

No. 4

SEPTEMBER 1981

# SAMVIT



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076

# SAMVIT

[ Knowledge that leads to enlightenment ]



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# SAMVIT

म नो बुद्ध्या शुभया संयुज्जतु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

*Shvetashvatara Upanishad III. 4*

## Universal Prayers

ओ नः पिता जनिता यो विधाता धामानि वेद भुवनानि विश्वा ।  
यो देवानां नामधा एक एव तं सम्प्रश्नं भुवना यन्त्यन्या ॥

The Father who made us, our Progenitor, our Creator,  
He knows all regions of the world and all things existing.  
Of all the gods He is the One, but He has many names;  
Him other beings approach with questions.

*Rig Veda X.1xxxii.3*

●                      ●                      ●  
अचित्ती यच्चकृमा दैव्ये जने दीनैर्दक्षैः प्रभूती पूरुषत्वता ।  
देवेषु च सवितर्मानुषेषु च त्वं नो अत्र सुवतादनागसः ॥

O God, if due to pride of vigour, in thoughtlessness  
we have done anything against gods or men through  
feebleness or insolence; whether among the gods or  
men, O God, do thou free us from the guilt of it.

*Rig Veda IV.liv.3*



## REFLECTIONS

### Surface Dwellers

ON 15 November 1882, Sri Ramakrishna was going from Dakshineswar to Calcutta, riding in a carriage. As the carriage went along the crowded Chitpur Road he looked out joyfully, like a child, leaning now out of this window, now the other. Casually he remarked: 'I find the attention of the people fixed on earthly things (देखति सकलैर निम्नवृत्ति). They are all rushing about for the sake of their stomachs. No one is thinking of God.'

So, *that* was what this 'Hound of Heaven' was looking for—to see how many people were thinking only of their physical existence, busy only with the trivial round of life, and how many had their eyes turned towards God! Individuals whose personalities are made up only of their psychophysical adjuncts can be called surface dwellers. The most common of these conditioning adjuncts are the individual's birth, family, money, education, occupation, nationality, and so on. One is an Indian, an American, or a Japanese; one puts on a khameez, a coat, or a kimono; one speaks Hindi, English, or Japanese; one believes in Vedanta, Christianity, or Buddhism. In short, the individual is an 'I', the indestructible 'I' that does not die, bundled up in a variety of *upadhis* or limiting adjuncts. 'You may cut the peepal-tree to the very root today, but you will notice a sprout springing up tomorrow,' says Sri Ramakrishna. Thus, with his *upadhis*, the individual struts about on the vast and varied earth as an apparent man, unaware of his real nature.

### Upadhi

*Upadhi* is an important term in the Nyaya philosophy. Its literal meaning is 'that which transfers its own nature to something that is near it'. (उप समीपस्थिते वस्तुनि धारयति संज्ञाययति स्वीयं धर्ममिति उपाधिः). The usual example given is that of a crystal placed near a red flower; the crystal looks red. This redness is not natural to it, however; it is *aupadhika* or caused by an extraneous factor, namely, the red flower. Therefore

*upadhi* means 'an extraneous factor'. The *Vedanta Paribhasha* defines it as 'that which differentiates and is present, but which is not integrally connected with the qualified object'. (कार्यान्वयी व्यावर्तको वर्तमानश्च). Shankaracharya explains that though fire is by nature unchanging, it assumes the size and shape of the iron which it heats. Similarly, the Supreme Self, due to its connection with a superimposed *upadhi*, assumes the qualities of the *upadhi* even though It is naturally perfect and eternally unchanging.\*

### The Actor

An *upadhi* is a powerful factor in changing a person's nature. Sri Ramakrishna, in his inimitable style, explains this point:

'Each *upadhi* changes man's nature. . . . If even a sickly man puts on high boots, he begins to whistle, and climbs the stairs like an Englishman, jumping from one step to another. . . . If a man but holds a pen in his hand, he scribbles on any paper he can get hold of—such is the power of the pen!

'Money is also a great *upadhi*. The possession of money makes such a difference in a man! He is no longer the same person. A brahmin used to frequent the temple garden. Outwardly he was very modest. One day I went to Konnagar with Hriday. No sooner had we got off the boat than we noticed the brahmin seated on the bank of the Ganges. We thought he had been enjoying the fresh air. Looking at us, he said: "Hello there, priest! How do you do?" I marked his tone and said to Hriday: "The man must have got some money. That's why he talks that way." Hriday laughed.

'A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot as if to kick the elephant, and said, "How dare you walk over my head?" Such is the pride that money begets!' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—14.12.1882)

An actor who has to play many parts changes his costumes accordingly. He puts on a kingly robe, and we know him to be a king. The next moment he changes into tattered clothes, and we know him to be a beggar. Similarly the *jiva*, or the individual self, adorns himself

\* उपाधिसम्बन्धवशात्परात्मा एपाधिघर्माननुभाति तद्गुणः ।

अयोत्रिकारानविकारिवह्निवत्सदैकरूपोऽपि परः स्वभावात् ॥ *Vivekachudamani*, 191



in various *upadhis* during his sojourn towards the Ultimate. These snares of *maya* or ignorance make him forget that he is an embodiment of *Satchidananda*, the Absolute Reality which is Existence, Knowledge and Bliss personified.

#### The Inner Voice

Some day, some time, however, the individual hears a voice which says, 'All this is an outward show; everything is transitory. Seek for that which is permanent.' He looks in all directions. 'Who speaks thus?' But he sees no one. He becomes aware of certain vibrations in his *buddhi*. These vibrations gradually become regular and rhythmic. It is the *buddhi*, or determining faculty, that leads him to Self-awareness. 'Who am I?', asks he who lived so long on the surface of life. He shakes himself free of his day-dreams. He becomes conscious of his *freedom of will* and says: 'I have to get out of this acting. Up and above and beyond there is something which is Eternal and Perfect. It is the voice of That that is calling me. But its source is not in the world without. Let me therefore close my eyes and look within. It is an inner voice that is calling me.'

#### The Diver

The surface dweller then dives within. His power of introspection reveals to him a whole inner world. Like a diver who enters the measureless depths of the ocean to collect pearls and other sea-treasures, the aspirant dives within to secure spiritual treasures. Sri Ramakrishna gives the simile of a diver in order to arouse the aspirant. The aim is to take the aspirant's eyes from earthly glamour and rivet them on inner splendour. He sang to the aspiring souls often—and still sings to those who have ears to hear—

'Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the  
Ocean of God's Beauty;  
If you descend to the uttermost depths,  
There you will find the gem of Love.'



# **The Relevance of the Vedas to Modern Man**

**JEANINE MILLER**

**WHAT MAKES** a religion eternal, that is, ever relevant to the problems of each age, each generation, is its answer to the eternal questions man asks throughout the ages. For age after age man has to face the same difficulties, to solve the same puzzles, to find a satisfactory answer to the great and fundamental questions of life's meaning and his place and function in the universe, of his conduct, of the meaning of death, the probings of the soul, of the Eternal he feels throbbing within his innermost depth, of God. Though their formulation may vary, these ever tax our mind and intuition and demand a solution that may satisfy the deepest yearnings of the soul.

## **Sanatana Dharma**

Alone among all the ancient religions, the religion of India has survived to this day. The true name of what we in the West have miscalled 'Hinduism' is Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion, a name which transcends all barriers of time and space, of age and locality. Dharma stands for the proper function, the inherent duty, the particular path or vocation in life, the essential truth of life as a whole and of each human life in particular, that which binds humans to their inner reality; religion. Sanatana Dharma, phoenix-like, shows us a history of cycles of dynamic activity—saint after saint is born, raising the people to new life and fresh awareness, invigorating them by teaching and example, bringing about moral and social regeneration and transforming the presentations of great truths to suit the times.

Then follow cycles of lethargic lapses of sheer aridity, when spiritless rituals hold the ground. Sanatana Dharma's ever-living source of life can be found in its mighty power of absorption, of assimilation, of inclusiveness, an ability to renew itself from within, to change its language according to circumstances, to change the presentation of its gods and to absorb other gods. Another source is its capacity to cater to the needs of all; it appeals to the loftiest intellect in its far-reaching and abstruse philosophical speculations, and it appeals to the simplest heart through its naive and yet moral and

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heroic tales. All this is summed up in the words of Lord Krishna:

'However men approach me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is mine.'

(*Bhagavad Gita* IV.11)

### The Cosmic Vision and the Law of Harmony

Within the history of Sanatana Dharma three main epochs or stages of unfoldment stand out: Vedism, Brahmanism, Hinduism. Each represents a variation upon the same theme—that Cosmic Harmony in which we live and have our being. The ancient seers of Vedic days were privileged to vision and express this Cosmic Harmony through their hymns, their legacy to posterity.

There was a time when truth could be expressed in the language of myth, of poetry, in terms of those primeval experiences of the soul when man lived in close communion with nature; this is now embodied for us in the four collections of hymns called the Vedas. Then a time came when those same truths needed the language of philosophy. Speculations and explanations resulting from a deeper probing of the soul became part of the spiritual heritage of the seekers of truth. These explanations are now embodied in the Upanishads. Then came the age of the epics, when great truths were enshrined in the language of stories of heroes and heroic deeds. Now is the time for the stern, colourless idiom of science, of intellect, of logic, of reason, no more true than the other varieties because it strives after exactness. Yet the great themes of righteousness or duty, of love or devotion, of truth in word, thought, and deed, of reward and punishment or cause and effect, or action and reaction, of self-sacrifice, generosity, hospitality, remain throughout the basic seeds of all civilizations; they are present in all religions and are as fundamental and vital today as ever before. Without integrity, individual as well as group, without ideals, without vision, no civilization can endure, for these are the backbone of religion which itself is the moulder of civilization. Vision is the great gift of the Vedas.

Hinduism is unique among all the religions in that it founded its philosophical and ethical tenets upon a cosmic vision, the vision of an eternal, universal order, traceable, not to just one seer, but to generations of seers, to those famed patriarchs who were already celebrated in Vedic times as 'our fathers', those who 'showed us the way'. This



cosmic vision is found scattered throughout the four Vedas, and they thus represent one of the primeval sources of that divine revelation—*brahma vidya*—which man received at the beginning of earthly evolution, and to which may be traced all the roots of subsequent religious philosophies. The Vedas contain the very basis of the philosophy of the Upanishads, and it is the Upanishads which have permeated the thought of India for the past two thousand years and are now slowly conquering the western world. More and more of the West's thinkers evidence Vedantic influence. The extraordinary contemplation of the Indian sages on the banks of the Sarasvati, of the Ganga, and in the jungles, has not yet ceased to arouse the wonder, the admiration, and the speculation of our own hard-headed generations.

The vision which the Vedas give of the 'cosmic order (Rita) born of the all-blazing contemplative-exertion' (*Rig Veda* X.190.1), of the One, and of man's place in the cosmic order, has stood the test of time, for none of our scientific discoveries, or the philosophic speculations of the past two thousand years has been able to challenge or to oust it, but it grows in depth and grandeur in proportion as our understanding and view of life mature. For, in its depth of insight, that vision of Deity, as expressed both as the ONE (*Ekam*), or THAT (*Tat*), and through the infinite variety of Deity's manifestations, has never been surpassed. Many more details may have been surveyed, but as in the case of the sages' conception of the Absolute—

'whose shadow is death, whose shadow is immortality'

(*Rig Veda* X.121.2)

it has been more a case of degradation of the loftiest inkling of the Divine that the human mind has been capable of, than of clarification or deepening of understanding.

There is implied in the Vedas, on the part of the Vedic sages, a knowledge of certain laws of the universe all embodied in and subservient to the one Law of harmony. The world order emerges as both static and dynamic; static, in the sense of the 'established order' of life which nothing can alter—the rhythm of becoming, the motion of the planets, the recurrence of day and night, of the seasons, of growth, of diseases, and so on; and dynamic, in the sense of that constant transformation to which all things are subjected, birth, growth, death, decay, the many appearances and disappearances of



all things, all of which exemplify the law of change. Thus in accordance with the ideal pattern, the blueprint of the cosmic order, the dynamic activity of the universe spells an ever rhythmic movement whose very constancy is itself the stability of the cosmic order. Motion and stability are united in the divine Harmony.

'Firmly fixed are the foundations of Cosmic-Order, shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms.' (ibid IV.23.9ab)

### Ultimate Oneness

The Rishis thought of the origin of the universe in terms of a projection into manifestation through divine contemplation of that which lies latent within the One; an unfoldment from within, without. We observe three definite stages of this projection implying three world orders: the primordial or transcendental level, the blueprint of all that is about to unfold; the intermediate level where the gods come into being and express the dynamics of the cosmic order; and the phenomenal level where man rules and disrupts the divine equilibrium. Ultimate *oneness* is a characteristic of the Rig Vedic vision that is disregarded by Western scholars. From this One differentiate the two poles of manifestation, which we term positive-negative, spiritual-material. The Vedic sages gave other names to these two poles; they personified them in Aditi and Daksha, and, at a lower level, in Heaven and Earth, Father and Mother, and from the interaction of the two the many gods and all other creatures are born:

'One whole governs the moving and the stable, that which walks and flies, this variegated creation.' (ibid. III.54.8cd)

'That which is one has developed into the all.' (ibid. VIII.58.2d)

'Born of old, the parents spreading around, co-dwell in one mansion in the womb of cosmic order.' (ibid. X.65.8ab)

In the 'billowy deeps' of mother space, Aditi the infinite, the gods come into being:

'Closely clasped, then from ye, as though from dancers, hot dust was whirled away.' (ibid. X.72.6cd)

With the fiery mist and the dance of the heavenly bodies, as it were, the world is set going. Each god performs his task in accordance with the great law of harmony of which he is the very embodiment, and all the gods' actions move concertedly towards the one end of



**creating a harmonious world:**

**'One-minded, one-Intentioned, the devas move unerringly together to the one purposeful accomplishment.'**

**(ibid. VI.9.5cd)**

Cosmic solidarity characterizes the Vedic pantheon—the wonder of the working in unison of all the great intelligent, energizing principles behind all phenomena as they shape the ideal thought of the Supreme Ordainer, the 'pattern in the heavens'. Here there is no degradation to our human level, to our human frailties, no anthropomorphization such as we later observe in the Hindu pantheon or the Greek or the Roman, but the gods are represented as:

**'Herdsman of the Supreme-law, whose decrees are truth.'**

**(ibid. V.63.1ab)**

**'Law-abiding, born in law, sublime fosterers of law, haters of falsehood.'**

**(ibid. VII.66.13)**

Whereas the exclusive claim of monotheistic creeds, which emphasize their particular creeds to the exclusion of all others, conduces to separativeness and conflict, or as A. C. Bose says, 'carries the imperialistic challenge of one social group against all other groups',<sup>1</sup> the all-inclusive appeal of the Vedas stands in sharp contrast. This is far more in tune with the demands of a world that is slowly emerging to a global outlook and a better understanding of the need for tolerance and respect for one another's beliefs. In the Vedas all gods are revealed to be the various expressions of the one divine and nameless Essence. Many and varied in their form, appearance, and function, they are one in spirit, one in purpose:

**'One is the mighty godhood of the shining-ones' (ibid. III.55.1d)**

Each is worshipped according to time or need, each for his own specific influence or beneficence, or all are worshipped together or identified with one another or with their Essence, the Ultimate Reality, *Tat Sat*:

**'Him with fair wings, though only one in nature, inspired sages shape with songs in many figures.'**

**(ibid. X.114.5)**

**'Reality is one, sages call it variously; they call it Agni, Yama, Matarishvan.'**

**(ibid. I.164.46cd)**

**'The Seer beholds that Being, hidden in mystery, in whom all find one single home; in that all this unites; from that**



all issues forth; He omnipresent. is warp and woof in created things.' (Yajur Veda 32.8)

These few verses, out of many more, evidence the Vedas' comprehensive view and understanding of the Divine, the One in the many; India has always been the land of unity in diversity, a conception which stems from the Vedic Rishis.

To the Supreme Order, all beings are shown as subservient, gods, planets, men, animals, plants, and so on; every action on the part of any creature that goes against it is disorder, strife, discord, and thus harmful, evil. The whole structure of life was deemed to be based on the bedrock of harmony:

'Cosmic Order is the foundation that bears the earth; by law the sons of the infinite stand secure.' (Rig Veda X.85.1)

'Vast truth, stern Order, consecration, self-offering, prayer, sacrifice, these uphold the earth.' (Atharva Veda XII.1.1)

'Where spiritual and ruling powers move together in unity that world will I know as holy, where move the shining ones and Agni the flame divine.' (Yajur Veda 20.25)

The great unitary vision of the Vedic sage made him capable of conceiving a oneness to which all aspects converged; all things working towards a greater harmony of the whole so that whatever brought discord was 'wrong' and, in man's case, 'sin'. At our human level the one law of harmony expresses itself as righteousness; hence the laying down of social and ethical norms for man to follow so that, as an individual and as a group, i.e., in society, man can endeavour to work towards the end of establishing on earth the ideal cosmic order.

### Man's Place in the Cosmic Order

The Vedic Rishis firmly set man in the middle of this Order as capable of becoming an active co-worker with the agents of the cosmos, the gods, to bring about in his own society the harmony that prevails in the 'heavens'. In the task of actualizing this at the phenomenal level the gods and men are shown as closely linked and able to work together; man standing at that stage where conflict prevails prior to that further stage which the *deva* commands, where harmony has been achieved and the tension between the polarities that constitute the woof of the universe resolved; but man has it in himself to

become the true epitome of the Cosmic Order by uniting in himself the poles of manifestation and integrating himself in the harmony.

The realization of the interdependence of all, hence that the sin of one is also the sin of all, whether ancestors or contemporaries, seems to have been prevalent in the Rig Vedic age:

'Release us from our fathers' offences, from those that we ourselves have committed,' (Rig Veda VII.86.5a)

It is only in this century that we have started to grasp the meaning of world interdependence and the fact that we are responsible to a certain degree for the welfare or misery of others. Co-operation and sharing are ideas which have only recently started to be taken seriously and to be implemented not only at the level of pure knowledge, as in the library world, but also in the economic world, and, let us hope, one day in the political world.

Man, since he is a vital part of the universe, if he would fulfil his destiny, his dharma, must choose of his own free will to align himself consciously to the divine order and perform his true function which is to be the living link between heaven and earth:

'Heaven is my father, my begetter; here is affinity, my kinship; this mighty Earth is my mother.

Here between the two wide-spreading receptacles is the womb [of birth] . . . ' (ibid. I.164.33)

The path of justice, harmony, truth, alone can lead to felicity:

'Sweet blows the breeze for one who lives by truth, rivers pour for him sweets.' (ibid. I.90.6)

He is then a harmonized man, a man at peace; a sage. The closer we human beings approach this fundamental equilibrium, this *sattva*, the inherent harmony of all things, the more do we live in accordance with the essence of righteousness, the more do we become dynamic expressions of that truth which is the very breath of the Divine.

The last hymn of the *Rig Veda* collection is so appropriate to our modern world that it should be recited before every session of the United Nations:

'Gather together, converse together. Your minds be of one accord . . .



United be your counsel, united your assembly, united your spirit and thought.

A single plan do I lay before you; a single oblation do I offer.

United be your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be at one, that you may long together be in unity and concord.'

(ibid. X.191.2-4)

Man's eternal call to freedom, his bursting forth from his bonds, are summed up in a beautiful hymn from the *Atharva Veda*:

'Open yourself, create free space; release the bound one from his bonds, like a new-born child, freed from the womb, be free to move on every path.'

(VI.121.4)

#### Reference

1. *The Call of the Vedas* (Bombay 1954) 38.
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*Let us meditate on the excellent glory of that divine Being who illumines everything. May He guide our understanding.*

Rig Veda III.62.10

## Regaining My Faith

KAKASAHEB KALELKAR

Dattatreya Kalelkar, endearingly called Kaka Saheb by the whole of India, will be ninety-seven in December 1981. He is an ardent follower of Gandhiji. As a writer, an educationist and a journalist, he is recognized as one of the foremost thinkers and authoritative interpreters of Gandhian thought. He has written more than 110 books in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and English.

Since his college days Kaka Saheb was influenced by the writings of Swami Vivekananda. They moulded his philosophy of life. 'Since the day I was inspired by Vivekananda,' he said, 'I have been pushing the young men who came to me to Swamiji.' It was out of his love for Swamiji that he readily and joyfully acceded to the editor's request to write something for *Samvit*.

WHEN I was in college I became an atheist for some time, being much influenced by the modern Western philosophers and thinkers. I always believed in truth, integrity and the necessity of purifying one's life. But I no longer felt that a belief in God was essential or necessary or even desirable.

At such a time I came across the writings of Swami Vivekananda. So deeply did they influence me that I became a believer—an *astik*—once again, with a stronger, deeper and unshakable faith.

I then read about Sri Ramakrishna and Sister Nivedita. For me the Master—Sri Ramakrishna—Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita form an undivided triad. Years later I was fortunate enough to come into close contact with the Swamiji of the Ramakrishna Mission (which I nearly joined).

Many years later I visited Belur Math and was blessed with the *darshan* of Sri Sarada Mataji. Mataji came out of her room. I bowed and touched her feet. She looked into my eyes, smiled her blessings—and moved on.



## Swami Vivekananda

### PRAVRAJIKA AJAYAPRANA

'Now, YOU folks have been wanting me to show you a real renouncer, such as I have been telling you about—one who has renounced everything for the Truth. Very well, a great teacher has recently come from India. His name is Swami Vivekananda. I advise you all to go and hear him. He is one of the greatest teachers and greatest ascetics India has ever produced.'<sup>1</sup>

This announcement was made by Mr. Paul Miltz, a German-Polish preacher in Oakland on a Sunday in 1900. The words were so convincing and sincere that the next Sunday, when the preacher came to the pulpit he found the hall empty save for two people, one Mr. Brown and a German lady. Everyone else had gone to see and hear the 'real renouncer'. The next Sunday Mr. Brown and the German lady also decided to hear the great teacher and ascetic from India. The indelible impression made by this astounding experience of meeting Swami Vivekananda may better be expressed in young Mr. Brown's own words, as given in his memoirs:

'He was not there when we arrived, so we took our seats and waited. Then someone in an orange-coloured robe walked from a little side-room out on the platform and I said to myself, "Who is that? An emperor?" His walk was that of a god, a man accustomed to ruling. When he sat down the audience burst into tumultuous applause. But he sat there unmoved, his face reflecting the perfect calm within. Then he rose and just held up his hands with palms facing the audience, and at once there was a silence that you could feel, it was so tense, so palpable. I said to my companion, "Who is this person who can make a large audience like this yield and in a moment give silence? He is obviously accustomed to commanding others." Then he began his lecture.'<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Brown and other members of Mr. Miltz's Sunday audience had gone to see a 'real renouncer', and what they found was 'an emperor accustomed to ruling', for it was the great ascetic, Lord Maheshwara Himself in human garb, who stood before them.

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Pravrajika Ajayaprana is the head of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in Trivandrum. Several of her articles and translations into Malayalam of books of the Order have been published.



*Swami Vivekananda*



Great and inspiring thoughts flowed from the monk easily and effortlessly, and the large audience was electrified by his magnetic personality, his imposing appearance, his rhetoric, and the powerful thoughts born of strong conviction and intimate personal experience. The western world was amazed to see this man who represented India and her religion, and in whom was seen a beautiful, harmonious meeting-ground of all the great philosophies of the world. All the paths to liberation propounded by the great religious leaders or incarnations all met in him.

Yes, one who renounces every earthly thing in order to gain divine glory and reach the realization of the Ultimate Truth finds, at the end of his quest, the whole of creation bowing at his feet. Truly has Thomas Carlyle said when depicting the causes and circumstances that led to the bloody days of the French Revolution, 'If my algebra does not deceive me, unity divided by nothingness gives infinity. If you give up even the one thing the world owes you, the whole world will lie at your feet.'

#### A Jnani and a Bhakta

In the eyes of most men Sri Ramakrishna was all *bhakti* outside, but all *jnana* inside, whereas Swami Vivekananda was all *jnana* without but all *bhakti* within. Anyone will agree to this who has read that extraordinary book, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and the mighty treatises on Advaitic philosophy and other topics, skilfully dealt with in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. But Swamiji himself expresses his nature very vividly through some of his conversations and letters. Sister Nivedita, in a letter to Miss MacLeod, quoted Swamiji telling Mrs. Bull in the course of conversation:

'You see there is one thing called Love, and there is another thing called Union; and Union is greater than Love. I do not love religion, I have become identified with it. It is my life; so no man loves that thing in which his life has been spent, in which he really has accomplished something. That which we love is not yet oneself. Your husband did not love music for which he had always studied; he loved engineering, in which as yet he knew comparatively little. This is the difference between *bhakti* and *jnana*; and this is why *jnana* is greater than *bhakti*.'<sup>3</sup>

This is only one side of the picture. On another occasion, when speaking about the love of Radha, the queen of devotees, for her Lord Krishna, Swamiji remarked that someone's fingertips may be cut by the foam of freshly drawn cow's milk, but softer still was Sri Radha's heart, mellowed by her all-surrendering love for her Lord. These sentiments can only be the outcome of direct personal experience. Thus Swami Vivekananda was a remarkable personality who had reached the acme of perfection through the paths of both *jnana* and *bhakti*.

### An Ideal Karma Yogi

Swamiji was involved in incessant activities throughout his short life. He was always kept under a heavy strain of work—lecturing, planning, writing and organizing. It was characteristic of him that once he entered any field of work there was no stopping half way, nor would he be satisfied with anything short of the final achievement. Bold are his words when he exhorts us to plunge head-long into action, but have our whole being coated with a layer of detachment:

'If only we had power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is, that there must be as much power of attachment as that of detachment. There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery; the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. Surely it is better to be attached and caught, than to be a wall.'  
(*'Work and Its Secret'*)

Swamiji urges all to become true karma yogis, never shrinking from duties and responsibilities nor frightened by miseries and oppositions. He often said:

'The whole of life is only a swan-song! Never forget those lines—

The lion, when stricken to the heart, gives out his mightiest  
roar.

When smitten on the head, the cobra lifts its hood.



And the majesty of the soul comes forth,  
Only when a man is wounded to his depths.'<sup>4</sup>

Swamiji saw the ideal karma yogi in Sri Krishna, the Eternal Driver of the chariot of life, represented through the picture of the powerful figure, holding with one hand the reins of the restive horses harnessed to the war-chariot of the greatest warrior in human history, Arjuna, the other hand raised as the symbol of fearlessness and everlasting hope.

Swamiji once told his friend, Priya Nath Sinha:

'Sri Krishna ought to be painted as he really was, the *Gita* personified; and the central idea of the *Gita* should radiate from His whole form as He was teaching the path of Dharma to Arjuna, who had been overcome by infatuation and cowardice.'

Swamiji then posed himself in the way in which Sri Krishna should be portrayed, and further said:

'Look here, thus does He hold the bridle of the horses so tight that they are brought to their haunches, with their forelegs fighting the air, and their mouths gaping. This will show a tremendous play of action in the figure of Sri Krishna. His friend, the world-renowned hero, casting aside his bow and arrows, has sunk down like a coward on the chariot, in the midst of the two armies. And Sri Krishna, whip in one hand and tightening the reins with the other, has turned Himself towards Arjuna, with his child-like face beaming with unworldly love and sympathy, and a calm and serene look—and delivering the message of the *Gita* to His beloved comrade. Now, tell me what idea this picture of the Preacher of the *Gita* conveys to you.'

The friend said: 'Activity combined with firmness and serenity.' Swamiji's rejoinder was: 'Ay, that's it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky! This is the central idea of the *Gita*—to be calm and steadfast in all circumstances, with one's body, mind and soul centred at His hallowed Feet!'<sup>5</sup>

Swamiji himself was the practical example of this idea—a perfect yogi and a perfect worker at the same time. Adept in yogic practices and meditation, he exemplified, through his most ordinary actions, the truth of the saying of the great German monk, Meister Eckhart:

'In service man gathers the harvest that has been sown in



contemplation. . . . God's purpose in contemplation is fruitfulness in works. . . . Activity is a further part of the Unity seen in the Vision.'

### Fusion of the Three Ideals

Incarnations and world prophets stood for one among the three ideals of *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma*. They were all great ideals and Swamiji adored all the *avatars* that had gone before him; he offered salutations at their feet with the greatest respect, love and humility. But he saw that the task of reconciling and harmonizing the seemingly contradictory ideals and principles of previous teachers and of the ancient texts fell upon his guru, Sri Ramakrishna. The disciple hailed him as 'the establisher of righteousness, the embodiment of all paths of religion and the greatest among incarnations'. In one of his lectures he paid a glowing tribute to his guru thus:

'The one [Shankara] had a great head, the other [Sri Chaitanya] a large heart, and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both this head and heart; the time was ripe for one to be born who, in one body, would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak; for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand, brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart, into existence. Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years.' ('Sages of India')

Following in his Master's footsteps, Swamiji performed the most arduous task in the world of religion, namely, the harmonizing of all the important theories and ideals in religion, denouncing or destroying none, but polishing and cleaning all the dross accumulated through the ages. Marie Louise Burke, in her book, *Swami Vivekananda His Second Visit to the West New Discoveries* remarks about this:

'It was for Swamiji not only to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony to the world at large but to give it philosophical form'. To substantiate this, she quotes from Sister Nivedita's book, *The Master As I Saw Him*.



'Hitherto the three philosophical systems . . . had been regarded as offering to the soul three different ideals of liberation. No attempt had ever before been made to reconcile these schools. On reaching Madras, however, in 1897, Vivekananda boldly claimed that even the utmost realizations of Dualism and Modified Unism [Qualified Monism] were but stages on the way to Unism [Monism] itself; and the final bliss, for all alike, was the mergence in One without a second. It is said that at one of his midday question-classes [at Madras] a member of his audience asked him why, if this was the truth, it had never before been mentioned by any of the Masters. . . . The great gathering was startled, on this occasion, to hear the reply [given in both English and Sanskrit]: "Because I was born for this, and it was left for me to do!"<sup>6</sup>

One feels thrilled when one reads these words spoken more than eighty years ago. They were not pompous, hollow words, bubbling with vanity, but words wrung out of a heart strong and vigorous and sure of what it said and believed. His conviction of the purpose of his advent on earth, strengthened by the tremendous faith and hope his Master had placed in him, based on his own insight, enabled him to utter such words.

#### The Inspirer

'Never forget the glory of human nature', Swamiji said one day. 'We are the greatest God. . . . Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am.'<sup>7</sup>

'Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; . . .'<sup>8</sup>

Like a cleansing wind, Swamiji moved over the earth, shaking people to their roots, inspiring and encouraging them with words of power, hope and enthusiasm. But, wherever he went, peace radiated from him and he transmitted it to everyone who came into contact with him. Miss MacLeod once wrote to Mary Hale, 'What a breath of the Infinite he always brings with him!' He communicated this inner poise and serenity to all around him and induced them also to



diffuse these qualities wherever they went. In a letter to Nivedita, written on 6 December, 1899, he expresses this:

'The man who really takes the burden blesses the world and goes his own way. He has not a word of condemnation, a word of criticism, not because there was no evil, but that he has taken it on his own shoulders, willingly, voluntarily. It is the Saviour who should "go his way rejoicing, and not the saved". . . . Come ye that are heavily laden and lay all your burden on me, and then do whatever you like and be happy and forget that I ever existed.'

Ever conscious of his mission in life, his mind always soaring in the highest realms of Advaitic experience, his whole being incessantly engaged in pure and perfect Karma Yoga, Swamiji always felt himself guided and protected by the hand of Providence. He had the constant unbroken remembrance that his activities were programmed and controlled by the spirit of his Master. Before the Master gave up his physical body the full outline of his illustrious disciple's life-work had been clearly envisaged and laid down. Swamiji experienced the continuous presence of God within and without him. One day he asked a young man, Ralph, 'Can you see your own eyes?' Ralph answered that he could not, except in a mirror. 'God is like that', Swamiji told him. 'He is as close as your own eyes. He is your own, even though you can't see Him.'<sup>9</sup> Mr. Allan, a Scottish friend, admirer and devotee of Swamiji recounts: 'He once told us that he had such faith in the Divine Mother that if he had to speak on a subject that he knew absolutely nothing about, he would get on his feet, for he knew that Mother would put the words into his mouth.'<sup>10</sup>

In 1900 when the Shanti Ashrama was to be established in California, Swamiji found Swami Turiyananda to be the right person to head this project, and he spoke to him about it. Seeing his brother monk reluctant to take up the assignment, Swamiji told him, 'It is the will of the Divine Mother that you should take charge of the work there.' Swami Turiyananda was amused. He smiled and replied, 'Rather say it is *your* will. Certainly you have not heard the Mother communicate Her will to you in this matter!' But Swamiji grew grave. 'Yes, brother', he said. 'If your nerves become very fine, then you will be able to hear Mother's words directly.' He spoke with such fervour that Swami Turiyananda's doubts were stilled.



Swamiji quotes the soul-stirring, inspiring words from the immortal Song of Krishna:

'Therefore, stand up, O Arjuna, and acquire the glory worthy of a man; overcoming all thwarting obstacles, enjoy the wealth and welfare of your country.'

He then sends out his own appeal to the modern world:

'Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! . . . Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, and every thing that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'<sup>11</sup>

### References

1. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda His Second Visit to the West New Discoveries* (Calcutta 1973), 349
2. *ibid.*, 350
3. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta 1964), 284
4. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta 1959), 172-3
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1973), VII.272-3
6. *op. cit.*, 578
7. *Inspired Talks* (Madras 1974), 156
8. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1973), III. 190
9. Marie Louise Burke, *op. cit.*, 224
10. *ibid.*, 367
11. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1973), III. 193

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*My Narendra is a coin with no alloy whatsoever; ring it and you hear the truest sound.*

Sri Ramakrishna

## Indian Culture and Womanhood—II

T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

In the first part of this article, published in *Samvit* No. 3, March 1981, Dr. Mahadevan said that the noble qualities of those born of a divine heritage constitute our cultural values, while those qualities belonging to the demoniacal heritage constitute anti-culture. Although we are born as human beings, many of us live like demons. The *Bhagavad Gita* (X. 34) mentions seven divine virtues which are feminine. These are: fame, auspiciousness, speech, memory, intelligence, fortitude and endurance. These virtues may be found among men also; but they are essentially womanly qualities. Sri Krishna does not choose an excellent woman and say 'I am she among women', but he mentions these feminine qualities and identifies himself with them. The writer considers Sita the perfect example of an excellent woman.

SITA, WHO was a gem among women, possessed all the feminine virtues. We shall now show how she was endowed with these excellences.

### Fame (Kirti)

The *Ramayana* is a great story of fame. In Thailand, the version of the *Ramayana* written in the Thai language is called *Rama-Kirti*. In this epic poem the major character who illustrates fame best is Sita. The *Ramayana* is known by another title: 'The Great Story of Sita'. The entire *Ramayana* demonstrates the glory of Sita. (I.iv.7)

In Mithila, after Rama broke the bow, King Janaka said to Vishwamitra, 'My daughter, Sita, will bring fame to my family by marrying Dasharatha's son, Rama'. (I.1.xvii.22) King Janaka said this with great elation. His words came to be completely true. Sita brought fame not only to Janaka's family but to Rama's, the family of Raghu. Even Rama's valour shone because of Sita's fame. A woman's fame depends on her chastity. Rama had taken a vow to wed only one wife (*ekapatni-vrata*). The entire story of Rama is an epic demonstrating Sita's chastity.

At the time of Sita's wedding Janaka addressed Rama as follows:

'O Rama, son of Kaushalya, my daughter, Sita, will remain with

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you and help you in the performance of dharma. Please accept her. May you be blessed in every way. Take her hand in yours. She is very fortunate; for her only aim is to serve her husband. She will follow you like a shadow without separating from you.' (I.1.xxiii.26,27)

Rama was an embodiment of dharma, and for the sake of his mission Sita left Ayodhya, and went with him to the forest. Even when she was abducted by Ravana and taken from Dandaka forest to Lanka and had to live there, she remained, as it were, Rama's shadow.

Now we shall refer to certain episodes which reveal Sita's enormous fame. King Dasharatha desired to make Rama the crown prince but, as fate would have it, circumstances changed suddenly and he had to go to the forest in exile. The fourteen years' exile was for Rama alone and not for Sita. Rama said to Sita, 'Do not come to the forest with me. There will be many difficulties.' Hearing this, the valorous Sita in reply reminded Rama that a chaste wife had the ability to face any difficulty, and added that, with him, she would live on roots and fruit and would not cause him any embarrassment. (II.xxvii.15) She further said to him:

'In my mind I harbour no thought that is different from yours, and I will surely die if I am separated from you. So please take me with you. You will not be burdened on account of me.' (II.xxvii.22)

She also told him:

'You are under an obligation to take me with you, for I, to whom happiness and sorrow are the same, am your devotee and chaste wife and I am helpless when alone.' (II.xxix.20)

Before leaving for the forest, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita went to Dasharatha to take leave of him. Dasharatha was in the throes of death, being unable to live separated from Rama. Kaushalya, Rama's mother, was there, and she embraced Sita, placing her face on Sita's head as a mark of affection. Then Kaushalya instructed Sita how an ideal wife should behave towards her husband. After condemning the conduct of evil women, Kaushalya extolled the virtues of chaste women. She added:

'Virtuous women are by nature *sattvika*; they will not stray from



the right path, they will listen to the instructions of the great and keep their minds pure. To them there are none holier than their husbands.' After saying this, Kaushalya advised Sita not to neglect her husband, for he was her god and he should be served even as God, whether he be rich or poor, while he lived in exile. (II xxxix, 24-26) In the reply that Sita gave to Kaushalya, her pain is reflected profoundly. She said:

'O mother, I shall act according to your command, not deviating even a little. I know very well how I should behave towards my husband. Even as a child, I learnt from my parents everything relating to this. Please do not compare me with evil women. I cannot deviate from dharma, just as brightness will not leave the moon. The *vana* will not yield musical sounds without strings; without wheels, the chariot will not run. Similarly, a woman, even though she may be the mother of a hundred sons, will not gain happiness without her husband. Father, brother, sons, all these can give a woman only limited satisfaction. It is only the husband that can give her unlimited fulfilment. Which woman will not worship such a man? I follow the dharma of chastity. From the great ones I have come to know very well what the characteristics of dharma are. Will I ever neglect my husband? Is not the husband a god to a woman?' (II xxxix 27-32)

Sumantra, the Chief Minister, took Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to the forest. Returning to Ayodhya, he consoled Kaushalya with these words about Sita:

'Although living in the forest which is unfrequented by people, Sita is as happy as she was in her palace in Ayodhya. Surrendering her mind, life and everything to Rama, she is blissful and without fear. She does not seem to suffer even a little from the hardships of dwelling in a forest. On the contrary, she behaves as though she had always lived in the forest from her birth, and she seems to regard life in the forest as the highest status that could be hers.' (II.lx.7,8)

In the Ashrama of Sage Atri, the famous Anasuya Devi consoled Sita, of high repute, with these words:

'Under divine influence, you are following the way of dharma. Following the way of chaste women you will constantly be close to your husband; you will be with him in the pursuit of dharma; you will then acquire fame and merit.' (II.cxvii.20,21,28)



Agastya, after detailing the defects that are found in ordinary women, told Rama that his wife was free from defects, that she was worthy of praise like Arundhati and that she was foremost among chaste women. (III.xiii.7)

After Ravana was killed in battle, Sita had to enter a fire. But fire could do no harm to chaste Sita. Agni, the god of fire, said to Rama, 'O Raghava, accept her unhesitatingly who is supremely chaste and who is devoid of even the least sin.' (VI.cxxi.10) Rama's reply makes it crystal clear how Sita is of unblemished fame:

'Sita does not exist apart from me just as light cannot exist without the sun. In the three worlds, Janaka's daughter, Maithili (Sita) is supremely pure. Just as a self-possessed person would not give up his good name, I cannot be without her.' (VI.cxxi.19,20)

In the 'Uttara-Kanda', a chapter in the *Ramayana*, after introducing Lava and Kusha to Rama as his sons, Valmiki swears that Sita is without any fault and that she is not even slightly subject to censure:

'I have performed austerities for several thousands of years; I would not enjoy their fruit if Sita were a bad person. I have not committed any sin through mind, action and speech; the fruit of these I shall enjoy if Sita is sinless.' (VII.xcvi.20,21)

#### Auspiciousness (Sri)

Sita Devi was an embodiment of beauty. She herself was Sri. Her beauty was equal to that of divine beings. Valmiki declares that she was the very personification of the Goddess Lakshmi. (I.lxxvii.31)

Sumitra consoled the grief-stricken Kaushalya who found it unbearable to live separated from Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. About Sita she said:

'With the valiant and unconquerable Rama dressed in tree bark, walking in front, Sita follows him like Lakshmi. What can he not attain?' (II.xliv.19)

In these words of Sumitra there is an indirect reference to Sita as the *avatara* of Lakshmi, and Rama as the incarnation of Vishnu.

Hanuman found Sita in the Ashoka grove in Lanka, and before he left to return to Rama, he spoke these consoling words to her:

'You are soon going to behold Rama whose face is like the full

moon. He will come with Lakshmana. He will save all his friends and, after killing the enemies, come victorious. Even as Sachi Devi saw the Lord of the gods you will see Rama.'

After consoling Sita, who shone like Lakshmi, Hanuman speedily returned to the place where Rama was. Thus says the poet Valmiki. (VI.cxvi.50,51)

After Sita went through the ordeal by fire, the gods appeared in the sky and reminded Rama of his real nature. In response to their words Rama said:

'I consider myself to be the son of Dasharatha. Who I am, whence I have come, you yourselves may say.' (VI.cxx.11,12)

Brahma, the Creator, replied:

'You are Lord Narayana, Vishnu, the bearer of the cosmic form. You are all. You are knowledge, patience, humility, all these virtues. Sita Devi is Lakshmi; you are Maha-Vishnu, Krishna, Prajapati.' (VI.cxx.28)

### Speech (Vak)

Skill in speech is particularly a woman's virtue. Women will forget everything in speech. They can conquer through speech. Excellent women will speak with measure, their speech will be beautiful, good and sweet.

Manu codifies the law about speech thus:

'Speak what is true, speak what is pleasing. Do not speak what is true in a harsh manner, do not utter even a pleasing falsehood. This is the ancient law.' (*Manu-Smriti*, IV.138)

Sita had no equal in speaking what was true and in a pleasing manner. Anasuya Devi, who herself heard from Sita the details about the *svayamvara*, marriage by choice, extols Sita's skill in speaking in the following words: 'You have spoken words which are clear, beautiful and sweet' (II.cxix.2) Anasuya aptly addresses Sita as *Madhura-Bhashini*, one who utters sweet words.

Rama was preparing to kill the demons in the Dandaka forest in order to protect the Rishis. Sita told him, 'We should not get angry with those who are not our enemies and kill them' The poet, in this context, observes that Sita spoke in a heart-melting, persuasive way.



(III.ix.1) Immediately, after this, however, Sita says, 'Rama knows dharma. He will do only what is proper.' Then she adds, 'I spoke in the manner I did because women are said to be of unstable intellect. Who can give you instruction in dharma? With Lakshmana by your side, you yourself can think over, and do without delay, what is appropriate.' (III ix.33)

Although Rama did not accept Sita's advice, he praised her skill in the art of speaking, her devotion to him, her consideration for dharma, and so on:

'O daughter of Janaka, O knower of dharma, you stated the proper duty of a *kshatriya*, you spoke in a pleasing and persuasive manner.' (III.x.2)

Sita spoke to Hanuman about her devotion to Rama. She said, 'I do not wish even to touch another man.' Hanuman, who was also an expert in speech, heard the words of Sita. He became joyous and stated that she spoke these words in keeping with the nature of women and which were appropriate to the humility of good women. (V.xxxviii.2)

#### Memory (Smriti)

Memory is the faculty of storing in the mind, without forgetting or losing, what has been experienced. It is useful when the appropriate occasion arises. Sita had the power of memory. She remembered even things of the far distant past, which one usually forgets. For example, one of the reasons that she gave Rama when she asked him to take her along with him to the forest was that as a child she had heard the astrologers in her father's palace say that she would live in a forest. They had confirmed this prediction after looking at the indicatory marks on her features.

In Atri Maharshi's hermitage, when Anasuya Devi told Sita that she had heard about her *svayamvara* and wanted to hear the details directly from her, Sita narrated the story of the *svayamvara* in great detail, without omitting any feature. This is also an excellent illustration of Sita's memory.

#### Intelligence (Medha)

Though one has a strong memory, it does not follow that one has intelligence. Even if intelligence is keen, the memory may be poor.

But in Sita's case, memory and intelligence compete with each other in gaining excellence. We have already seen how Sita argued with Rama that it was wrong to punish those who had done no harm. Rama addressed Sita as one who knew dharma. Sita had studied the Dharma-Shastras deeply; she had a keen intelligence. This is the essence of Sita's teaching:

'Wealth comes from dharma; happiness results from dharma; one can attain everything through dharma; this world has dharma for its essence.' (III.ix.30)

Sita admonishes Ravana for his evil ways and advises him to return to the right path:

'You should look upon dharma as what is good. You should follow the way of good people. Just as you protect your own wives, you should protect the wives of others.' (V.xxi.7)

She further says:

'As wisdom is to a knower of Brahman, in the same way, I am the worthy wife of Rama, the ruler of the world, to whom I was married after he had completed his life as a celibate student.' (V.xxi.17,18)

#### Fortitude (Dhriti)

Women are thought to be the weaker sex. But great women will oppose unrighteousness (*adharma*) with fortitude. At that time they will discard fear. Ravana abducted Sita by a ruse; he spoke charming words to her. Hearing these words, Sita was deeply hurt and sorrowful, but without the least fear, she threw a blade of grass before him and spoke with pride about Dasharatha and her husband, Rama:

'King Dasharatha was a great emperor, and his son Raghava is well known for his fidelity to truth. He who is famous in all the three worlds as Rama, is universally recognized as the soul of dharma. The handsome Rama, with long arms and large eyes, is my husband.' (III.lvi.2,3)

In the 'Sundara-Kanda', a chapter in the *Ramayana*, Sita speaks harshly to Ravana thus:

'As Sachi Devi is to Indra, I am to Rama who is the soul of dharma. Who, in all the three worlds, except you would think of attaining me? O, the worst among demons, you have spoken sinful



words to me, who am the wife of Rama who has no equal, and who is brilliant. Wherever you may go, how will you get liberation?' (V.xxii.14,15)

We shall listen to more words of valour uttered by Sita:

'Although I possess the power to reduce you to ashes, why have I not done so? Because I do not have Rama's permission and because I want to preserve my vow of austerity.' (V.xxii.20,25)

#### Endurance (Kshama)

Sita, who was born of Mother Earth, was the repository of patience. She acquired the mental fortitude to endure anything for the sake of Rama. We can say that her very life-story is a narrative of her forbearance. She grew up in Mithila as the daughter of a great king. She became the daughter-in-law of another great king and lived in Ayodhya. But when Rama had to go to the forest, she did not wish to live in the city, separated from him. She was ready to suffer all the difficulties connected with life in the forest. And even though Rama tried to dissuade her from following him, she went to the forest with him and Lakshmana. Life in the forest was not difficult for her. But when she was abducted by Ravana and kept in the Ashoka Grove, surrounded by demonesses, that was unspeakable suffering for her. She bore even this, because of the hope that she would again join Rama. After Ravana was killed, Hanuman went and stood before Sita and told her, 'If I have your consent I shall kill these demonesses.' In the reply that Sita gave, her noble virtue of patience reaches its pinnacle. She said:

'These demonesses behaved in a cruel manner, being commanded by their king. Who would become angry with them for this? I had to account for my *prarabdha*, past karma. Whatever one has done, one must reap the result thereof.' (VI.cxi.38,39)

#### The Ramayana as the Epitome of Indian Culture

Thus, in the nature of Sita, we see a plenitude of the special qualities of women. We have already said that these noble qualities are found in men also. Even as Sita was the plenitude of virtues, so Rama, who was the recipient of universal praise, shone as the peak of goodness. Was not the narration of Rama's story itself Valmiki's answer to the question: Does there live, now, a man who

is possessed of great virtues? Valmiki enumerates the great virtues to Narada and asks him, 'Does such an ideal man exist?' Among the great virtues enumerated by the poet, the ideal qualities of a woman are also included. With the help of the divine vision of the poet Valmiki, illustrations have been taken from the *Ramayana* to show Sita as the ideal repository of great virtues, and to expound the special features of India's culture. This is the gift that India has to give to the world: that one can gain spiritual peace through a virtuous life.

The Sage of Kanchi (Shankaracharya, a living saint) discusses in a discourse the authority which is to be taken as the source for understanding a country's culture. He says:

'The authority for understanding the greatness of a country's culture is the statements made by a great poet. Even as the Vedas are the *pramana*, authority, for dharma, so the statement of a great poet is the *pramana* for measuring a country's culture and civilization. We can know the greatness of a poet by the fact that his poem survives the ravages of time, and also by the use made of the poem by future generations. The eternal value of the poem can also be judged by the fact that the poem has been translated into many other languages. We should not waste our time reading the works of poets who enjoy a transitory reputation. There are classical poems which have been repeatedly tested on the touchstones of people's lives over a long period of time. The authors of those poems are our authorities. Their statements should be regarded as our *pramana*.'

Our duty is to take as a *pramana* the words of Valmiki, the poet among poets, and understand the details of the features of our culture and strive to mould our lives in accordance with them. The greatest wealth that we can offer to the world is the excellence of character which Valmiki saw in Sita Devi. It is the duty of all those who are born as human beings to strive to gain such excellence.



## The Shaivism of Kashmir

T. N. GANJOO

THE SHAIVISM of Kashmir is the only school of Hindu philosophy which represents a realistic and positive metaphysical view of phenomena. The special characteristic of this school is its use of the scientific method in concluding that the total substance of spirit and matter is indivisible, for both spirit and matter are reflections of Parama-Shiva.

Kashmiri Shaivism does not emphasize any form of social hierarchy, nor does it provide any code for graded forms of the social order. The Shaivite rituals and *Karma-Kanda* do not propagate any hierarchical levels, for Shaivites believe that Shiva himself is the real spirit and the only *gotra*, from whom to trace a line of descent. There is not a single reference in these texts to any form of caste. The most valuable fact of Kashmiri Shaivism is that Shiva himself is *akula*, one who does not adhere to any social denomination. Shaivism does not recognize incarnations and prophets. In Shaivite philosophy Parama-Shiva with his Chit-Shakti descends into the hidden or subtle form of the universe. The existence of the universe is nothing but the transmission of the self-imposed creativity of Shiva who inheres in the diverse objects of cognition. It is the spontaneous freedom and blissful joy of Shiva which leads him to manifest himself in the entire panoramic universe.

### The Trika Darshana

According to the doctrines of Shaivism, Shiva and Shakti are inseparable. Shakti is the very vibrating heart of Shiva—हृदयं परमेश्वरः. It is Shakti which actuates Shiva towards manifestation of the universe. In this creativity, the element of energy that is Shakti is called Vama. It unfolds all that is sustained in the self of Shiva and which springs up into the universe. The blissful joy of Shiva and Shakti, which is inseparable from them, is expressed in the phase of Nara, the self-sustained evolution of Shiva and Shakti. In this process of cosmic evolution Shiva, Shakti and Nara are the primordial causal factors of this infinite universe. Because of this triple unity, Shaivism is known as the great Trika-Darshana—the triple-science.

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When the cosmic creative-conscious movement lies within Shiva, such a state is known as *ahanta*, the state of the sublimation of the creative consciousness. Here, it should be noted, Shiva is not like the Shanta Brahmadevin, the serene knower of Brahman.

Nara, the individual being is Shiva himself, concealed within the limited sphere of creation. Shiva is an infinite state in which self-conscious recognition is spontaneous. In the form of the individual being, the spontaneity of Shiva is concealed. To transcend this limitation, the individual being needs to recognize his own self through the bold claim, 'I am That' and then, in return, he has consciously to declare, 'That I am'.

'In the sense-imprisoned human form or in the limited individuality of the human being, the conscious self of Shiva is hidden.'\*

Shaivism explains the socio-spiritual communication between the unbounded and the finite at all levels of conscious phenomena. Creativity is equally shared by Shiva and Nara, the only difference being in the sphere of creativity. In Shiva subjectivity lies within the self-conscious, supreme ego of *ahanta* and in Nara the subjectivity confines itself to the mind, ego and intellect, of which the sphere is limited. In its general and total form, creativity and subjectivity are one and indivisible. Creativity is a function of both the infinite and the finite. This is the common factor in Shiva and Nara. This kind of communication makes Nara and Shiva integral in the subjective sphere as well as in the creative sphere. Shaivism adopts this principle as its fundamental focus.

#### Five Qualities of Shiva

Shiva, in his self-conscious state, sustains five cosmic, independent and limitless qualities. These are:

- (i) Sarva-Kartritva : infinite conscious creativity.
- (ii) Sarvajnatva : conscious knower of all in its entirety.
- (iii) Purnatva : perfect within his own conscious self.
- (iv) Nityatva : beyond time and space.
- (v) Vyapakatva : existing everywhere and at all times.

In the individual human being, Shiva confines himself in

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\* मनुष्यदेहमास्थाय उन्नास्ते परमेश्वराः ।



five finite qualities in lieu of the five infinite qualities:

- (i) Kala (कला) : limited creativity.
- (ii) Vidya : limited capacity to know.
- (iii) Raga : specific attachment.
- (iv) Kala (काल) : time-bound.
- (v) Niyati : sense of value.

These five finite qualities and five infinite qualities are creative, conscious faculties and are common to the Supreme and the individual. In Shaivism great emphasis is laid on this possession in common, for it clearly means that an individual is not a mere puppet but a limited, conscious identity, in whom creativity rests. The only difference between the individual and the Supreme is limitedness and limitlessness.

Why does Shiva undertake this self-imposed limitation? A rational explanation of this phenomenon is given by Shaivism. Nara, the bound being, acts in his sphere as a limited actor and his universe also corresponds to his limitation. The three Malas (मल), self-imposed states of illusion, involve him in his limitation. So Nara acts within the three Malas:

1. *Anava-Mala*: In this state of limitation one's conscious sphere assumes limits and one's entire concentration rests on the corporal form. Mala simply means impurity. The layers of ignorance conceal the originality of Nara's being. The individual clings to it without comprehending that he is something else. The physical ego dominates the whole phenomenon.

2. *Mayiya-Mala*: In this state the limited-being's conscious sphere is so shrunk that he feels that he is separate from the universe and that the universe is separate from him. This whole existence appears totally concealed from him and he, likewise, is concealed from those in his conscious sphere.

3. *Karma-Mala*: The stream of consciousness is so narrowed down that Shiva himself acts like an ignorant entity and gets involved in the mesh of values, that is, of right and wrong. The *Para-Shastra* explains it thus:

‘The self-concealed Shiva starts to reconstitute a new

sense of right and wrong which is joy and sorrow.\*

According to Shaivism, Mala is the main factor which makes the limited being perfectly worldly, *samsari*, and because of this the shackles of birth and death are always perpetuated, and as long as the infinite being is not released the question of cognition does not arise. The energetic force of this threefold Mala is very active in concealing one's real being. The resolving process laid down by Shaivism for the deliverance of the infinite is that one becomes Shaiva, the mighty One, in his own conscious orbit, and thus crosses the barrier of limitation in one's own *vimarsha*—continuous self-consciousness in wakefulness, dream and deep sleep. This is the only approach which can assist the individual being in his Self-recognition. Shaivism claims that no Self-recognition is possible, for it is not like the recognition of a subjective universe and an objective universe, perceived apart from each other:

'The *mantra*, the object, and the *mantri*, the subject, have to make an integral unity for Self-recognition;† then alone, the experience is realized.‡

In such a state of consciousness the individual never forgets his real identity and views the whole objective universe as his own creation. Though he may pass through all the distended impressions of *vikalpa*, a chain of doubts, he is never disturbed. In fact, he lives his life to the full but he is not overpowered and engulfed by them.

#### Purposeful Creation

Shaivism lays positive emphasis on the fact that the creation of this universe is purposeful and is not an accident. Its existence is as real as the reality of Parama-Shiva. It is the spontaneous joy of Shiva, and he creates the impression of this universe on his own self.§ Through his infinite and subtle desire, Parama-Shiva unveils this whole universe by his own will. This state is known as *unmesha*, the opening of the eyelids. Parama-Shiva is nothing but *prakasha*, the cosmic totality; and *vimarsha*, the creative conscious faculty, is its

\* धर्मधर्मार्थकं कर्म सुखदुःखादिलक्षणम् ।

† पृथक् मन्त्रः पृथक् मन्त्री न सिद्ध्यन्ति कदाचन ।

‡ भोक्तृव भोग्यभावेन सदा सर्वत्र संस्थितः ।

§ स्वेच्छया स्वमिती विश्वं उन्मीलयति ।



real luxuriance. Shiva creates, preserves, destroys and merges its sense perception and finally integrates it with his absolute conscious joy. These five steps are continuously going on within Shiva's conscious liberty of action. The individual being, also, continuously passes through these five states known as *Srishti*, *Sthiti*, *Tirodhana*, *Samhara* or *Vilaya* and *Anugraha*, that is, creation, preservation, self-limitation, dissolution and grace. His liberty of action and conscious creativity remain limited and finally become integrated within his conscious self. The individual being in his limited sphere does it unconsciously.

### Positive Characteristic of Shaivism

The chief and the unique characteristic of Shaivite philosophy is that it does not propound the negative phenomenon of renunciation but insists upon the re-attainment of the concealed one's real being. The question of *neti-neti*, the negation and non-acceptance of the material universe is not accepted. It firmly and unequivocally declares *esheti-esheti*, that is, whatever exists is within the self of Shiva. Shaivism does not propagate restraint of the senses or the renunciation of family life. The great Shaivite scholar, Utpala Deva, states:

'Let my developed senses appreciate their respective objects without any restriction but, O Lord! let them not dare to break the continuous integral unity and the spontaneity of the communication I have with you '\*

In its conscious evolution, Shaivism does not endorse the idea of renunciation that prevails in other Indian philosophies. Its only proclamation is that, like a true actor, the individual enjoys the essence of this material universe which, in subtlety, is the integral soul of the Supreme Being. The great Utpala Deva, in his *Stotravali*, makes it more poetic:

'A self-realized soul who, as a conscious being, observes this whole and varied objective universe in his own conscious self is never afraid but is ever filled with supreme joy.'†

\* निजनिर्गेषु पदेषु पतन्विमाः करणभूतस्य उल्लसिता मम ।  
क्षणमपीक्ष्य मनागपि मैवभूत् त्वदविभेदरसक्षति साहसम् ॥

† योऽविकल्पमिदमर्थमण्डलं पश्यतीक्ष्ण निश्चलं भवद्वयम् ।  
स्वात्मपक्षपरिपूरिते जगत् यस्य नित्यनुचिन्तः कुतो भयम् ॥



The Shaivism of Kashmir, as a metaphysical school of philosophy, develops a unique system, for it claims that Shiva himself descends from the Absolute Self to the individual self. Its chief contribution lies within its philosophical framework which does not create the sense of a deprived situation for the individual. The individual is bound within his sphere and is finite at his conscious level, but still he has direct communication with the Supreme Being, for creativity is the common phenomenon of both. Shaivism is a great challenge to the Indo-Aryan society of India, where a graded society is constituted in social *gotras*. In Shaivite religious practice, Shiva connotes the only common *gotra*. Shaivism presumes a society which is casteless and it creates a society which is classless. This fundamental precept is, in fact, the basic reason why caste withered away in Kashmir and a conscious sense of belonging to the *Shiva-gotra*, the oneness of being, transcended all social grades and finally smoothed them out.

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## The Concept of Philosophy and Social Change

RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

PHILOSOPHY IS not satisfied with superficialities or with what is obvious or apparent. Philosophy is sophisticated and highly critical, and has a long and eventful history. In the vicissitudes of man's development, the concept of philosophy passed through significant changes. A brief study of its history is indispensable, for it has direct bearing on the present connotation of philosophy and its relevance to social change.

### Ancient Greece

Philosophy in the West had its birth in ancient Greece. Thales of Miletus, who was renowned for his practical sagacity, is acclaimed the founder and father of Western philosophy. In the early period of Greek philosophy, from Thales to the Sophists, natural science constituted a part of philosophy. With the appearance of Socrates and Plato, the tide of the traditional way of thinking underwent a significant change. Socrates sought to restore sanity and cohesion into the disordered intellectual life of his time and to infuse into it a

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sense of purpose and direction, for this had been rudely shattered by the Sophists. With Socrates and Plato the culture of the self and the rational aspect of human nature became the centre of philosophical inquiry. 'Know thyself', so goes the famous dictum.

Greek philosophy attained its zenith in Aristotle. The synthetic and comprehensive outlook, which came to be a dominant feature of philosophic investigations in later years, had its root in Aristotle's philosophy. The post-Aristotelian philosophy made no significant departure from the general trend initiated by Plato and Aristotle.

### **Medieval Europe**

The period of Medieval European philosophy was one of decadence and senseless dogmatism, with a slavish dependence on biblical dogma. Any sort of free and independent thinking was viewed with suspicion. Some of the profound principles of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle were sometimes misinterpreted to suit the whims and caprices of the Church fathers. They proclaimed themselves to be the sole guardians of man's intellectual, moral and religious life. This amounted to the death of philosophic reflection, which could germinate and flower only in an environment of freedom and vitality. In fact, there was really nothing in the Middle Ages which merited the description of philosophy.

### **The Modern Period**

Modern European philosophy is opposed to the uncritical and credulous tendencies of the medieval period. It shows distinctive signs of renaissance and is characterized by a spirit of independent and creative thinking, and a spirit of criticism and scientific temperament. The startling findings and discoveries in physical science had their inevitable effect on philosophical reflection.

The spirit of modern philosophy first found expression in the writings of Francis Bacon, an English empiricist. Rene Descartes, the famous French philosopher, also sought to construct a system of thought entirely in the spirit of modern times, though theological bias is not entirely absent in his system.

Philosophy in the modern period is generally regarded as a rational reflection of life and experience as a whole—some sort of synoptic world-view. A critical attitude towards the problems of the here and now persisted all through the modern period. A group of



powerful thinkers, Herbert Spencer, Samuel Alexander and Bertrand Russell in particular, are eager to ensure intellectual rapport between science and philosophy, and regard philosophy as a universal science, a super-science, whose main function is to harmonize the results of the sciences into a consistent world view. Thus Russell writes, 'Philosophy involves a criticism of scientific knowledge, not from a point of view ultimately different from that of science, but from a point of view less concerned with details and more concerned with the harmony of the whole body of special sciences.'<sup>1</sup> *Prima facie*, Russell's formulations appear to be in perfect conformity with the spirit of the modern age, yet he ignores the basic difference between his methodology and general attitude to things and events and the methodology and attitude of science, and hence his position is found to be indefensible. Philosophy is not merely a critical restatement of scientifically ascertained facts.

The modern trend of philosophical enterprise in the West is essentially concerned with man and his affairs in this mundane existence. Hence an attempt is being made to bring philosophy closer to life. Pragmatism, Positivism, the Dialectical Materialism of Marx and Existentialism bear clear manifestations of this tendency. In his eagerness to give philosophy an action-inspired orientation, Marx maintains that hitherto 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it.'<sup>2</sup> The Marxists explain this view as suggesting the divorce of philosophy from life. But what Marx actually gave was nothing more than an interpretation of human society according to his own preconceived notions. His interpretation inspired many to bring about certain changes in the existing social order. Undoubtedly, Marxism has mass appeal, but this is due to the 'strength of the creed' and not to the 'validity of science'.

#### Linguistic Analysis, Logical Positivism and Existentialism

The appearance of Wittgenstein on the scene of European philosophy marks a turning point in its history. He fathered two different schools of philosophy, Linguistic Analysis and Logical Positivism, and these schools hold that the function of philosophy is to undertake a close analysis of science and its logic and language. Man's metaphysical quest in the realm of reality, it is asserted, is a pointless



pursuit—the madness of miscalculation leading to nowhere. Rudolf Carnap proudly proclaims, 'We pursue logical analysis but not philosophy'.<sup>3</sup> The unqualified dependence of Logical Positivism on sense-experience has circumscribed the ambit of its inquiry to observed facts only. The reductionist tendency of the empiricists in general and the Logical Positivists in particular in reducing all experience to the narrow limit of sense-experience is the root-cause of many difficulties. Linguistic Analysis is undoubtedly very vital in any serious intellectual pursuit, not less in any philosophical discourse. Logical Positivism, by emphasizing this fact, has cautioned us to be very careful in the use of words; but its assertions that metaphysical statements are all meaningless and that philosophical activity is to be exhausted in only linguistic analysis are nothing more than unwarranted assumptions. For obvious reasons, philosophy refuses to play the role of the grammar of science.

Existentialism is a very significant philosophical movement of the modern age. Its anti-metaphysical attitude is based on the admission of the inadequacy and relativity of scientific knowledge. Existentialism exhorts us to return from barren intellectual exercise to a 'complete human life, an authentic existence'—a life of inward subjective experience which makes man immediately conscious of his own inward existence—as the only indubitable truth. 'The revolt of modern philosophy in its Positivist and Existentialist forms', Dr. Radhakrishnan observes, 'has been a healthy and liberating influence. But we cannot rest content with revolt. We need constructive philosophy, an articulation of ultimate presuppositions about the world we live in. This is possible only by hard metaphysical thinking.'<sup>4</sup>

#### Theory and Practice

The concept of philosophy in the West makes it abundantly clear that philosophy is a process and an expression of rational reflection upon experience without unnecessary assumptions. It is, and it should be, mainly concerned with the meaning and significance of human life. Further, there are certain areas of human life, such as its moral, aesthetic, religious and spiritual experiences, over which science has no *prima facie* authority to pronounce judgement. Any attempt to explain these aspects of human experience in terms of either economic determinism or technological determinism is clearly a



case of over-simplification. Man's life is an integrated whole and therefore should be viewed as a whole. Any study in disparate sections, however important it may appear on pragmatic considerations, cannot really answer the perennial problem of paramount importance which has been agitating man's mind since the dawn of civilization. The question is: What is man and what is his destiny? What is his relation to the physical and social world in which he is placed? This is a persistent problem which still continues to be the central issue of any serious philosophical inquiry.

The Indian conception of philosophy has its distinctive characteristics. In India, philosophy is looked upon as '*darshana*', a direct vision of truth or reality (*Tattva-darshana*), and philosophical investigation is not undertaken for its own sake; truth is sought, not mere intellectual satisfaction. The search for truth is mainly concerned with the realization of Ultimate Truth and Reality, leading to a life of truth and justice, peace and equanimity. Hence philosophy in India is recognized as the light of life. All systems of Indian philosophy consider philosophy to be both an intellectual and a practical discipline, to be cultivated in order to find out how life can best be led. As Plutarch pertinently points out, 'Philosophy is the art of living'. Henry Thoreau very beautifully sums up the function of a true philosopher in the following words: 'To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust'. This clearly shows that philosophy implies both theory and action; philosophy and life go together.

The modern age suffers from the alienation of practice from theory, thus giving rise to all sorts of behavioural maladjustments, and to hypocrisy and fanaticism. Indian philosophy and culture emphasize the maximum co-operation of knowledge with action, theory with practice. The *Gita* also maintains that wisdom is compatible with action.

#### Philosophy and Social Science

Philosophy is meaningful and comprehensive. It can hardly deny its function of interpreting the great changes that are taking place all around us in society. The social life of man needs direction in the midst of present fluctuating situations. Social sciences take great pains to examine various facts of social change with the objective of



offering a theoretical explanation and practical direction. But these explanations are destined to be incomplete and incoherent inasmuch as they take a piecemeal view of social events and affairs. Here lies the imperative necessity of presenting an integrated picture which only philosophy can offer. Thus Emile Durkheim's contention that sociology should not succumb to the influence of philosophy does not sound wise. The philosophical interpretation of social phenomena should be critical and constructive, evaluative and synthetic and in being so, should keep in view the basic nature of man and his destiny, individual and collective. For what seems to be most important, and what is lacking in the attitude of the different social sciences, is a comprehensive approach to the totality of the situation.

Social change is a very significant expression. Society is a dynamic reality. Change or transformation is inherent in the very nature of society. Social change does not imply a change in the social structure only, but also indicates changes in social groups, institutions, man's way of life, his manners, customs, habits, beliefs, modes of social relationships and, above all, the ideals which social beings seek to realize in their own lives. Multifarious factors contribute to social change, such as physical, biological, technological and cultural. According to some thinkers change is unilinear, while others maintain that it exhibits 'recurrent rhythmic movement'. This issue, along with other corollary problems relating to the conditions, factors, ways or mechanism of social change constitute the vast panorama of social studies.

Keeping in view the function of philosophy, we are interested in two important types of social explanation, namely the economic interpretation offered by Karl Marx and the technological determinism advocated by the American sociologist, Veblen. Both are deterministic theories inasmuch as both doctrines seek to explain human consciousness and social change in terms of environmental and material conditions. Certain theoretical assumptions preceded the Marxian theory of social explanation, such as the dialectic movement of society, the materialistic conception of history, and the concept of class struggle. What appears to be the most glaring weakness of all deterministic theories, whether economic or technological, is that they offer some superficial formulae of social explanation by oversimplifying the complex structure of society and social relationships.



The demand for food and shelter is, no doubt, a very forceful and penetrating issue, vitally affecting man's biological existence, and a sound social system must ensure that these basic necessities of life are met. But still the fact remains that man is not an animal and that his life is maintained neither by bread alone nor by wealth alone. There is more to life than economic values. Hence any social explanation which is nourished by over-materialism and class conflict cannot, in the long run, provide the ideal conditions for the promotion of the common good of man.

### Social Evolution and Social Change

Very often social change is linked with social evolution, though some thinkers are unwilling to extend the concept of 'evolution' to society. Social evolution shows 'an increasing specialisation of organs and units' within a social system. It implies social integration and social differentiation as a result of which old social systems are replaced by new ones. From the philosophic point of view, social change must be a progressive advance of society towards an ideal. An ideal society is one where man can attain his best self—where he can bring forth all that is best in him. A progressive society should create such a social structure and environment where complete functioning of the integrated personality will be possible. But social progress cannot take place automatically. It must be a consciously directed process towards the promotion and perpetuation of a social order based on truth, justice, equality and real freedom. Material progress can never be an end in itself. A society cannot be regarded as progressive if it exhibits progress only in the spheres of industry, science and technology. Scientific and technological development is certainly important but there must be corresponding moral progress. In fact, no society can really progress unless its members are socially conscious and morally advanced and enriched. Man's developed moral sense, emanating from deep perception of the spiritual fellowship of man, can inspire him to utilize judiciously the material resources of the society for the common good. The Vedantic teaching of the unity of all existence can act as the spiritual foundation of social life and social harmony.

### The Present Need

In the present critical juncture of social and political life, a



psychological revolution, and a redirection of our group attitude, is necessary. Political revolution is not the *sine qua non* of social progress. Again, psychological revolution is not the inevitable consequence of political upheavals. The ultimate spring of all social activities and relationships lies in the integrated psychological and spiritual constitution of man. Hence a radical transformation at the deepest levels of mind is of cardinal importance. Then only can an end be put to all violence and conflict, injustice and misery. With this humanization, all forces of disintegration and disruption will become ineffective and an era of peace and harmony, love and justice will come to stay. Love will be the law of life and will dominate all our social relationships.

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## Sri Narayana Guru

G. BALAKRISHNAN NAIR

BASIC REALITY is one, not many. This truth was discovered and made known in India centuries ago. We see manifold phenomena, and perceive change all around us because of our individual desires. An acceptance of the truth of the oneness of Reality can raise an individual or society to the highest spiritual level. On the other hand, refusing to see this truth, we can go down to abysmal depths.

At the head of a long line of Indian Rishis who steadily saw this truth is Veda Vyasa. His origin was humble, his social status low, yet he rose to great spiritual heights. Like Vyasa was Sri Narayana Guru, a nineteenth century saint. He was born in a small hut in an obscure village in Kerala, in a caste which was denied many human rights. He grew to the heights of spirituality, for he was born to teach the same message.

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The idealistic view that Reality is basically one is easily forgotten and when it is forgotten there arises prejudice against the different castes and their sub-divisions. In the latter half of the nineteenth century these caste distinctions reached their greatest complication all over India, especially in Kerala. The social gradations and social behaviour were such that the atmosphere of a madhouse prevailed. It was at this juncture, in 1855, that Narayana Guru was born. His parents lived at Chempapazhanthi, a village near Trivandrum. The hut in which he was born is still preserved there as a monument. As a child he learnt to read Malayalam and to recite a few Sanskrit verses. This was the extent of his formal learning, but from childhood he took pleasure in visiting temples and offering worship. Because of this many people called him, Nanu Bhakta. At the age of twenty-three he went to Karunagapalli (another village) to study Sanskrit under Varanapalli Raman Asan, and stayed there for four years. When he returned home his marriage was arranged. But the prospect of marriage only induced him to leave worldly life altogether and become a wandering seeker. He spent the rest of his life in *tapasya* and in the search for Absolute Truth.

We do not know much about Narayana Guru's life of *tapasya*. At that time he must have come into contact with some great men, for we do know that he met Sri Chattampi Swamikal and they became friends. His close acquaintance with the great Vedantic texts in Sanskrit and Tamil must have been made during this period. He went to many places in search of quietude and peace. Among them he selected Maruthuvamalai, a hill near Kanyakumari, as a quiet place for doing *tapas*, and he spent some time there. It is perhaps his experiences at this place which are echoed in his poem, *Atma-Upadesha-Shatakam*.

After acquiring all this knowledge and experience he was keen to share it with others, and thus it was that he became a social reformer. In Kerala the majority of people were not allowed to enter temples and worship there because of their caste and social inferiority. Narayana Guru began to work against this. He wanted to secure for people who were denied facilities of temple-worship, their basic right to these facilities. Without waiting for a change of mind to occur among those who called themselves high-caste Hindus, he established new temples for those who had been segregated. In 1887 he opened



the first of such temples in Aruvipuram near Trivandrum. Thus he started a silent social and spiritual revolution in that part of the country. He established several temples for this specific purpose in various places in South India. At the same time he made attempts to remove the prevalent superstitious beliefs and undesirable practices of those who were among the backward sections of society. It was made clear to them that their progress lay in united action, more education and greater involvement in industrialization. These would give them hope, strength and inspiration.

It was the great aim of Narayana Guru to make the people learn the basic truths of religion. He wrote many books, expounding these truths in simple language. His works are of two kinds: *Stotra Kritis* and *Vedanta Kritis*. *Stotra Kritis* are a guide to the worship of the *Ishta Devatas*. They explain that those who have grasped the message of the Upanishads and understood the truths of Advaita will have no difficulty in following the various steps in spiritual progress, from image worship to *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Each individual progresses at his own rate, according to his *vasanas*, desires, and *samskaras*, tendencies. There is no doubt about the poetic excellence and imaginative grandeur of these books.

His *Vedanta Kritis* accept the basis of the *Shrutis* and go on to establish the truths of reason and experience. These works reveal the nature of the Absolute Reality as clearly as the proverbial gooseberry in the open palm. His important Vedantic works are *Darshana Mala*, *Atma-Upadesha-Shatakam*, *Janani-Navaratna-Manjari*, *Advaita-Dipika* and *Daiva Dashakam*. He was acquainted with Vedantic tradition from the earliest Upanishadic times to the modern era. Because he selected from this vast storehouse of knowledge the truths that experience had taught him, his works will always shine like beacon lights to seekers of truth everywhere.

Narayana Guru died at the age of seventy-two at Varkala Shivagiri-Matom. Many assessments of his life and work are popular now, but they do not refer to his long and arduous days in search of ultimate Truth. Though it is true that he was a religious and social reformer; a destroyer of the privileges of caste and a revolutionary, we should not forget that what made him all these was his personal realization of the great Truth discovered in ancient India. The Vedantic works that he wrote reveal the seeker and discoverer that Narayana Guru

was. To try to evaluate his personality without a careful reading of these works is like holding sea water in your hand and claiming that you have the sea in your palm. Sri Narayana Guru's work of preaching the universal Truth to all mankind is gathering more and more strength. Let us pray that the light of his teachings will spread with greater effulgence.

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