mankind as a whole is God. This implies that man's service for humanity is the true form



of worship. Satprakasananda, a renowned monk in Vivekananda order says:

It is Śaṅkara's Advaita philosophy that he accepted and expounded in modern terms and found its widest application in modern life. So far as the basic ideas of Advaita Vedānta are concerned he does not differ from Śaṅkara, but there are some differences in his way of presentation and the emphasis laid by him on its practical aspects. He lived about twelve centuries after Śaṅkara under altogether different circumstances. He has aligned the spiritual outlook of Śaṅkara with the modern outlook upon life and the world. He has explained from the Advaita position how to spiritualise the modern view and the way of life. His aim has been the reconstruction of humanity on a spiritual outlook of Śaṅkara with modern outlook upon life and the world.<sup>25</sup>

### *Evaluation*

Here I have attempted to discuss two ideas of Neo-Vedānta of Vivekananda. Firstly, for him, it is *anubhava* which is the most important means of realization of reality rather than śruti, which is the position adopted by Śaṅkara. Vivekananda gave more importance to immanence of Brahman than the transcendence which is prominently brought out by Śaṅkara. As far as ethics is concerned, Vivekananda evolved a human-centric-ethics rather than Brahman-centric ethics. He felt the need for assimilating Advaita with other systems and in doing so he might have said certain things which are against his views presented earlier, but the historical situation necessitated such thinking. Like Śaṅkara, Vivekananda too addressed the conspicuous needs of the society he was confronted with.

For Vivekananda, philosophy seems to be a means and not an end in itself. He was not like Śaṅkara who was a philosopher by choice. Vivekananda's main aim was to bring about a social reformation, to make people realize the divinity within them; and for this he did not do any speculative philosophy and kept himself confined to his intellectual cell. Since his aim was to galvanize

people to work for the emancipation of the oppressed, he modelled his thinking accordingly and talked about an immanent God in all beings rather than doing a beyond-world-philosophy. Most of what we know of him is from his speeches which he delivered on different occasions to different audiences. Since he spoke much and wrote little, there ought to be certain inconsistencies and variations as per the need of those circumstances. But one thing that strikes a serious reader of Vivekananda is that he had been influenced considerably by Śaṅkara. As per the oft-cited criticism of his apparent inconsistency of views, A.P. Sen, puts it in perspective by bringing out the complex background of his forceful utterances. He says:

A trait that close friends and followers observed in Vivekananda was his inconsistency, for which he appeared to show no particular concern or anxiety. Neither did he try to reconcile his often contradictory points of view. The inconsistencies frequently apparent in his statements may be explained in two ways. In the first place, it has to be accepted that Vivekananda was a multi-layered personality speaking from multiple reference points. He also grew irritable in his later life and was given to enormous mood-swings. Moreover, the Swami was always an eager learner, never ashamed to admit that he has either changed or outgrown his earlier views. His active public life brought Vivekananda in contact with a wide variety of people and cultures and he was constantly reframing and reformulating his ideas in the light of new revelations and experiences. The social environment in which he lived and worked was itself riddled with many incongruities and contradictions.<sup>26</sup>

In the long journey of Hinduism, Vivekananda stands as a prominent milestone who dedicated whole of his life for the preservation of the sacrosanct nature of Indian culture and philosophy. He was a power house of creativity and tried to analyse Indian tradition in a more scientific way to suit the needs of the modern man. In doing Vedānta, he found it difficult to accept anything dogmatic and that is the reason why at times, he seems to have entertained different views, sometimes deviating from Śaṅkara.

On most of the aspects he accepts Śaṅkara and Advaita, but at places when he feels that the modern mind would find it difficult to accept such a position, he offers an alternative analysis so that it is comprehensive to address modern predicaments and becomes acceptable to the contemporary mindset.

### NOTES

1. The *Amarakośa* treats the Buddha as a proponent of Advaita (*advaya-vādin*) and who did not believe in the theistic principle (*vināyakaḥ*). Refer *advayavādi vināyakaḥ*.
2. In his *Bhāṣya* to the *sūtra*, 2.1.11.
3. Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age*, The Vedānta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, 1985, p. 87.
4. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, ed., Marie Louise Berke, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1996, Vol. 4, p. 257.
5. *Complete Works (CW)*, 2.347.
6. *Ibid.*, 3. 409.
7. *Ibid.*, 2.163.
8. *Ibid.*, 3. 175, 3.253.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.283, 5. 311.
10. Anantanand Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture, Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994, p. 46.
11. *CW*, 1.232.
12. *Ibid.*, 504.
13. *Ibid.*, 7.37–8, 3.25.
14. *Ibid.*, 1.414.
15. *Ibid.*, 3.248, 6.105.
16. Anantanand Rambachan, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–62.
17. *CW*, 2. 284
18. *Aitareyopaniṣad-bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara, Introduction and the *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara on verse 2.46.

19. R. Balasubramanian, "Text, Tradition, and Theory-Practice Problem" in R.K. Dasgupta (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years Since Chicago*, R.K. Math, Belur, Howrah, 1994, p. 830.
20. *CW*, 6.264.
21. Amiya P. Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000, p. 55.
22. *CW*, 1.73.
23. *CW*, 1.383.
24. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Philology and Confrontation*, "Aspects of Neo-Hinduism," SUNY, 1995, p. 240.
25. Swami Satprakashananda, *op. cit.*, p.70.
26. Amiya P. Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

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THE MAHĀSVĀMĪ AS A GUIDE  
TO POETIC APPRECIATION

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Great men live for others. This is particularly true of the saints of our land. From the Vedic, through the epic and the purāṇic, down to modern times, we have had illustrious men who combined in themselves greatness and goodness. Only on the basis of factual knowledge could Ācārya Śaṅkara have made his averment about the great (*mahāntaḥ*) in his *Viveka-cūḍcmaṇi* as: "There exist great and good persons who, like the spring season, are ever given to doing good to the world."<sup>1</sup> In the Mahāsvāmī of Kāñcī, Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī (May 24, 1894—January 8, 1994) we had an authentic affirmation of the illustrious tradition of saintly goodness.

Saintliness is a quality that one associates with a person who has turned his back on the world and pursues a goal that is supra-mundane or, to use a more familiar term, spiritual. The spiritually perfect saint of the world is a *jīvan-mukta* (the liberated one) in the Advaitic tradition. And the Mahāsvāmī has been acclaimed

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as one such being who is like a tall cliff on which sunshine 'settles', 'though round its breast the clouds are spread.'<sup>2</sup>

If civilization is an 'act of the spirit' (as S. Radhakrishnan would have it),<sup>3</sup> individual eminence, too, needs to be traced to that source. The *jīvan-mukta* is a spiritual adept and as such all his thoughts, words and deeds should be deemed to be touched with divine fire-sparks from the anvil of the supreme spirit. Scholars have spoken of the 'abundance, strangeness and glitter' of the 'amazing erudition' of the Mahāsvāmī. One may not be wrong in assuming that whatever is attributed to his intellect—ideas, wise sayings and sagacious counsel (*upadeśa*)—is an emanation of the spirit. Intellectuals there are but not all of them are spiritually inspired. The Vedic ṛṣi is the Indian archetype of the saintly tradition that is spiritual at the core, and moral in its essence. Intellectualism in this case is partly, (sometimes wholly) of the nature of intuition and partly of book-learning. Instances of this type are Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, Śrī Ramaṇa and Mahatma Gandhi of the last two centuries. There were many earlier and quite a number of them are now in our midst.

The Mahāsvāmī's response to poetry had an element of spontaneity as was his appreciation of music. All art, said Walter Pater, constantly aspires towards the condition of music. Elaborating this view, he has said: "In its (of music) consummate moments, the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other, and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, all Indian fine arts, which are described as "spiritual in outlook, idealistic in expression, and sublime in interpretation," are the province of the Mahāsvāmī and in his discourses, one sees him harmonizing them with religion—Sanātana Dharma—and philosophy—Advaita Vedānta. Rarely does the Mahāsvāmī let himself stray away from the religion of which he was the custodian as well as the exemplar.

The Mahāsvāmī's approach to poetry is that of one who has a definite conception of Indian culture of which poetry is the touchstone. He had an exalted view of both culture and poetry. According to him, culture expresses itself in noble thoughts, high ideals and fine sentiments; the originators of these are men of sterling worth, imbued with values of the religion of their birth. They influence the conduct and character of the people of a country, the fine arts they cultivate, the virtues they practise and the ideals they cherish. These are reflected in their creative effort, notably in poetry, the first artistic expression of the gift of imagination and the faculty of speech honed over time by constant remembrance of or devotion to God—*Īśvara pranidhāna*. The Mahāsvāmī has a fine analogy to bring home to us the role of the poet in a country's culture. The doctor, he says, examines a patient and finding his heart in a good condition declares: "You are all right, no need to worry." Just like the heart in the body, is there a place in a country which could be tested for the soundness of its culture? "Yes," says the Mahāsvāmī, "you will find it in the words of the greatest poet of the country."

As in everything else, the Vedas form the foundation of Indian poetry which, despite the fact of India being a Babel of tongues, is essentially Sanskrit poetry. In world's literature, Sanskrit may be said to have more schools of literary criticism than any other. At least six schools are well recognized viz. (1) *Guṇa-Rīti*, (2) *Rasa-Dhvani*, (3) *Alaṅkāra* (Poetics itself is called *Alaṅkāra Śāstra*), (4) *Vakrokti*, (5) *Anumāna*, and (6) *Aucitya*. Of all these principles of literary evaluation, the Mahāsvāmī seems to have a preference for 'rasa' and 'dhvani'. Of all the *rasas*, he would like us to appreciate any piece that holds up a person of great devotion (*bhaktimān* like Nārada), and/or exalts the path of devotion. He would attach equal importance to poetry that is suggestive of that embodiment (the great fount) of beauty itself, *Īśvara* or Brahman. He can also delightfully expatiate on a verse of an Advaitin like Appayya Dīkṣita or on stray verses of unknown

authorship. Thus we have a long line of poets held up to us for study and appreciation—Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Kālidāsa, Māgha, Śrīharṣa and others. The Mahāsvāmī can bring before us a vivid picture of Naṭarāja in his *Ānanda Tāṇḍava* pose or of Dakṣiṇāmūrti in his state of speechless eloquence.

The following are some illustrations of the Mahāsvāmī's handling of poetry. Kālidāsa the supreme poet, is the Mahāsvāmī's favourite; and here are two examples—the importance that Kālidāsa attached to *Śruti* and *Smṛti*, and his stress on the unity of Godhead. The following narration is in the Mahāsvāmī's own words.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Kālidāsa: The Vedic Roots*

As the Vedas form the foundation of our culture, Kālidāsa never forgot this even for a moment. And he knew the importance of *śruti* and *smṛti*—the Vedas and the Śāstras. That the *śruti* and the *smṛti* are closely related is brought out by him in a telling simile. And Kālidāsa is famous for his similes—"*upamā kālidāsasya*."

In the solar dynasty of kings, to which Rāma belongs, Dilīpa had for long no progeny. On the advice of Sage Vasiṣṭha, he started tending the sage's cow called Nandinī, daughter of Kāmadhenu. Like a cowherd, the king took out the cow for grazing, scrubbed it clean and did whatever he could to take adequate care of it. "The lord of the earth followed her as her shadow—halting when she halted; moving when she moved; sitting as she sat down; accompanying her as she sought water for drinking.... As he went along, the trees of the forest, with the birds on their branches, seemed to praise him with their cries; and the tender creepers, blown by the wind, showered flowers on him."

Sudakṣiṇā, Dilīpa's spouse, paid equal care and attention to the cow. As the king took out the cow to the forest every morning, she followed him to some distance. And how? "Like the *smṛti*



following the meaning of the śruti," says Kālidāsa—*śruteri-vārtham smṛtir-anvagaccat*. (In the evening, she welcomed the cow back with 'akṣata'—rice smeared with turmeric and used as a sacred offering like flowers).

The cow was śruti; Sudakṣiṇā, free from the dust of blame or blemish, was smṛti; she followed the path along which the cow walked and raised dust with its hoofs. (The dust is as pure as the cow. The dust shows the way as does the Veda.) The hoof was like the meaning of śruti. Likewise, smṛti does not repeat all that is contained in the Vedas—it goes some way, like Sudakṣiṇā. But what it does contain is the essence of the Vedas.

A poet like Kālidāsa is acceptable to all, even to men of different faiths or religious points of view. For instance, both Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, the Mīmāṃsaka (the one who was mainly concerned with the interpretation of the ritualistic part of the Veda) and Vedānta Deśika, the chief exponent of the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified monism) system of philosophy quote him. Both of them refer to Kālidāsa as they affirm the importance of one's conscience—*ātmanastuṣṭiḥ*—as a determinant of right and wrong in one's conduct. While the Vedas provide the primary source of judgment in matters of 'Dharma'—righteousness—there are others in the following order: the conduct of those who know the Vedas; the smṛtis or the secondary scriptures based on the Vedas; the conduct of the good; and one's own conscience. Kālidāsa points out that Duṣyanta (in the *Śākuntalam*) acts according to his conscience.

The king goes a-hunting. Giving a hot chase to a deer he comes near the penance-grove of Sage Kaṇva. The ground being uneven, he fails to get at his target. His charioteer tells him to dismount and take his aim as the deer is within the arrow range. Suddenly, voices are heard asking him to desist. He is told that the deer belongs to the Āśrama of Sage Kaṇva. Intending to pay his respects to the sage, the king changes his dress and walks in. (The Mahāsvāmī adds that the king enters with the idea of

purifying himself by seeing the holy hermitage.) He tells his charioteer: "Let us purify ourselves by seeing the holy hermitage" (*puṇyāśrama-darśanena tāvad-ātmānam punīmahe*).

Entering the penance grove of Sage Kaṇva, Duṣyanta sees Śakuntalā watering the plants. He is struck by her extraordinary beauty, "her lower lip red like a fresh leaf, arms like tender twigs, and youth, attractive like a flower, pervading the limbs" (*kusumamiva śobhanīyam yauvanam-aṅgeṣu sannaddham*). He asks himself; "Could it be that she is the daughter of the sage by a woman not of his class? Away with such doubts. Without doubt, she is good enough to be the wife of a Kṣatriya, as my mind longs for her. In matters over which there is a doubt in the mind, the good go by their conscience" (*satām hi sandeha-padeṣu vastuṣu pramāṇam-antaḥkaraṇa-pravṛttayah*).

Kālidāsa is acceptable to persons belonging to different schools of philosophical thought. What does Kālidāsa say about the unity of Godhead, the 'ekam sat' of the Vedas? He says:

एकैव मूर्तिविभिदे त्रिधा सा  
सामान्यमेषां प्रथमावस्त्वम् ।  
विष्णोर्हरस्तस्य हरिः कदाचिद्  
वेधास्तयोस्तावपि धातुराद्यौ ॥

The one God appears as three—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. They are equals, none superior, none inferior. Sometimes, either Śiva or Viṣṇu is placed first; both yield place to Brahmā also.

The Mahāsvāmī has a word of caution to the lovers of poetry that they should not be contented with studying one or two poets. They should forage far afield to savour the sweetness of poetic works by different poets. Poets are many and poetic works are numerous. But once we have studied all the works of one poet, we are apt to feel that nothing more would be found in other poets. This is a mistaken view—the mistake we make when we worship only one deity. There are many "*upāsana-devatās*",

though the ultimate Reality is one. Similarly, a poet does not take away all the ornaments (with which he adorns his poem) from the Goddess of Learning. If you look into the treasury of the Goddess you will find innumerable ornaments or poetic gems scattered all over. No single poet exhausts all the ornaments of Sarasvatī, the Goddess of Learning. Others use them and it is for us to make a search and exult in the joy of discovery. Bāṇa has a poem on the one supreme God whose manifestation are the Trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

### *Māgha's Feat*

The opening canto of the *Śiśupālavadhā* of Māgha describes the descent of Sage Nārada from the sky into the abode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā. He brings the message from Indra that Śiśupāla had become a menace to the world and, therefore, he deserved to die at the hands of the Lord. Taking up only two verses from the first canto to which few commentators or translators have attached any importance or significance, His Holiness, in one of his discourses in the fifties, explained the poetic beauty of Māgha's verses and the quality of Nārada's bhakti. As he descended, Nārada looked like a "lustrous mass" from afar; then he was recognized as an embodied being; as he came nearer he was identified as a man; and finally Nārada stood before Śrī Kṛṣṇa. (Nārada's lustre was due to his bhakti or devotion). This poetic description (according to the Mahāsvāmī) conforms to our own experience of viewing things at a distance—from a blur to the real form in stages. Māgha gives an idea of Nārada's *Bhakti-svarūpa* in a simple verse:

चयस्त्वषामित्यवधारितं पुरा  
 ततः शरीरीति विभाविताकृतिम् ।  
 वपुर्विभक्तावयवं पुमानिति  
 क्रमादमुं नारद इत्यबोधि सः ॥

How did Nārada look like? Like Śiva himself in his radiance. And he is telling his crystal beads. Lo and behold! a little below his finger, the rosary looks reddish like one made of coral beads and the rest is pure white crystal. Why should the rosary look reddish at one place and white at another? Nārada, the *bhakta* thinks of God all the time. He either plays upon the lute (veena) most of the time singing His glory or tells the beads chanting His name. He switches over to the rosary from the veena when his thumb becomes painful through constant plucking of the strings. The thumb, though shining white with the nail at the top, becomes blood-red. And the blood-red coloration of the thumb is seen as coral-red through the crystal beads. Thus the poet suggests the depth of Nārada's devotion in just one verse which apparently seems to describe a physical fact of painful blood-shot thumb.

अजस्रमास्फालितवल्लकीगुण-  
क्षतोज्वलाङ्गुष्ठ-नखांशु-भिन्नया ।  
पुरप्रवालैरिव पूरिताद्भ्रया  
विभान्तमच्छस्फटिकाक्षमालया ॥

### *Gaṇapati, a Symbol of Sacrifice*

There is a common prayer to Lord Gaṇapati which has come down to us through the ages:

अगजाननपद्मार्कं गजाननमहर्निशम् ।  
अनेकदं तं भक्तानां एकदन्तमुपास्महे ॥

'*Gam*' means 'to go'. *Agam* means not going or not moving. A mountain is called 'agam' because it does not move. *Agajā* means 'born of the mountain', that is, Pārvaṭī. '*Ānana*' means face. *Arka* means the sun. The lotus face of Goddess Pārvaṭī expands as it sees the sun-like Gajānana—the one who has an elephant's face. (The Mother's lotus-like face beams as it looks at the sun-like son, Gajānana.) (Him) I worship day and night—*aharniśam upāsmāhe*. He blesses the bhaktas in many ways—

*anekadam bhaktānām*. Who is He? *Ekadantam*—the one with a single tusk. What has happened to the other tusk, the source of pride and beauty to the elephant? Gajānana had broken that tusk to write the *Mahābhārata*—the book that spreads satya, jñāna and dharma. It was a case of supreme sacrifice in the cause of justice, righteousness and knowledge. To Gaṇapati the sacrifice was worthwhile as it would help serve the people. Gaṇapati is thus a symbol of supreme sacrifice for the sake of people's welfare.

### *Learning and Humility*

"*Vidyāvihīnaḥ paśuḥ*"—one without learning is like an animal. (Bhartṛhari, *Nītiśataka*, 20)

The student was described in the past as '*vineya*', the embodiment of humility. A fine example of '*vineya*' was Padmapāda, the first disciple of Ādi Śaṅkara. The Ācārya was once taking his bath in the Gaṅgā. Padmapāda was away from the Ācārya, on the opposite bank right across the river. The Bhagavatpāda wanted his disciple to bring his clothes. And lo and behold! the disciple walked over the river (with the clothes) and wherever he stepped on, there arose a lotus from the bottom that prevented him from falling into the water. Hence the name Padmapāda, the one who had the lotus at his feet. Padmapāda's devotion to his Guru was unique and unrivalled. He wrote a commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* of Śrī Śaṅkara. In his invocatory verse to his *Pañcapādikā*, Padmapāda described the Bhagavatpāda's Bhāṣya as the lotus rising from the Mānasa lake on the Himalayas; from that lotus (says Padmapāda) bees from different parts are sucking the honey. The bees are *vineya-bhṛṅgāḥ*—humble bees (like the disciples of an Ācārya).

यद्वक्त्रमानससरःप्रतिलब्धजन्म-  
भाष्यारविन्दमकरन्दरसं पिबन्ति ।  
प्रत्याशमुन्मुखविनीत-विनेय-भृङ्गाः  
तान् भाष्यवित्तकगुरुन् प्रणमामि मूर्ध्नि ॥

(I bow to the Guru who gave the *Bhāṣya*, which came out of his mouth set in a lotus-like face, as from the Manasa lake, and which is swarmed by bees from different parts, drinking in the nectar—bees which are disciplined and humble).

Though humility is the mark of learning, be that of the guru or his disciple, intellectual arrogance is very much seen. And how much arrogant should be a teacher who is hailed as one "who knows all the śāstras of the world"? In a stone inscription in far-off Siam, it is said in a verse that "scholars, like bees, are crowding at the lotus feet of Bhagavān Śaṅkara." (Śrīharsa in his *Naiṣadha*—one of the five mahākāvya—also describes the Ācārya as Bhagavān). Well, what does such an Ācārya think of himself? Is there any trace of arrogance in him? To get the answer, we must look into the Ācārya's *Saundarya-laharī*.

The *Saundarya-laharī* celebrates the beauty ineffable of the supreme Mother. She is beauty incarnate. She is described as "Tripurasundarī." She is also identified as "Śrī-vidyā." The *Saundaryalaharī* is looked upon as a lyric containing secret doctrine. There are certain restrictions upon one who wants to expound it. It is, nonetheless, excellent as a bhakti scripture and it is a poem of great merit. At the end of the *Saundaryalaharī*, Śaṅkara makes a confession, which is extraordinary for its spirit of utter humility. He says:

प्रदीपज्वालाभिर्दिवसकरनीराजनविधिः  
 सुधासूतेश्चन्द्रोपलजललवैरर्घ्यरचना ।  
 स्वकीयैरम्भोभिः सलिलनिधि-सौहित्यकरणम्  
 त्वदीयाभिर्वाग्भिस्तव जननि वाचां स्तुतिरियम् ॥

I have but offered this 'stotra' with the gift of your own words—you are the Mother of Words—*vācām janani tvadīyābhirvāgbhistava iyaṁ stutiḥ*—this stotra is the gift of your own words. This is comparable to: Waving the light of camphor to the sun, the source of all light—*divasakara-nīrājanavidhiḥ*; offering

'*arghya*' to the moon from the water oozing out of the moonstone—*svakīyaiḥ candropala-jalalavaiḥ sudhāsūte arghyaracanā*; offering oblations to the sea—*arghya, ācamanīya, snāna*, etc.—with sea-water—*ambhobhiḥ salilanidhi-sauhityakaraṇam*).

Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādā's *Saundarya-laharī* is like an ancient sculptural piece. Try as we may to our best to replace a broken part of the sculpture, we are bound to fail. Similarly, in the Ācārya's stotra not a word can be replaced. But the Ācārya did not take pride in having composed a perfect poem. He was content with saying that he had but used the words of the Mother of speech. Such humility should become part of us. If our achievements are looked upon as so many gifts from Her, the supreme Goddess, we shall have no reason to feel egoistic. Without egoism, we shall be making ourselves and the world happy.

Three great devotional poems describe the power and glory of the supreme Mother. They are: Ācārya Śaṅkara's *Saundarya-laharī*, Sage Durvasa's *Āryā-dviśatī* and Mūka's *Pañcāśatī*. The *Mūkapañcāśatī* containing 500 verses, is exquisite in the beauty of its language and content, each verse rivaling the other in poetic excellence. All the literary adornments, both of the word and the meaning (*Śabdālaṅkāra* and *Arthālaṅkāra*) are found here. There is hardly a verse which does not refer to Kāmākṣī or 'Kāñcī'. Those who are fortunate enough to find the time to study this work, verse by verse, in an analytical frame of mind, will find themselves immersed in an ocean of nectar.

### *Monism of Śrīharṣa*

The story of Nala-Damayantī is one of "a conflict of emotions and clash of love and duty". It has lent itself to a great deal of poetic treatment. The most outstanding work based on it is Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhacarita* of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Śrīharṣa's *Mahākāvya*, consisting of about 2,800 verses divided into 22 cantos and with eight commentaries, covers the story only up to the first *svayamvara*. In fact, Śrīharṣa has opened himself to the criticism

that he has left out the more poignant part of the story and chosen instead "the slender and comparatively less important" part. There are, however, rich poetic embellishments.

There are also deviations from the *Mahābhārata* story. Nala in the *Naiṣadha*, as the messenger of the gods, initially conceals his identity from Damayantī as in the *Mahābhārata* but later reveals himself and declares: "Pity me with thy word; ... thou alone art the life of Nala as the night is of the lunar rays." But he also repents for the failure of his mission, and regrets his betrayal of the trust of the gods in him as a messenger. He says: "Ah, me! This great task of Indra I have forsaken; for I have disclosed my name for nothing; Hanumān and others shed lustre on the messenger's part with their fame while I have become a laughing-stock."

The Nala of the *Mahābhārata* sticks to his *dharma*; the Nala of the *Naiṣadha*, while not impervious to *dharma*, yields himself to normal human emotions. Another innovation of Śrīharṣa is the introduction of Sarasvatī as the helper of Damayantī in describing the qualities of the kings assembled at the *svayamvara*. This innovation is one of the fine strokes of the poetic skill of Śrīharṣa—the verses describing the qualities of the four gods have double meanings intended to exalt both the God concerned, and Nala at the same time. (Damayantī, getting confused, passes by the gods.)

The Kāñcī Mahāsvāmi refers to the *Naiṣadha* in many of his discourses of the thirties and the fifties. He is more concerned with its philosophical aspects than its purely poetic or tragic-comic (or romantic) aspects. In the course of his discourses on Śaṅkara, he draws our attention to two verses—one stressing Guru-bhakti and another to the doctrine of Advaita. The first verse occurs at the end of the last, the 22<sup>nd</sup> canto of the poem. The verse beginning with "*grantha-granthirihā*", says: "In this work, I have placed wantonly many knots. One must approach a guru with faith and learn from him to untie these knots, otherwise this is not possible. Those who wish to understand must seek a guru,



worship him and bathe in the ambrosia of poesy. Those who are egoistic cannot understand this. If anyone thinks that he can read it with persistence and understand by himself will find that it is impossible. He who is virtuous must offer devotion to the guru and understand by his grace."

Śrīharṣa was an Advaitin. His faith in Advaita was total and his reverence for Adi Śaṅkara deep. He wrote the *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā* refuting all objections to Advaita. In the *Naiṣadha*, he depicts the scene of the *svayamvara* hall with Damayantī baffled by the appearance of five Nalas:

प्राप्तुं प्रयच्छति न पक्षचतुष्टये तां  
तल्लाभशंसिनि न पञ्चमकोटिमात्रे ।  
श्रद्धां दधे निषधराड्विमतौ मतानाम्  
अद्वैततत्त्व इव सत्यतरेऽपि लोकः ॥

"In the presence of diverse philosophical doctrines, people do not believe in the true one, Monism. Similarly, in the presence of four other Nalas, Damayantī did not believe in the reality of the fifth, the true Nala." The Mahāsvāmī points out that the passages on Damayantī in different situations and the descriptions of the kings by Sarasvatī are as novel as they are of high poetic quality.

### *Metre and Rhyme*

Poetry in the past in almost all countries was invariably governed by rules of versification called prosody. Prosody consists of two parts—metre and rhyme. While metre is concerned with syllables, both stressed and unstressed in close association, rhyme (which should be properly spelt as rime as in Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner') refers to the identity of sound in words, considered from the last accented vowel to the end of the word e.g. fast and past. Spellings are less important than the sound in rhyme as words with the same spelling do not necessarily constitute a rhyme, e.g. flange and change. The word 'rime' has taken

over the aspect of rhythm in assonance wherein the vowel sound in two syllables is in agreement, and not in consonants e.g., Roam and bone.

The metrical pattern is of great importance in Sanskrit verse. Metres vary according to the number of letters (*akṣara*) or syllabic instants (*mātrā* with long and short vowels in each '*pāda*' or foot of a verse). Where they are the same in each '*pāda*', the verse is metrically described as '*sama-vṛtta*'; when there are deviations, the verse is said to be '*Vi-sama*' or unequal (From the word '*Vi-ṣama*, or mischief which denotes a deviation from ordinary or normal behavior). An example of a *sama-pāda* verse is the well known eight-syllabled prayer to Viṣṇu:

शुक्लाम्बरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ।  
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

I meditate on Viṣṇu for the removal of all obstacles (in my path)—Lord Viṣṇu who is draped in white, who is moon-like in complexion (shines like the moon), who has four hands and who has a smiling (pleasant face).

### *Leader of Madmen!*

The Mahāsvāmī of Kāñcī often referred to Appayya Dīkṣita in his discourses and in two of them touched upon his life in detail. There was an occasion when the Dīkṣita wanted to test the sincerity of his devotion to God. He took datura seeds and went mad. And in madness started saying things that his disciples took down. And what did he blabber? Fifty verses in praise of God. This prayer is known as the *Ātmārpaṇa-stuti*.<sup>6</sup> The Mahāsvāmī introduced the episode thus: If one becomes insane his relatives and others close to him make all efforts to cure him of his insanity. But once he gets back to his normal state, he behaves like the rest of us—hypocritically, that is not speaking what we have in mind.

The mad man hides nothing: he speaks out his mind. If one may say so, a mad fellow commits no sin as he is no hypocrite. In the world as we know it, the sinless are two—the child and the insane. This is the reason why seers are described as '*bālonmattvat*'—*bāla*, child and '*unmattavat*,' mad.

Lord Parameśvara is known as 'Unmatta-śekhara'—the Leader of Madmen. He likes to put on the appearance of a madcap. The word has another meaning also—the one who wears the '*unmatta*' flower (*datura*) on his head. As Īśvara is mad, he is also totally sinless! Come to think of it, He likes such flowers as '*arka*' (sunflower or *calatropis gigantea*), '*drona*' (a small white flower) and '*unmatta*' which nobody wears and even in these days of rising prices, are available at a very low price in cities and can easily be plucked from the wayside in villages. Appayya Dīkṣita has this śloka in praise of Īśvara to whom is offered the flowers which nobody else wants:

अर्कद्रोण-प्रभृतिकुसुमैरर्चनं ते विधेयम्  
प्राप्तं तेन स्मरहरफलं मोक्षसाम्राज्य-लक्ष्मीः ।  
एतज्जानन्नपि शिव शिव व्यर्थयन् कालमात्मन्  
आत्मद्रोही करणविवशो भूयसाऽधः पतामि ॥

(The fruit of offering flowers like '*arka*' and '*drona*' to you is salvation. (Yet) knowing this I waste my time. By not doing (what I should do) through helplessness, I am an enemy unto myself (who) goes under again and again.) (*vidheyam* -to be done or performed).

This is an instance of the Mahāsvāmī's way of stressing devotion, by taking up a poem not popularly known or the value of which is not generally realized. (Dīkṣita's *Ātmārpaṇa-stuti*).<sup>7</sup> The illustrations given above do not exhaust the Mahāsvāmī's exposition of the poetic merits of Sanskrit literary works. He has an eye for beauty in the poetry of other languages as well, notably

Tamil and English. It should not be mistaken that he is selective in his choice of verses and his concern with *bhakti* and Advaita Vedānta. He reveals a poet's heart which opens art like the lotus to the sun (like Śaṅkara himself). If in literary appreciation, it is the "point of view" that really matters; the reader has as unfailing guide in the Mahāsvāmī. He introduces one to the choice and master spirits of ages past.

There are few saints in our land, like the Mahāsvāmī, whose knowledge is encyclopedic in its range and who combine in themselves the aesthetics and the spiritual. In the Mahāsvāmī, one finds a blend of these fine strands of life, the eternal and the ephemeral.

#### NOTES

1. *Viveka-cūdāmaṇi*, 39.
2. Oliver Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village* describing the preacher of the Auburn village.
3. P. Nagaraja Rao, et al, *Radhakrishnan Reader: An Anthology*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 1990, p. 382.
4. Raghunathan, N., "Music and Poetry" in *Ripeness Is All* (Centenary Volume) V. Sivaramakrishnan (ed.), Vighneswara Publishing House, Bangalore, 1993, p. 80.
5. As told by Ra. Ganapati in '*Deyvattin Kural*' in Tamil.
6. Appaya Dīkṣita was cured himself of his madness by taking a herbal medicine which he had himself prepared and had asked his disciples to give at an appropriate time.
7. V. Sivaramakrishnan, *Kanchi Mahaswami and Poets and Poetry*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 1995, p. 63.

## ABOUT THE PUBLISHERS

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संसारध्वनि तापभानुकिरणप्रोद्भूतदाहव्यथा-  
खिन्नानां जलकाङ्क्षया मरुभुवि भ्रान्त्या परिभ्राम्यताम् ।  
अत्यासन्नसुधाम्बुधिं सुखकरं ब्रह्माद्वयं दर्शय-  
न्त्येषा शङ्करभारती विजयते निर्वाणसन्दायिनी ॥

*samsārādhvani tāpabhānukirāṇaprodhbhūtadāhavyathā-  
khinnānām jalakāṅksayā marubhuvī bhrāntyā paribhrāmyatām  
aryāsannasudhāmbudhim sukhakaram brahmādvayam  
darsayanti  
yesā śaṅkarabhārati vijayate nirvāṇasandāyini*

To those who are afflicted, in the way of the world, by the burning pain given rise to by the scorching sun-shafts of misery, and who through delusion wander about in the desert (of worldliness) seeking water—showing the felicitous ocean of nectar, which is very near, the non-dual Brahman, this—the Voice of Śankara—is victorious, leading, as it does, to liberation.