



SAMVIT

[Knowledge that leads to enlightenment]



Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700 076

No. 8, September 1983

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SAMVIT

म नो बुद्ध्या धुनया समुत्पन्तु ।

May He endow us with good thoughts.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad III 4

Universal Prayers

चोदयित्री मूढतानां चेतन्ती सुमतीनाम् ।

यज्ञं दधे सरस्वती ॥

Inspirer of pleasing and true speech; awakener of those with good minds, Saraswati upheld the sacrifice.



महो घर्गः सरस्वती प्र चेतयति केतुना ।

धियो विद्धवा वि राजति ॥

Saraswati, with her ray of light reveals the great ocean of consciousness; she illumines all intellects.

Rig Veda I.Ili.11-12.

REFLECTIONS

The Symbol and Symbolism

SINCE TIME immemorial man has been in search of truth. Nature in both its aspects, external and internal, attracted his attention as it posed a challenge to his understanding. He approached Nature to ask for facts. The knowledge he obtained by his senses after coming in contact with the external world, he called science. The knowledge of Self that he acquired by his subtle supersensuous power he called religion. Religion or the experience of the reality revealed abstract truths which were difficult to convey to others. Persons of supersensuous power therefore adopted different methods to convey them and one of the methods was symbolism, that is, representation of thoughts and ideas by the use of symbols.

The word symbol, derived from the Greek *symbolon* means a mark, a token or an insigne. So, an object, a picture or a word, an allegory or a parable were all used as symbols to express abstract truths. Swamiji calls symbols 'the language of the souls'. Symbols differ in their outer form, though the religious experiences and truths they convey may be the same. Why is it so? The answer is that in the process of symbolization, though a person's subconscious mind is influenced by his objective environment, his conscious mind combines with the subconscious in determining the form or sign or figure of the symbol. Historical, racial, cultural and other differentiations build up the conscious mind and hence symbols differ in their forms.

Symbols have a twofold character, revelatory and veiling. Symbols in their revealing capacity become a means of identification of a particular set of ideas and are based on the customary practices of a group that agrees upon their meaning. Symbols reveal their meaning to their followers in an esoteric way, as *Om*, or the crescent or the cross. They veil their inner meaning from others outside the close group.

The Power of Symbols and Their Limitations

Symbols have tremendous power over their followers through faith and love. Speaking about the need of symbols Swamiji clearly states:

'... abstract ideas are often very hard to comprehend. Therefore symbols are of great help, and we cannot dispense with the symbolical method of putting things before us. . . . In one sense we cannot think

but in symbols; words themselves are symbols of thought. In another sense everything in the universe may be looked upon as a symbol. The whole universe is a symbol, and God is the essence behind. This kind of symbology is not simply the creation of man. . . . The symbols of religion have a natural growth. Otherwise, why is it that certain symbols are associated with certain ideas in the mind of almost everyone? Certain symbols are universally prevalent. Many of you may think that the cross first came into existence as a symbol in connection with the Christian religion, but as a matter of fact it existed before Christianity was, before Moses was born, before the Vedas were given out, before there was any human record of human things. . . . The circle has been a great symbol throughout the world. Then there is the most universal of all symbols, the Swastika. . . . What does this show? All these symbols could not have been purely conventional. There must be some reason for them; some natural association between them and the human mind.¹

Symbols are needed at the first stage of religious development, but not at all stages. At the second stage, the need of symbols is recognized as a protective hedge only. But at the third stage, man outgrows the need of the hedge also, he desires to grow in freedom, without any impediments. Recognizing the limitations of symbols in reaching the highest goal, Swamiji says:

'Just as it is necessary for a man to go through symbols and ceremonies first in order to arrive at the depth of realisation, so we say in India, "It is good to be born in a church but bad to die in one". A sapling must be hedged about for protection, but when it becomes a tree, a hedge would be a hindrance.'² 'Ceremonials and symbols etc. have no place in our religion which is the doctrine of the Upanishads, pure and simple.'³

The Symbol Vivekananda Gave to the World

Swamiji himself gave a new symbol to the world as an emblem of his Order. What was his purpose in doing this? What is the meaning of his symbol? Is it only to distinguish his Mission from other organizations? Is it simply to interpret ancient ideals in a new garb? Does it convey some new idea that arose in his mind? Or did he look far into the future and know that the path of synthesis, which his symbol represents, would be trod by people of a new world without borders?

It is interesting to know when and how he designed his symbol. Ideas came to Swamiji and then took concrete shape; he made no studied effort to execute any plan beforehand. To Nivedita he once wrote, 'The details come to me as I go. I never make plans. Plans grow and work themselves. I only say, awake, awake!' This is amply proved by the way he first drew the design for the symbol, a reference to which we get in Sister Devamata's article 'Memories of India and Indians' published in the *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1932.

'The design which has become the symbol of the Ramakrishna Mission everywhere came into being in the same casual way as did the 'Song of the Sannyasin'. It took shape in 1900 during Swami Vivekananda's later visit to America. At that time the Vedanta Society of New York was definitely established and occupied a modest house in Fifty-eighth Street. Mrs. Crane, the housekeeper, told me that the Swami was sitting at the breakfast table one morning when the printer arrived. He said he was making a circular for the Society and wished to have an emblem to go on it, could the Swami suggest something? Swamiji took the envelope from a letter he had just received, tore it open and on the clean inner surface drew the waves, the swan, the lotus, and the sun circled by a serpent—the four Yogas wrapped about by eternity, it seemed. He threw the bit of paper with the design on it across the table and said, "Draw it to scale". Henry van Haagen, the printer, was an able draughtsman as well as printer. He converted the rough sketch into a finished drawing.

'Since that day this little symbol has gone round and round the globe on stationery and books, circulars, invitations and reports. Did the Swami foresee its far journeyings?'

Sister Devamata does not give the date or month of this incident, but Marie Louise Burke has referred to it in her book, *Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West*, as happening in July 1900. This seems to be correct because on July 24, he wrote to Miss MacLeod:

'The sun = Knowledge. The stormy water = Work. The lotus = Love. The serpent = Yoga, The swan = the Self. The Motto = May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake. How do you like it? May the Swan fill you with all these anyway.'

On July 25, he wrote a letter to Swami Turiyananda. On the envelope he wrote in Bengali, 'I say, how does the swan look?' He

then added half a line from a song, 'The she-swan Tara sports with the Swan in the lotus-pond.'*

On August 13, 1900 Swamiji wrote to Swami Turiyananda on a letterhead which, for the first time, had the seal printed on it.

His last recorded reference to the seal is found in his conversations with his disciple Sarat Chandra Chakravarty. Swamiji was in the Belur Math in 1901. One day Ranadaprasad Das Gupta, an artist, and the founder and professor of the Jubilee Art Academy, Calcutta, went to the Math with Sarat Chandra to meet Swamiji. In the course of their conversation, Swamiji showed the artist the design he had sketched for the seal of the Ramakrishna Mission and asked for his opinion.

'Ranada Babu at first could not catch the significance of it and asked Swamiji to explain. Swamiji said, "The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma; the lotus, of Bhakti; and the rising-sun, of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman (Supreme Self). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Yoga—the vision of the Paramatman is obtained."'

In the *Prabuddha Bharata*, (X.1) the components of the emblem are thus described:



"A lake ruffled by the wind; the sun rising, as it were, from its waters; a full-blown lotus rearing its head above two floating leaves; a swan sailing gracefully on the troubled waters; and a serpent with outstretched tongue, upraised hood and a Mantra in the central part of its body . . . meaning, 'May the Self inspire and guide us.'"

We began by saying that symbols give concrete form to ideas derived primarily from the objective environment. Swamiji beautifully

* बोलि, हाँस केमन? 'तारा पद्मबने हंस सने हंसीरूपे करे रमण ।'

Swami Vivekananda Bani O Rachana (Calcutta, 1963), VIII.151.

expressed how different elements in nature became components of different symbols:

‘There is the morning sun radiant in his glory, bringing light and warmth and joy to a sleeping world. Slowly he travels and, alas, he also disappears, down, down below! But the next day he appears again—glorious, beautiful! And there is the lotus . . . opening in the morning as the solar rays strike its closed petals and with the waning sun shutting up again.’ . . . The sun and the lotus are, therefore, the chief symbols in the most ancient religions.’⁵

By convention and tradition the sun and lotus have been accepted as symbols of *jnana* and *bhakti* in our sacred books. So it was natural that Swamiji accepted these two symbols for knowledge and devotion in his picture.

Karma is action, motion. A thing is put in motion by the force of thought. There are waves of thought (*vrittis*) in our mind-stuff (*chitta*) that give rise to actions. Conventionally karma is associated with the waves of water. Similarly, in the Yoga philosophy, energy is said to be stored up in the sacral plexus. As Swamiji explains:

‘The last bone in the spine is over the Sacral Plexus and is described in symbolic language as a triangle; and as the energy is stored up beside it, this energy is symbolised by a serpent. . . . Because this movement of the Ojas (energy) up the spinal cord feels like a spiral one, it is called the “snake”. The snake, therefore, or the serpent, rests on the bone or triangle. When it is roused, it travels up the spinal cord; and as it goes from centre to centre, a new natural world is opened inside us—the Kundalini is roused.’⁶

Harmony of Yogas

Swamiji’s symbol stands for the integration of the four paths—the four yogas—each of which, if practised to perfection, can lead to the supreme goal of Liberation. In his discourses on these four yogas Swamiji has shown that each path is efficacious and individuals choose them according to their temperaments. But he has also said that human nature is complex, there is an intermingling of temperaments—hence it would not be proper to consider each path to be exclusive. On the contrary, a synthesis of the four yogas would produce an ideal character. Swamiji says:

‘There is not really so much difference between knowledge (Jnana)

and love (Bhakti) as people sometimes imagine. We shall see, as we go on, that in the end they converge and meet at the same point. So also is it with Raja-yoga, which when pursued as a means to attain liberation . . . leads us also to the same goal.⁷

'Work, endless work—without looking at results, and always keeping the whole mind and soul steadfast at the lotus Feet of the Lord! . . . this is Karma Yoga . . . you must harmonise the four different Yogas,—otherwise how can you always keep your mind and heart wholly on the Lord?'⁸

His symbol in its esoteric sense therefore means that the spiritual disciplines to be followed in his organization must be based on the synthesis of the four yogas.

But there is more meaning in it. Seeing with a *rishi's* foresight that the world is going to shrink into one global whole—or, in other words, it is going to be one world culturally and spiritually—Swamiji gave the gospel of synthesis for the man of the future. As he says:

' . . . We see various forms of religion in the world. It is a bewildering study, but it is not, as many of us think, a vain speculation. Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord, and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone'.⁹

The Symbol with a Change

Now, in symbolism it is natural that symbols disappear—as naturally as they appear, or even change. Behind every change is growth, and therefore a change would point to a progressive historical fact. The changes in Swamiji's seal seen in the seal of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission bears out this fact.

Though Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission are ideologically the same as the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, they are legally two separate organizations. Therefore some changes had to be made in the components of the seal, without deviating from Swamiji's original symbol, in order to mark the distinction between the two organizations.

There is one important point to bear in mind. The new seal has not brought about any change in its value and function. It has Swamiji's inspiration as its support. The symbol of Swamiji's ideas is the nucleus

round which Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission work and spread their influence, giving it new expression in all their activities.

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati 1972), I.72.
2. *ibid.*, (1971), VIII.220.
3. *ibid.*, 523.
4. *ibid.*, (1972), VII.204.
5. *ibid.*, (1971), VIII.148.
6. *ibid.*, (1972), VI.131.
7. *ibid.*, (1973), III.32.
8. *ibid.*, (1972), VII 274.
9. *ibid.*, (1973), III.1.

This Math is established to work out one's own liberation, and to train oneself to do good to the world in every way, along the lines laid down by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. For the women, too, there will be started a similar Math. The Women's Math will be conducted on exactly the same principles as that for the men.

You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's (Sri Sarada Devi's) life,—none of you. But gradually you will know. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India, and making her the nucleus once more Gargis and Maitreya will be born into the world. Hence we must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons,—can you understand this?

Swami Vivekananda

The Attainment of Freedom

PRAVRAJIKA BARADAPRANA

ACCORDING TO one of the grandest concepts of Vedanta, our nature is divine, pure and eternally free. The whole purpose of life is for the soul to go back to that freedom from which it came. The soul comes from freedom, dwells in bondage, and goes back once again to that freedom. In the invigorating words of Swami Vivekananda: 'You are the soul, free and eternal, ever free, ever blessed. Have faith enough and you will be free in a minute.' It is this innate freedom which percolates through our minds and thoughts, making us feel that we are free, and giving us the urge for freedom. We all want to be free from pain, misery and sorrow—free from bondage of any kind. In fact everything in the universe is struggling for freedom, consciously or unconsciously. It is the job of the spiritual aspirant to strengthen this urge for freedom, to purify and direct it; to intensify it until its momentum carries us on to the ultimate goal of life.

Americans have a natural love of freedom, so this aspect of Vedanta is especially appealing to many of us. Most of our ancestors as well as present-day immigrants came to this country to find religious or political freedom. As a result of this, our cultural, social and political structure is highly motivated towards freedom. Swami Vivekananda saw and loved this spirit in the American people, so much so that on one July 4th, the anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence, he was moved to write a poem entitled 'To the Fourth of July' which he presented to some of his American disciples. It is not surprising therefore that Swamiji chose July 4th for the day of his *maha-samadhi*, or final freedom.

It is interesting to note that two great American patriots also apparently chose this day for their freedom. America was stunned when Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, and his good friend John Adams (both of whom were ill) departed this world, as if by unspoken agreement, on 4th July in 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of American independence.

According to Swami Vivekananda, liberty is the first condition of growth. In an ideal society man must have freedom of thought and speech, as well as liberty in his food, dress, marriage and in all other

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things so long as he does not harm others. In the field of religion India has always been free of dogmatism and narrowness, and that is the area in which she has had the greatest growth and leads the world.

Americans expect, and enjoy to a great extent, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and freedom of action within the framework of laws and social structure. The problem with American society today, as with many other societies in the world, is not a lack of freedom, but misdirected freedom. We tend to think of freedom as the absence of all external restraint. This misconception of freedom has led to moral permissiveness and a general lack of discipline—not to speak of the alarming rise in drug abuse and crime. This kind of freedom is not freedom at all, and leads to greater bondage. Real freedom is not to be found outside; we have to go to its source which is centred within every one of us.

Two Kinds of Freedom

Thus there are two kinds of freedom; the outer freedom which is limited, and the inner freedom born of the spirit. The outer freedom is necessarily limited because it functions within nature and so is subject to the laws of cause and effect and the pairs of opposites. God is the master of nature, as well as beyond nature. Only in God, the unchangeable, is real freedom to be found. When we reach union with the true Self or God within, we find that freedom which is unlimited and lasts for eternity.

Because that Reality is ever within us, we often have a sense of freedom and free will. But it is only a glimpse of that which is Real. As Swami Vivekananda acutely pointed out, our will only came into existence when we became bound, so how can it be free? Our lives are controlled to a great extent by our past karmas. But if we are affected by our past deeds, it follows that we can also mould our future by our present actions. We have the choice between right and wrong action, between the path of worldliness and the path which leads us Godward. The more we can identify ourselves with our true Self, or God within, the more we will be in tune with God's will, and the more free we will be. A sense of freedom will come when we can surrender ourselves to the will of God, and feel ourselves to be an instrument in His hands.

In the spiritual sense, freedom means not just the absence of restraint, but the awakening of a higher state of consciousness which leads

to liberation and union with God. In various ways, the major religions have all referred to this ultimate state, calling it salvation, redemption, *nirvana* or freedom from bondage. According to Buddha the goal of life is the noble way of freedom—*nirvana*. Christianity speaks of the salvation of the soul, and redemption through Jesus Christ. Christ said: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. In Hinduism there are two words used to depict this state of freedom—*moksha* and *mukti*—which imply release from all bondage, and freedom from the wheel of birth and death. Whatever path one follows, this state of freedom is reached when one has the direct knowledge of the ultimate Reality or union with God. Once we have realized this true identity, there can be no falling back; we have reached Immortality.

Swami Vivekananda poetically referred to freedom as the 'song of the soul'. Sri Krishna beautifully describes the nature of the soul (*atman*), in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Know this *atman*: unborn, undying, never ceasing, never beginning, deathless, birthless, unchanging forever.

This freedom is our glorious heritage and birthright, but through ignorance we constantly forget it. We have become so identified with the body, senses, mind and ego, that we forget who we really are. The light of the soul remains hidden like a buried treasure, covered by the darkness of ignorance. We must make the struggle to go beyond the complex of our little personalities, in order to reach the simple One, the *atman* or God dwelling in the heart. There alone can we find lasting peace and blessedness.

It is the longing for freedom and happiness which can give us the impetus to struggle for God-realization. As long as we have a thirst for life and attachment to the ego and things of the world, we cannot hope to catch a glimpse of that joy which lies beyond. Only through renunciation, in giving up attachment and the desire for enjoyment, can we have a taste of freedom. Who are the happiest people in the world? Probably the saints who have given up all attachment, expectations and desire. They alone are fearless, joyful and truly free.

There are various kinds of joy. There is the earthly happiness which comes from sense gratification and is of a temporary nature. Some aspire to the joy of heavenly pleasures which is longer lasting, but there is the still greater joy of communion with God which lasts for

eternity. Through discrimination and spiritual disciplines we can train our minds to seek only the highest joy. For most people this giving up must be gradual. By going through experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant, we eventually realize that there is no lasting value in worldly life. Only then will we start looking for a way out of the net in which we have become enmeshed.

The Way to Freedom

What can we do to strengthen our desire for spiritual life and liberation? Through the regular practice of meditation, repetition of *mantras* and hymns, study, worship and the remembrance of God, we gradually create a taste for spiritual life. Old habits and patterns of thought are replaced by new ones. The mind is strengthened and purified by the thought of God. Just as gold is heated to burn away the dross, so through spiritual practices the impurities of the mind are removed and the pure Self is revealed. Through discrimination and meditation the center of consciousness is gradually shifted from the manifold world to the divinity within.

One of the easiest ways to acquire a taste for spiritual life, is to keep the company of the holy. In their presence it becomes natural to think of God; we feel happy in their company and they give us words of encouragement and inspiration. However, holy people are not always available, so we should try at least to associate with those of similar spiritual interests. Also we can find holy company in spiritual books and scriptures. Of extreme importance, however, are the times in solitude when we turn to the Lord Himself for company, guidance and solace.

Sri Ramakrishna often said that the easiest and best path for this age is the path of devotion. Through love of God, worship, *japa* and meditation on His Divine form, life gradually becomes sweeter. By establishing a living and loving relationship with God, spiritual life becomes intensified and His grace can be felt. The one quality we find in common among all the saints and spiritual teachers of the world is their all-consuming devotion to God and to the spiritual ideal. All their energy goes in that direction and they do not deviate from the ideal. It is this kind of one-pointedness and intensity we must acquire if we want liberation in this life. When one has attained this whole-souled devotion and dedication, the vision of God cannot be far away.

However, for most of us this state seems far, far away. We try, but fail many times. Distractions and involvements come and pull our minds away from the thought of God. We have to pray repeatedly to God for steadfastness, devotion and grace. Prayer can be an intimate form of communion which helps us to establish a closer relationship with God. Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi incarnated in this age to make it easier for us to realize God. We know we can achieve very little by our own efforts, but we should have the faith that through their grace, God-realization can be obtained in this very life. When that grace finally descends, the devotee becomes absorbed in his Chosen Ideal of God and thus reaches liberation.

For people with an active temperament, another way to freedom is to purify the mind through unselfish work. By performing duties without attachment, and surrendering all the results of action to God, our karmic debts can be gradually rolled back. When we are attached to our work and our own egoistic achievements, we become deeply enmeshed and misery results. Only when we can stand back as the witness and offer our services to God and to God in man can we have a sense of freedom. Lord Krishna gives us this assurance in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*:

Whosoever works for me alone, makes me his only goal
and is devoted to me, free from attachment,
And without hatred toward any creature—that man,
O Prince, shall enter into me.

What is the nature of the man who has had direct knowledge of God and attained freedom in this life? Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the man of God becomes simple and childlike. The illumined soul is characterized by his complete lack of egotism. His heart is blissful and he is filled with love and compassion for others. He has risen above the conventional rules of conduct, but like the expert dancer he is incapable of making a false step. Having attained bliss and fulfilment in the Supreme Self, he sees that Divinity everywhere.

Once again turning to the second chapter of the *Gita*, we read:

He knows bliss in the Atman
And wants nothing else.
Cravings torment the heart:
He renounces cravings.

Not shaken by adversity
 Not hankering after happiness:
 Free from fear, free from anger,
 Free from the things of desire.
 I call him a seer, and illumined.

Such souls live for the good of the world, shedding their light on all who are ready to receive it. In order to be of real service to others, we must first attain freedom for ourselves. We must struggle to realize God in this very life. Then only will we have fulfilled the purpose of life, and be a blessing to others.

Saraswati—Sarada, a Revelation

PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA

'SHE IS Sarada, the incarnation of Saraswati. She has come to bestow the rarest wisdom on others'—these words of Sri Ramakrishna about Sri Sarada Devi bring to our minds immediately the image of the goddess Saraswati of the Epic and Puranic times. But the mind also goes further back, to the Vedic times, because the goddess Saraswati is mentioned in the Vedas also.

In the Vedas

In the Vedas Saraswati is not the name only of a river, as many people believe. She is also mentioned as a goddess, an impelling force of inspiration, and bracketed with two other goddesses, Ila and Mahi whose other name is Bharati. To quote two instances :

'May Ila, Saraswati and Mahi, three goddesses who give birth to bliss, they who falter not, take their places on the sacrificial seat'.*

'May Bharati come speeding to our sacrifice, and may Ila also come hither, awakening our consciousness like a human being; and Saraswati also. May these three goddesses, doing well their work, sit on this

* इला सरस्वती महो विन्नो देवीर्यशोधवः । बहिः सोदन्त्यस्त्रिषः । *Rig Veda* I. xiii. 9.

blissful seat.*

The following descriptions of Saraswati show clearly that she is the goddess from whom flow streams of divine thought and inspiration.

She inspires all intellects (विदो विद्या वि रावति); she is the giver of spiritual inspiration to the truthful and good (चोरविदो वृक्षानाम्); she is the awakener of consciousness which leads to right thinking (चेतन्तो सुषतीनाम्).

Once the inspiration of Truth is received, a person is led to the correct vision of life. The co-ordination of the functions of emotions, will and action lead to this true vision. This true vision gives bliss, that is why she is called the giver of bliss (मनोदः); and who can be more dear than such a beloved mother (पितृवत्) who is bright and illumined (वृषा).

There are close parallels between a stream of water and a stream of thought, hence in some hymns there is a mingling of the river Saraswati and the goddess Saraswati. For example:

‘Most motherly of mothers, best of rivers,
Most godly of goddesses, O Saraswati
We are as of no repute;
Mother give us high renown (of intellect).’†

To such a goddess the Vedic *rishi* therefore prays:

‘May the divine Saraswati, rich in power,
Inspire our minds and protect us.’‡
‘May Saraswati, with holy thoughts, be gracious to us.’§

In Epic and Puranic Times

This same imagery of a goddess inspiring our thoughts and enlightening our consciousness to lead us to the highest Truth—became the anthropomorphic Devi Saraswati later on. During the Epic and Puranic period she rose to eminence as the patron of all creative arts and literature. Hymns are sung in praise of her effulgence of knowledge. One

* घा नो यज्ञं धारती तुषनेद्विला मनुष्वदिह चेतयन्ती । तिलो देवीर्देहेदं स्वनं सरस्वती स्वपतः सन्तु ॥
Rig Veda X.cx.8.

† अम्बितमे नदीतमे देवितमे सरस्वति । अग्रजस्ता इव स्यति प्रजस्तिमन्व नक्तुषि ॥
Rig Veda II.xli.16.

‡ प्र षो देवी सरस्वती वाचोधिवाचिनीवती । धीनामवित्ववतु ॥ Rig Veda VI.lxi.4.

§ वं सरस्वती सह धीधिरस्तु । Rig Veda VII.xxxv.11.

Rig Veda mantras on Saraswati quoted above. She came to bless the virtuous, to guide the faltering and to save the failing. But who first recognized her? None other than Sri Ramakrishna. A mighty spiritual force like Sri Ramakrishna was necessary to unveil before the wondering world the image of the *maha-shakti*, the great power, embodied as Sri Sarada Devi. He did it gradually.

His first step was in the selection of little Sarada as his consort. When Sri Ramakrishna, oblivious of the world, was immersed in the thought of the divine day and night, his mother and brother made plans to marry him without informing him beforehand. But when their efforts to get a bride for him were fruitless, he told them: 'Vain is your search in this place and that. Go to Jairambati and there, in the house of Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya you will find her who is marked out for me.'

After selection, Sri Ramakrishna's second step was to throw in hints now and then about Sri Sarada Devi's divine nature, and to prove that the two of them had met not on the human level, but on a super-conscious level, and recognized each other. A seemingly ordinary incident can be given here. Once it happened like this. When Sri Sarada Devi was fourteen and a half years of age, she went for the first time to stay with Sri Ramakrishna in Kamarpukur. In his house, the womenfolk met him in the afternoons, after they were free from their household chores. As he had previously done, he sang to them and told them elevating stories to give them ideas about the evanescent nature of the world and about God, the only reality. During these afternoon sessions, young Sarada often fell asleep. The others said amongst themselves, 'What a pity! She missed these fine things. She has fallen asleep', and they tried to wake her up. But the Master said, 'No, no, don't wake her up. Don't think she is asleep without reason. If she hears these things, she will fly headlong away.'

After a few years Sri Ramakrishna made Sri Sarada Devi aware of her divine nature. She went to stay with him at Dakshineswar when she was nineteen years of age. Through their intimate conversation we know that they understood their lives' purposes.

Sri Ramakrishna: Well, have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?

Sarada Devi: No, why should I drag you down to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path.

On another day, as she massaged his feet,

Sarada Devi: How do you regard me?

Sri Ramakrishna: The same Mother that is in the temple gave birth to this body and now resides in the *nahabat*, and she, again, is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother.

The culmination of this recognition and assertion was soon revealed to the world. On a *Kali Puja* night he worshipped Sarada Devi as the *Shodashi*—the Universal Mother. By this act he fully awakened the hidden divinity in her and brought it to the surface to make it a part of her waking being. Her divine power that had so far been hidden, was brought out into the open for all to see.

After this incident Sri Ramakrishna in his conversation now and then gave expression to her role as the *maha-shakti*, the divine power, which had come to inspire and guide the world. He who never used personal pronouns like 'I' or 'mine' for himself, said of her, 'She is my Shakti'—(সে আমার শক্তি) 'She is Saraswati. She has covered her beauty this time lest people should look upon her with impure eyes and thus commit sin.' 'She is a cat who has rolled in ashes and thus hidden her true colour.'

It was not, however, until the last few days of his earthly existence, when his physical energy was ebbing away, and he could hardly speak, that he directly told her to carry forward his work. To reproduce their conversation:

Sarada Devi: What do you wish to say? Tell me.

Sri Ramakrishna: Well, won't you do anything? Should this (pointing to his own body) do everything single-handed?

Sarada Devi: I am a woman. What can I do?

Sri Ramakrishna: No, no, you'll have to do a lot.

Again one day,

Sri Ramakrishna: See, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.

Sarada Devi: I am a woman. How can that be?

Sri Ramakrishna: What after all has this one done? You'll have to do much more.

And she did what she was commissioned to do. For thirty-four years after Sri Ramakrishna's *maha-samadhi*, she became the virtual

spiritual head of the Ramakrishna Order. What she said and did is now well known. This is just an attempt to paraphrase the song of her divine life in terms of Sri Ramakrishna's recognition and his assertion that Sarada is really Sara-da (सरं ददातीति)—the bestower of the highest knowledge of the Supreme upon all those who take shelter in her.

Glory be to her! With the *rishi* of the *Rig Vedic* hymn, we can sing to her:

'These offerings have you made with adoration', say this, Saraswati, and be pleased with our prayer. And, placing us under Thy protection, O most beloved, may we approach Thee as we may (approach) a tree for shelter.'

इषा बुद्ध्या बुध्मदा नमोभिः प्रतिस्तोमं सरस्वति जुषस्व ।

तव शर्मन् प्रियतमे दद्याना उपस्येयाम शरणं न वृक्षम् ॥ *Rig Veda* VII.xcv.5.

Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya

M. R. YARDI

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Mimamsa and Vedanta

THE BRAHMA-SUTRA of Sri Badarayana is a treatise on Vedanta, the philosophy of the Upanishads. Sri Shankara calls it *Vedanta-Vakya-Mimamsa*, an enquiry into Vedic passages. The Mimamsa is a desiderative noun from the verb *man*, 'to think, to reflect' and so connotes an enquiry or investigation. The Mimamsa is a system of Hindu philosophy, chiefly concerned with the correct interpretation of the Vedic texts, including the settlement of doubtful points. It originally denoted two systems, the Purva-Mimamsa, which concerned itself with the interpretation of the ritual practices of the Vedas as explained in the *Brahmanas*, and the Uttara-Mimamsa, which dealt chiefly with the Supreme Spirit, the Brahman of the Upanishads. It was, however, soon discovered that they were two widely differing systems, with very little common ground between them; so the Purva-Mimamsa came to be

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known later as simply Mimamsa and the Uttara-Mimamsa as Vedanta. Sri Jaimini and Sri Badarayana were the celebrated exponents of these two systems in their own times, and their texts, the *Jaimini-Sutra* along with the *Shabara-Bhashya* and the *Brahma-Sutra* of Badarayana along with the *Shankara-Bhashya*, are regarded as authoritative texts by the many followers of Mimamsa and Vedanta. They now form part of the *Shat-Darshana*, the six systems of Hindu philosophy.

The Mimamsakas lay great stress on the ritual practices prescribed in the Vedas. Sri Shabara states in his commentary on the *Jaimini-Sutra* (I.i.1) that the sole purpose of the Vedas is to explain how to perform the Vedic rites.¹ He further explains that an injunction means a precept impelling one to further ritual action. These injunctions are of two kinds, those which prescribe certain rites (*vidhi*) and those which prohibit certain actions (*nishedha*). Some other statements, which are incidental to the performance of rites, are also regarded as meaningful, such as the eulogies of the deities to whom the sacrifices are offered, the sacrificial formulas (*mantras*), the qualifications of the sacrificer and so on. The Mimamsakas hold that since the very purport of the Vedas is the enunciation of some ritual practice, all Vedic passages which do not relate to any ritual action are meaningless.²

The Mimamsakas, however, acknowledge the existence of some passages in the Vedas known as *arthavadas*. According to them these have no intrinsic merit of their own; nevertheless they have their own uses. These *arthavadas* are explanatory statements, which are of four kinds. An *arthavada* may contain a commendation (*stuti*) indicating that a particular rite ought to be performed, a condemnation (*ninda*), pointing out that some action should not be performed, a precedent (*parakriti*), or historical instances (*purakalpa*) in support of some ritual practices. Thus the Vedic statement that 'the wind is the deity of the greatest speed' indicates that any rite connected with the wind-god is meritorious. Further it is stated that since silver is produced from the tears of fire, if a person makes a gift of silver in a sacrifice, there will be an occasion for mourning in his house within a year. This *arthavada* forbids the gift of silver in a sacrifice. There is also another statement that a particular sacrifice was performed by Agni to become the carrier of food for gods. This is quoted as a precedent for performing that particular sacrifice. Again historical instances are cited as a recommendation that a particular rite ought to be performed.

An *arthavada* may also be classified in three ways as *anuvada*, *gunavada* and *bhutarthavada*. An *anuvada* conveys a fact based on common knowledge, as in the statement 'fire is a remedy against cold'. A *gunavada* contains an apparent contradiction, so that it has to be taken in a figurative (*gauna*) sense. Thus the statement that 'the sacrificial stake is verily the sun' has to be interpreted in the sense that the stake is as resplendent as the sun. The *bhutarthavada* is a statement which neither confirms nor contradicts an observed fact and is known only from a reliable source such as a scripture, as for example, 'Indra raised his thunderbolt against Vritra.' The Mimamsakas, therefore, argue that those Upanishadic passages which speak of Brahman as a self-existent entity and enjoin no action are *bhutarthavadas* and serve no purpose.

Strongly disagreeing with this view, Badarayana holds that 'the highest human goal results from the knowledge of the Self because the Vedas declare so'.³ According to Sri Shankara, just as curds and other ingredients used in sacrifices help to produce the result as set forth in the Vedas, even so the instruction about Brahman in the Upanishads serves the purpose of removing ignorance. If the instruction about things not meant for ritual action are considered useless, then injunctions about refraining from such action as 'A brahmin should not be killed' become useless. For it is the very nature of a negative to convey the notion of the absence of the action with which it is connected. Hence 'only those explanatory passages referring to things such as episodes, which do not serve any human goal, deserve to be called useless according to the Mimamsa dictum laid down by the *Jaimini Sutra* (I.ii.1.). So the Upanishadic instruction about the Self which serves the highest human goal, namely liberation, cannot be called meaningless.⁴

Although Sri Shankara's text is the earliest among the available commentaries, he not infrequently refers to the view of a Vrittikara, maybe Bodhayana, who preceded him. This Vrittikara seems to have held that there is no essential difference between injunctions relating to a sacrificial rite and the knowledge of Brahman. He argued that just as sacrifices such as Agnihotra are prescribed for those who desire heaven, so the knowledge of Brahman is prescribed for those who desire immortality. Accordingly, the Upanishads too present Brahman with such injunctions as 'the Self, my dear, is to be seen',⁵ 'the Self

that is free from sin . . . is to be sought, to be enquired into',⁶ 'the Self alone is to be worshipped',⁷ 'whoever knows the Brahman alone becomes Brahman'.⁸ Disagreeing with him, Sri Shankara states that every action is dependent upon man, and it is open to him to do it, not do it or do it otherwise. On the other hand knowledge of Brahman is derived from valid means of knowledge. For instance, the thinking of man or woman as fire⁹ is certainly a mental act enjoined by the scripture and is dependent on man. But the notion of ordinary fire depends neither on an injunction nor upon man, but is derived from perception. In the same way the knowledge of Brahman is a kind of knowledge, not a mental act determined by injunction. One may ask, 'Then, how is it that verbs in the imperative are used in texts such as 'The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realized, should be listened to' and so on? Sri Shankara replies that it is the natural proclivity of the senses to turn outwards towards objects and the sole purpose of such texts is to turn their attention away from them and direct it inwards towards the Self.¹⁰

Sri Shankara argues very cogently that there is a qualitative difference between the results of action and the knowledge of Brahman. The Vedic texts lay down authoritatively, by way of injunction and prohibition, what duties (*dharma*) ought to be performed and what evil deeds (*adharma*) ought to be avoided. Good deeds result in happiness and bad deeds in sorrow; and both happiness and sorrow result from the contact of the senses with the objects of sense and are experienced by all beings, right from amoebae to god Brahma. We also observe that some men are happier than others and from this we naturally infer that the former are more virtuous and so are fit to perform religious duties. Similarly, we also see that some people suffer more than others, indicating that the former have perpetrated more evil deeds than the others. Thus every human being has his share of happiness and sorrow, depending upon the nature of his past and present deeds. In support of this view, Sri Shankara quotes the Vedic text, 'for an embodied being, there can be no cessation of happiness and sorrow'. This experience of happiness and sorrow is negated in the case of one who has attained to the incorporeal state, i.e. liberation while yet alive, as declared further, 'Happiness and sorrow do not surely touch one who is disembodied'.¹¹ Liberation, therefore, cannot be the product of mere virtue, as it is the essential nature of the Self which is untouched by happiness and sorrow. This is also supported by the Vedic statement

that it is different from virtue and vice, cause and effect and from past and future'.¹² Were liberation the result of some action, a state to be achieved, it would be impermanent and all our thinkers are agreed that liberation is an eternal state of bliss.¹³

Moreover, a number of Upanishadic statements point out that there is no hiatus between the knowledge of Brahman and liberation, so that no activity is possible or necessary in between. For instance, it is stated expressly that 'while realizing his Self as Brahman, the seer Vamadeva knew that he was the Manu, he was the Sun'.¹⁴ This is just like the sentence 'standing he sings', where it is clear that there is no activity in between his standing and singing. Further how can any action bring about liberation? As the latter is the realization of the Self, it is not capable of being acquired. This is so even if it is held that Brahman is different from the Self, because all Vedantic schools agree that Brahman is all-pervading and immanent in everybody. One cannot also maintain that liberation is attained through purificatory action. Firstly, purification can be achieved by adding some quality or removing some impurity. Neither is possible in the case of liberation, to which no good quality can be added or from which no impurity can be removed. It is possible to argue that although liberation is inherent in everybody, it becomes manifest only when the lower self is purified by action, much in the same way that the natural brilliance of a mirror shines when its dirt is removed by rubbing. Here, too, the obvious reply is that the action of purification, such as bathing, is associated with the embodied Self, which is connected with the body, organs and the mind.¹⁵ Since no action can take place without bringing about some change in its locus, the Self cannot be the basis of any action. If the Self were to get modified with action, it would become impermanent and contradict such texts as 'It is said to be immutable'.¹⁶ Therefore no one can ever hope to attain to liberation through the medium of action.¹⁷

Sri Shankara sums up his views succinctly and beautifully in the following words: 'The inquiry into religious duty (*dharma*) and the quest of Brahman differ significantly not only in their object of inquiry, but also in their results. When the religious duty is performed, it leads to prosperity (*abhyudaya*) and depends upon the performance of some ritual practice. But the knowledge of Brahman results in liberation (*nishreyas*) and is not dependent upon the practice of any religious

rite. Further, even when a person comes to know his religious duty, the matter does not end there; he has still to perform certain religious rites, which can be carried out through physical effort. On the other hand, Brahman is a self-existent entity, eternally present, and so once knowledge of it is attained, no further human effort is required. The Vedic texts, too, make this distinction in regard to injunctions and how to proceed about them. In regard to a religious duty a Vedic text makes its purport clear and requires a person to perform a particular rite. But in the case of Brahman the Vedic prescription is 'Desire to know that Brahman'.¹⁸ Since this knowledge is not occasioned by any injunction, the person concerned is not required to do anything further, just like a person who receives the perceptual knowledge of an object which he sees. The knowledge of Brahman comes to a holy person as a transcendental experience (*anubhuti*), even as the knowledge of a thing comes to us from direct perception.¹⁹

This, in sum and substance, is the distinction between the two departments of the Vedic texts, the *karma-kanda* relating to ritual practices and the *jnana-kanda* dealing with Vedanta. The knowledge of Brahman was originally expounded in the Upanishads, which are the concluding texts of the Vedas and are regarded as the source of Vedanta. The *Bhagavad-Gita* brought about a brilliant synthesis of the then three existing schools of philosophic thought, the Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta. After making a critical analysis of the doctrines of the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Badarayana outlined a coherent system of Vedanta philosophy and established its validity in comparison with the other schools of thought such as Samkhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Jainism and Buddhism. All the great founders of the Vedanta schools regard these three as the principal sources of Vedantic thought, however much they may differ in their interpretations. The Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutra* are, therefore, regarded as the *prasthanatrayi*, the three guides to men in their march towards the ultimate human goal, the knowledge of Brahman, which is liberation.

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The Great Goddess of Many Names

KATHLEEN McLAUGHLIN

IN THIS present time of intense cultural change and crisis many new options are opening up for women in various spheres: social and economic as well as symbolic and emotional. The new professional opportunities and salary scales opening to women now raise old issues in new configurations, issues of independence and dependency, of self-identity and relationship, among others. The obvious changes women are experiencing cannot help but affect men too, as not only their relationships with women but also the feminine aspect of their own psyches are deeply moved. Images of the feminine (whatever precise meaning this shimmering subtle term is said to represent—and, as one Jungian analyst said recently, 'one defines feminine and masculine at one's peril these days'¹) which have been dim memories of the past or hazy intuitions of the future are now being envisioned as present possibilities by women and men.

The Jungian perspective has paid attention to feminine images describing and specifying various types, e.g. positive nourishing mother, negative devouring mother, positive inspiring goddess of transformation, negative goddess of disintegration and madness (Erich Neumann), mother, medium, hetaira, amazon (Toni Wolff), anima (Jung), and so on. These types were described on the basis of experience in the mid-twentieth century European culture of these authors. However, in this time of transition, when archetypes are waking and emerging into consciousness, they do not always fit into an earlier understanding of

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types. While the old images of the culture seem stale, limited, and oppressive, and yet new images are still hazy and unclear, it is helpful to look again at classical expressions of the archetypal feminine forms for guidance and inspiration.

Many traditional images of both East and West, however, are one-sided in their expression, dividing the feminine into wholly positive or wholly negative aspects. For example, in Christian symbology the Virgin Mary represents the positive and Eve the negative aspects. Eve is the woman cajoled by the serpent who brings evil and suffering into the world, who represents lust and the body, and is punished by a masculine God with pain in childbirth and submission to her husband. Mary is the pure and spiritual woman who not only conceives in a non-carnal supernatural manner but is herself conceived immaculately so that she does not carry the taint of sexuality. She obtains salvation through submission to the masculine, through her fiat, and through bearing a male child. Another example is found in Judaism where Sophia represents the illuminative principle of wisdom; while Lilith, the first wife of Adam who left the garden because she would not submit to him and Jahweh, is seen as a demoness who destroys newborn children and causes men to have nocturnal sexual emissions. In Zoroastrian myth Spandarmat is the Earth, the Queen of Heaven and the Mother of Creation; while the Whore lets loose destruction on the world. The Earth and Grain Goddess Demeter, of Greek myth, not only causes all things to grow as the positive nourishing mother, but, when angered by the abduction of her daughter Persephone, also stops their growth. However, Demeter's negative aspect is usually seen in Hecate, goddess of the dark side of the moon, who is worshipped at crossroads and flies with her dogs over graveyards at midnight. Two more examples of the split feminine are the good sister of medieval fairy tales who usually has a wicked sister who thwarts her; and Glinda the Good who must fight against the Wicked Witch of the West in the Land of Oz. Further elaboration of one-sided symbols only makes this collective cultural transition more difficult since they are not able to represent the polar and paradoxical nature of the archetypal feminine. One image which does encompass both aspects of the feminine is Maha-Devi, the Great Goddess of Many Names of the *Devi-Mahatmyam*, the Glorification of the Great Goddess.

The *Devi-Mahatmyam*

The *Devi-Mahatmyam* is an independent treatise with a narrative and philosophical integrity of its own which has been interpolated into the *Markandeya Purana*, chapters 81-93. This kind of textual addition is quite common in Puranic literature, e.g. the well-known *Bhagavad-Gita* in the *Mahabharata*. The Puranas are one of the four types of Indian orthodox sacred books and can be roughly dated in the period 500 B.C. to A.D. 500. The *Markandeya Purana*, including the *Devi-Mahatmyam*, seems to have originated in western India, from the middle portion of the Narmada and Tapti valleys.² Scholars date the *Devi-Mahatmyam* at about A.D. 400, seeing it as a product of the Gupta period. Some of the concepts in the text date from the Vedic period, 1500-600 B.C., e.g. the concepts of Maha-Devi, of the Seven Mothers, and of the demon Mahishasura, but they have been formulated in accordance with the spirit of syncretism and tolerance characteristic of the Gupta period. The Goddess is invoked with the names characteristic of each of the five principal religious movements in the Gupta period. Also iconographic details mentioned in the text occur in the art work of the Gupta period. For example, Kushana art, first to third century A.D. shows the Devi trampling a buffalo, but Gupta art, fourth to eighth century, portrays the Buffalo demon Mahishasura emerging as a half form from the cut throat of a buffalo, which is the way he is depicted in the *Devi-Mahatmyam*. Also, Kushana art shows the Seven Mothers without distinguishing marks or symbols, but in the later Gupta period they are depicted with precisely the symbols and vehicles described in the *Devi-Mahatmyam*. We know nothing about the author of the text except that he was a person inspired and capable of expressing deep insight into the many cults of the Goddess.

The Three Exploits of the Devi

The *Devi-Mahatmyam* recounts three exploits of the Devi who is known first as Maha-maya, the Great Illusion, but has many other names. Two disciples who have come to a forest *ashrama* ask the sage Medhas why they remain so attached to memories of their previous worldly life even though it brought them great unhappiness and suffering. They ask:

'How happens this then, illustrious Sir, that we are deluded although aware of it, and that this state of delusion besets me

and him, who are each blind in respect of discrimination?' (I.45)*

The sage answers that their attachment, and therefore suffering, are caused by the great Devi, Maha-maya, the Great Illusion, who deluded them, drawing even the minds of the wise into delusion. She is also, however, the supreme knowledge which gives final liberation, and She is eternal. This is not a Goddess who is purely good or purely evil. She encompasses both what is called good and what is called evil, having created the entire universe, including all opposites.

The first exploit of Devi begins at the end of a *kalpa*, cycle of time, when there is no creation and the universe is all ocean. Vishnu, sustainer of the universe, sleeps on Ananta, the serpent of infinity, coiled on the ocean of unconsciousness. Brahma, the god of knowledge, arises out of a lotus from Vishnu's navel, and two demons Madhu and Kaitabha arise from the dirt of Vishnu's ear and attempt to kill Brahma. Brahma tries to wake Vishnu by extolling Devi who is the Shakti (power or energy) of Vishnu. She is Queen of the Universe, also called Yoga-nidra, the sleep of Vishnu. As Yoga-nidra, the Devi is *tamasic*, the power of darkness, ignorance, and unconsciousness. She pulls even the great god Vishnu back into the sleep of unconsciousness. She represents the elementary form of the archetypal feminine, the power of psychic gravitation which pulls consciousness back into the unconscious to find sleep and rest or sloth and torpor, a kind of deadly inertia. This is, however, only one of Her qualities. Brahma invokes Her in this way:

'By you this universe is borne, by you this world is created. By you it is protected, O Devi, and you always consume it at the end. O you, who are (always) of the form of the whole world, at the time of creation you are of the form of the creative force, at the time of sustenance you are of the form of the protective power, and at the time of the dissolution of the world you are of the form of the destructive power. You are the supreme knowledge as well as the great nescience, the great intellect and contemplation, as also the great delusion, the great *devi* as also the great *asuri*' (I.75-7).

Devi has the threefold power of creation, sustenance, and destruction. This threefold power is usually seen as a single power in the

* *Devi-Mahatmyam* (tr. Swami Jagadishvarananda, Madras 1972).

Indian tradition. Sometimes Vishnu is said to have this power, sometimes Shiva, and here Devi is invoked as the supreme. Metaphysically speaking, the power of creation, sustenance, and destruction are the same power; it simply takes on different forms or guises at different times. This is a monistic way of thinking, unlike the dualistic world-view of Christianity which divides the supreme good as all powerful and creative from the evil force which causes sickness, disaster, death, and destruction. A dualistic view, which describes realistically the opposites perceived in mundane consciousness, is always caught in a logical conflict between the opposites. So light is opposed to darkness, good to evil, and masculine to feminine in a constant struggle for one to reign supreme. This conflict can only be resolved in a mystical intuition of unity, the *coincidentium oppositorum* of medieval Christianity or the threefold power that is one in the figure of Devi. This monistic vision of the Divine offers a basis on which the opposites of masculine and feminine in ordinary life can be reconciled.

Devi's destructive power is described as Kala-ratri, the 'dark night of periodic dissolution', the dark source of *prana* or life energy as Maha-ratri, the 'great night of final dissolution', the dark source of mind; and as Maha-ratri, the 'terrible night of delusion', the dark source of the five elements. Ratri is the Vedic goddess of Primeval Darkness, the absorption of all light. The feminine principle is described then as one who destroys by drawing everything back into Herself at the time of cosmic dissolution, even as She makes Vishnu sleep.

She is the creative power, the primordial cause of everything. In fact She is embodied in the world. This means that the world, matter, the three *gunas* which compose matter, you and me and all objects are Her body. Her creative power is not one which created at a certain time and then ceased, or is removed or abstracted from the creation. She is invoked as Shakti, that is, the power of everything that exists, both conscious and unconscious. The word *shakti* comes from the Sanskrit root *shak* which means 'to be able, to have power'. This is applied to all forms of activity, for example the power to see is visual *shakti*, the power to burn is the *shakti* of fire. There are two basic types of *shakti*, as described in the Shakta Tantras : *Chit-shakti*, illuminating consciousness, and *Maya-shakti*, veiling consciousness. *Chit-shakti* is the knowing or awareness faculty which is the light within all phenomena. The function of *Maya-shakti* is to limit, finitize, negate

and contract consciousness in such a way that, having limits, consciousness can take form. Without limits consciousness is pure and free but does not exist since existence necessitates boundaries. As *Maya-shakti*, Devi creates through giving limits to consciousness which, without ceasing to be consciousness, veils itself. It is in this way that Devi is embodied as the world, and every object is formed by Her presence as illuminating and veiling consciousness.

The First Exploit

This understanding of *shakti* is expressed symbolically in the first exploit. Through Brahma's hymn Devi arises and draws out of Vishnu who then wakes up and fights with the *asuras* Madhu and Kaitabha. They fight for five thousand years and then are bewitched by Devi as Maha-maya, the Great Illusion, to believe in their own power so much that they offer a boon to Vishnu. He asks to kill them, and they, deluded by their own pride and egotism, grant this with a condition which Vishnu promptly resolves and then kills them. When Devi, as illuminating consciousness, arises out of Vishnu he is awake, filled with illuminating consciousness. When Devi, as veiling consciousness, deludes and bewitches the *asuras* with their own pride, then they are killed. Though all the characters in the foreground of this first exploit are masculine, the story itself rests on the action of the Goddess in Her power to illuminate and delude, the transformative character of the archetypal feminine.

The Second Exploit

In the second exploit the Lord of heaven, Indra, is overcome by a demon, Mahishasura, from the realm of the waters beyond heaven. In despair the vanquished gods appeal to Vishnu and Shiva, more powerful gods, for help. Vishnu and Shiva become very angry and concentrate their anger into a great light which is emitted from their faces. The other gods also concentrate and emit their anger until a mountain of light fills the sky and becomes a huge female figure. Each god offers Her his characteristic weapon or emblem and She, knowing Her tasks, lets out a loud, terrible laugh which shakes both waters and land. Riding on her lion, She goes into battle with Mahishasura. Several chapters of the text describe in bloody detail the battle between the Devi and the demon with his armies. She drinks a divine drink that intoxicates Her, making Her eyes red, and destroys Mahishasura in his buffalo form.



Mahishasura-mardini

Courtesy : Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi

The image of Mahishasura is very old for in the Vedas (*Rig Veda* X. lxxxix. 2) he is found circling heaven on his buffalo form and trying to penetrate it. He exists in the realm of the Goddess, in the waters, in the undifferentiated womb of Her elementary character. Like all *asuras*, if he stayed in those uroboric waters there would be no conflict and the universal mother who created him, as well as the gods, would sustain him. But when, through the dense pride and egotism symbolized by his buffalo form, he challenges Indra in the realm of pure masculine consciousness he must be restrained. The gods of masculine consciousness cannot defeat him but must call on the power of Devi who alone can do the task. After the victory, the gods offer Devi a hymn in which Her power and goodness are praised.

'O Devi, your nature is to subdue the conduct of the wicked; this your peerless beauty is inconceivable by others; your power destroys those who have robbed the *devas* of their prowess, and you have thus manifested your compassion even towards the enemies'. (IV. 21)

She is praised as having purified the *asuras* through fighting with them, for contact with Her, even in battle, is purifying. Even in exercising destructive power Her compassionate intention is present and the paradoxical nature of Her character is revealed.

'What is your prowess to be compared to? Where can one find this beauty (of yours) most charming, (yet) striking fear in enemies? Compassion in heart and relentlessness in battle are seen, O Devi, O Bestower of boons, only in you in all the three worlds! Through the destruction of the enemies all these three worlds have been saved by you. Having killed them in the battle-front, you have led even those hosts of enemies to heaven, and you have dispelled our fear of the frenzied enemies of the *devas*. Salutation to you.' (IV.22-3)

Devi is a feminine symbol of great power and beauty. Her ferociousness in battle is described in detail, Her anger, Her intoxication, Her relentlessness. Yet this does not deny Her beauty which is compared to 'the moon, giving out cool rays'. (IV. 20) Her compassion, and Her protectiveness. She has both compassion in heart and relentlessness in battle.

At the end of Her second exploit the Devi offers the *devas* a boon and they request protection for themselves and all those who chant this hymn in Her praise. Expressing the character of the positive

elementary type, the gracious mother, She grants this boon for all those in the world, for all Her children.

The Third Exploit

The third exploit begins through exercise of this boon. The *devas* have again been defeated in battle, this time by the *asuras* Shumbha and Nishumbha. They decide to request aid from Devi who had said, 'Whenever in calamities you think of me, that very moment I will put an end to all your worst calamities.' (V.6) They offer a hymn in which She is extolled as the one who is ever auspicious, who is terrible, and eternal, who is prosperity, welfare and success, who is the boat which takes one across the ocean of difficulties, and who is the knowledge of discrimination. She is saluted as the principle of consciousness, *Chit-shakti*, who takes many different forms and twenty-one of these forms are enumerated. She is extolled in the form of intelligence, sleep, hunger, reflection, power, thirst, peace, forgiveness, modesty, faith, loveliness, activity, memory, compassion, error, and mother, to name a few. While the *devas* are worshipping, the beautiful goddess Parvati, the daughter of the Himalaya mountains, comes to bathe in the Ganga and, hearing them, differentiates herself into two goddesses: the auspicious Ambika and the dark Kalika. The beautiful Ambika lets Herself be seen by the servants of the *asuras*, Chanda and Munda, who quickly go to tell their masters that they have seen the most beautiful woman in the worlds and to urge the *asuras* to take this prize as they have taken other prizes. The *asura* Shumbha, filled with arrogance and lust, sends the servants back to cajole Her with sweet words; but Ambika Devi tells them that She had taken a vow to be wife only to the one who could conquer Her in battle. Shumbha, when informed of this, becomes enraged and sends an army to capture Her. Ambika Devi reduces them to ashes simply through chanting 'hum'. When another army is sent towards Her, She becomes angry and Her face becomes dark and emits the fierce form of Kali.

Kali is the destructive feminine character described as:

'Bearing the strange skull-topped staff, decorated with a garland of skulls, clad in a tiger's skin, very appalling owing to her emaciated flesh, with gaping mouth, fearful with her tongue lolling out, having deep-sunk reddish eyes and filling the regions of the sky with her roars'. (VII.7-8).

She alone devours this army and Chanda and Munda, the servants of Shumbha, and brings their heads to Ambika Devi as a sacrificial offering. Shumbha, beside himself with rage, comes into the battle then with Nishumbha and thousands of other *asuras*. The *devas* then emit from their bodies, their *shaktis*, their power and energy, wearing the emblems and weapons which each *deva* possesses. These seven goddesses, called the Seven Mothers, throw themselves into the battle along with Ambika and Kali. One particular *asura* named Raktabija was difficult to fight because every drop of his blood which hit the earth created another *asura* of his size. Kali was specially instructed to drink every drop of his blood before it hit the ground in order to vanquish him. The Seven Mothers then dance, intoxicated with blood.

In this exploit ferocious, intoxicated feminine images express the negative transformative character of the feminine archetype, i.e. drunkenness, dissolution, destruction, and disintegration, from the point of view of the *asuras*. But from the *deva's* point of view they express the positive transformative character which leads to liberation and freedom through the overcoming of obstacles. The judgement of positive or negative comes from the point of view of the observer, and these feminine figures are complex enough to be visible from different perspectives.

Every Experience Provides an Opportunity to Realize Oneness

In the final confrontation between the *asura* Shumbha and Devi, Shumbha insults Her, saying that She is fighting 'resorting to the strength of others'. (X.3). Devi responds with a statement expressing Her universal and all-encompassing character as Great Mother. She says:

'I am all alone in the world here. Who else is there besides me? See, O vile one, these Goddesses, who are but my own powers, entering into my own self!' (X.4-5).

Then She absorbs all the other goddesses into Her own body and defeats Shumbha alone. In the hymn praising Her defeat of Shumbha all the *shaktis* are invoked as Narayani (the feminine form of Narayana, Lord). They are seen as the many names of one Goddess. And She is praised as the single presence in the world, 'By you alone, O Mother, this world is filled'. (XI.6). These statements express the monistic philosophy underlying the entire text.

In the very person of Devi the Upanishadic insight that there is 'One only without a second' is revealed. The supreme reality is seen in a very powerful and beautiful feminine symbol who fights relentlessly in battle and yet saves those whom She fights against. She makes Her illuminating statements in the middle of battle in the world which She creates, sustains, and destroys, and in which She is embodied.

Since She is embodied and present in the world, every experience in the world provides an opportunity to realize Her directly. This is the metaphysical base of the Tantric spiritual path, a way of feminine spirituality which does not ascetically deny that 'All is One'. We need not renounce anything, rather all is seen to be Her. This is a positive path of fully experiencing, to the depths, each moment of life, moment by moment, recognizing it as all part of the Divine Glory. In mundane consciousness the depths of life are missed; by being ignorant of our essential nature as *shakti* we float on the surface of life. The emphasis is on the total experience of life in one's own spiritual practice. The truth seen in the Tantra is that the entire universe is a joyful efflorescence of the dynamics of the Supreme Shakti in Her creative movement. The aim of spiritual practice is to render each person a centre of this ebullient bliss (*ananda*) of the divine play (*lila*).

In the final hymn celebrating the defeat of Shumbha, Devi's paradoxical character is praised again and again.

'You are the primeval Maya, which is the source of the universe; by you all this (universe) has been thrown into a delusion, O Devi. If you become gracious, you become the cause of final emancipation in this world.

'When pleased, you destroy all illness; but when wrathful you (frustrate) all the desires longed for.

'Who is there except you in the sciences, in the scriptures, and in the Vedic sayings that light the lamp of discrimination? (Still) you cause this universe to whirl about again and again within the dense darkness of the depths of attachment'. (XI.5,29,31).

She is the single source of good and evil, of beauty and power, of creativity and destruction. All forms of knowledge are said to be Her aspects and all women in the world manifest Her attributes directly.

She represents the supreme transcendent and ultimate power known in the universe and yet She is known as Mother to Her devotees.

As She can be both fierce in battle and filled with compassion, both the beautiful Ambika and the terrible Kali, both the creator and the destroyer, She is both the transcendent essence of life and our loving Mother.

While women cannot take an archetypal symbol as a realistic model for behaviour, and it is not suggested that we behave as a Kali or Maha-maya, still there is much which can inspire us here. Seeing the double-aspected, polar and paradoxical character of the feminine archetype means that we must face the negative side. It calls us to wholeness not perfection. Most spiritual as well as psychological perspectives take the one-sided approach which attempts to reach purity and holiness while denying, giving up, restraining ourselves from, transcending or conquering those experiences defined as negative. Even when we are confronting 'negative' feelings, e.g. anger, jealousy, loneliness, rejection, grief and so on, it is usually to get rid of them, not to accept or integrate them. We are in need of a symbolic image which expresses an integration of polar opposites and a spiritual path which leads to realization of this image. The Great Goddess presents us with such an image, a boat to carry us through the turbulent ocean of existence.

'... You are terrible and at the same time you are pleasing, yea, more pleasing than all the pleasing things and exceedingly beautiful.'

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ध्यायेऽहं लोकमातरम्

देवकी मेनन

देवीं निसर्गकरुणापरिपूर्णनेत्राम्

मन्दस्मितेन विलसद्बदनारविन्दाम् ।

शुक्लाम्बरां जलदनीलकचां सुवर्णाम्

श्रीमातरं हृदि भजे भवतापहन्त्रीम् ॥

गंगातीरे वसन्ती विमलमतिर्युता श्रीशिवाध्याननिष्ठा

छात्राणां सद्गुरोरप्यवहितमनसा पालने मातृतुल्या ।

विश्वप्रेमाद्रंचिता निरूपमचरिता या सदा सुप्रसन्ना

तां ध्याये योगिपूज्यां श्रितजनवरदां मातरं प्रेमरूपाम् ॥

करोति स्नेहवर्षं या निर्घोषं वर्षमेघवत्

भवतापप्रतप्तानां सौख्यशान्तिप्रदायकम् ।

सर्वलोकशरण्यां तां भक्तहृत्पद्मवासिनीम्

रामकृष्णपराशक्तिं ध्यायेऽहं लोकमातरम् ॥

I Meditate on the Mother of the Universe

DEVAKI MENON*

Away from me, oh worldliness, no more to thee shall I cling,
for I worship the Divine Mother, the destroyer of all suffering.
A Mother in whose beauteous eyes compassion and tenderness
I behold,
a Mother who in her unblemished raiment shines forth like gold.

I meditate upon Sri Sarada Ma, worshipped by hoary *yogis*,
the Universal Mother Divine, embodied in human form, the goal of
austerity.
Fountain of love and Truth sublime, gracious to seekers of refuge
in her,
protecting and guiding the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna—the
Great Master.

I bow to Mother, who on all beings bestows her love,
like a small stream and Ganga, both nourished by water-laden clouds
above,

I meditate upon Sri Sarada Ma, the highest Shakti of Sri Ramakrishna
a holy raft for taking us across this delusory karmic ocean.

Mother, residing on Ganga's shores, immersed in contemplation deep,
our prayers does heed,
and fills the universe with the ambrosia of her virtuous deeds.
Oh revered Devi, thou art Sat-Chit-Ananda, finite words your glories
cannot extol,
dwell, dwell, dwell in our hearts, oh Mother, thou art the refuge of
one and all.

* A free rendering of the Sanskrit poem by Shiv Dhawan.

The Unique Life of Sri Sarada Devi

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

THE HOLY MOTHER, Sri Sarada Devi's life is outwardly a simple and inconspicuous life. Yet it has a deep, majestic, inner beauty like a masterpiece of art, the subtle composition of which eludes the understanding of most people. Only one who has the inner eye can see it.

From early childhood till the very end of her life, the Holy Mother loved to serve people in various capacities. During a famine, when her parents fed the famine-stricken people, little Sarada eagerly fanned the hot food to enable the hungry to eat it quickly. Later we find her housed for about fourteen years in a tiny room in the *nahabat* at Dakshineswar, and still later, at Cossipore, completely absorbed in the service of Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees and disciples. With what willing care, devotion and anticipation of their tastes and needs she would prepare food for them, even at odd times.

Her day began at about three or four in the morning and ended at ten or eleven at night; all the while she was occupied with service or spiritual practice, which left her practically no time for rest. Yet her life flowed so steadily and silently that even those near her were not aware of her presence.

What an unprecedented ideal conjugal relationship is seen in the lives of the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna! Her divine association with him dims before its brilliant glory the wonderful ideals of the great ancient sages. Much more than a wife to him, she was Sri Ramakrishna's first disciple and spiritual counterpart. Their marriage was a spiritual union on the highest plane.

It is a sure sign of greatness to be unmoved by joy and sorrow in the pursuit of one's ideal. We find this quality in ample measure in the Holy Mother. When rumours reached Jayrambati that Sri Ramakrishna had become insane and people began to taunt young Sarada that she was the wife of a madman, she did not for a moment stoop to bemoan her lot, but became eager to be by his side to nurse him back to health. When she went to Dakshineswar to stay with her husband, she could at once gauge the real state of his mind. Shortly after, on a Kali Puja day, Sri Ramakrishna ritually worshipped her by performing the

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Shodashi Puja and asked her to sit on the seat meant for the Devi. Her quiet, dignified acceptance of the worship offered by her husband reveals the depth of her personality. This homage paid to her did not elate her, rather she hardly took notice of it. She lost herself in the service of the Master and his devotees even more. Later again, after the passing away of the Master, she was shown worshipful reverence as a great guru by Swami Vivekananda and other disciples, but this never disturbed the serenity of her soul. The even course of her serviceful life continued. With what wonderful humility she accepted their honour! She accepted it even as a mother accepts the loving homage of her children, and remained till the end like a simple mother, loving and serving all.

Sorrow generally undermines optimism and deadens enthusiasm; it makes people cynical and complaining. But it is in the school of misery that the great ones unfold their best. Such is the case with Sri Sarada Devi. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, when she lived at Kamarpukur, for a time she was so poor that she had to suffer great hardships and live on coarse grain and greens, cultivated with her own hands, without the means to buy even salt. She never let her condition be known even to her mother who was living in the village of Jayrambati. No bitterness marred her life. Without a murmur she endured all the hardships with firm faith in the Master. Her suffering made her motherly heart expand to accept one and all as her own, irrespective of caste or creed, religion or country, class or colour. Is it any wonder, then, that she served Amzad, a Muslim dacoit, with the same love and consideration that she had for Swami Saradananda? Is it surprising that her motherly heart overflowed in a thousand and one ways to serve the needy physically, mentally and spiritually? Did she not entertain western ladies under her own orthodox roof, an act considered highly opprobrious at that time? It is the nature of the great ones to behave in that manner (बहुविचिदमिदं हि ब्रह्मन्). She was the mother of one and all. She taught us not to look at the faults of others. She gave, with her last breath, her parting message, 'No one is a stranger, my child, learn to make the whole world your own.' She was not content to embrace only humanity. The animal kingdom and even inanimate objects received their share of her love. She pointed out that a cow had a right to vegetable peelings. In her own words, 'Even a broom must be treated with respect.'

Her understanding of the Master was very deep. When asked about the greatest factor in Sri Ramakrishna's life, she did not say that it was the harmony of religions, as most people did, but she pointed to his unique and unsurpassed renunciation as his special characteristic. He was a king among renouncers. A jeweller alone can understand the worth of a diamond. A great renouncer alone can understand what renunciation is. And was not Holy Mother's own life an exalted poem on renunciation from beginning to end? Was not her whole life a *sadhana* and a sacrificial offering at the feet of the Master and of humanity? She had the insight to know from the very beginning that Sri Ramakrishna was a universal personality and belonged to the whole of mankind. Though her relation to him was intimate in every way, she never thought of making any special claims on him; she sought no privileges, nor wanted priority. She was content to serve him and his followers unobtrusively. She served the Master continuously but when any devoted woman desired to do a particular service herself, she sacrificed her own privilege to serve when occasion demanded it. She never gave a clue to the extraordinary detachment she possessed, a precious quality with which she lived all her life amidst her relatives, doing all kinds of menial work like an ordinary woman. Her method of work was always gentle and filled with understanding.

Though she was unlettered she gave advice and made decisions in spiritual as well as secular matters with great understanding and self-confidence. Even the disciples of the Master sought her advice. She was orthodox in her habits, but never rigid. All through her life she maintained liberality of spirit, and independent judgement. Though always obedient, on occasions she did not hesitate to refuse to comply with the wishes of the Master himself when they went against her own motherly nature. On many occasions she initiated people against orthodox conventions, anywhere and under any conditions. She would sometimes even ask that others be fed the food to be offered in the shrine before the offering had been made to the deity. She showed tremendous moral courage when, in a highly orthodox society, in her widowhood she dressed as she had done before. She did this because she continued to feel Sri Ramakrishna's living presence.

To have a glimpse of the Holy Mother's character in its wholeness requires integral vision which any analysis is inadequate to describe. One can know very little about a lotus or a rose by a description of its

parts; and what is more, one would still miss its living freshness and fragrance. Only by trying to relive her ideal in our own lives can we hope to recapture, at least partly, the grandeur of the divine life of the Holy Mother.

Sister Nivedita, the illustrious disciple of Swami Vivekananda, paid tribute to the Holy Mother in these words :

‘ . . . Dear Mother! you are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love, like ours, and like the world’s but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play. . . . Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God . . . the wonderful things of God are all quiet—stealing unnoticed into our lives—the air and the sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges, these are the silent things that are like you!’

At the Door of the Lord

VISHNU LIVED in the village of Anbil in Trichy District, on the bank of the river Coleran, a tributary of the Kaveri. Even as a toddler Vishnu daily went with his parents to the village temple dedicated to Narayana. Narayana ruled the hearts and the home of this poor, honest and devout family.

When he was six Vishnu fell ill, only to get up from his sick bed as a child who could not walk normally. Neither his parents nor he knew that the dreadful enemy of children, poliomyelitis, had attacked him. Physical disablement no longer allowed Vishnu to romp about like other children. Wandering in the forests, swimming in the river, playing energetic games—all these joys were denied to him. He felt sad at heart. Only a child knows what it means to be lonesome!

Very early one morning Vishnu limped painfully along the village lane until he reached the temple garden. A cool wind was blowing, birds were joyously chirping—and all was quiet and peaceful. He looked towards the temple garden and saw that the temple priest, Chakrapani, was collecting flowers for worship. He approached the priest and asked permission to help him collect flowers. The genial old man gave him a winsome smile and nodded assent. Suddenly the

child's heart was filled with joy and his melancholy disappeared just as mist disappears at the rise of the sun. He was alone, but no longer lonely. He found company at the door of the Lord.

Vishnu's gentle and sweet nature captivated the heart of the old man, and Vishnu started spending more and more time with the priest, trying to be of help to him. When the worship was over, Chakrapani would tell him stories about the Lord Narayana and his exploits in his different incarnations. He would tell him how God saved the good and punished the evil-minded. He would describe to him the different places of pilgrimage—especially Badri Narayana—where the Lord dwelt high up in the snow-clad Himalayas. Vishnu gradually learnt to chant prayers too. The one he liked most was:

'I salute the all-blissful Lord, whose grace makes the mute eloquent and the cripple cross over a mountain.'

The second line used to reverberate in his mind and he asked his old friend one day:

'Father, I am lame in one leg, so I am a cripple, aren't I? If I worship Him, will He make me too cross the high Himalayas and meet Narayana there? I want to see Him.'

'Yes, my son, He can do that,' Chakrapani replied, 'but you must pray to Him and worship Him regularly.'

In the company of the old priest, Vishnu's childhood days passed happily. As a youth Vishnu continued his services at the temple and became a great support to the aging Chakrapani.

One day the old man announced that he desired to go on a pilgrimage to Badri Narayana, as every devout worshipper of Narayana would like to do. His son was now the temple priest, but all responsibilities were on Vishnu. On an auspicious day Chakrapani set out with a group of pilgrims. All the villagers went to see them off as far as the limits of the village allowed. With a heavy heart Vishnu also bade the priest good-bye. Time passed. Others came back, but Chakrapani never returned from that hazardous journey. Vishnu knew why. He had gone to the Eternal Abode of Narayana—never to return to this mortal world again. Secretly he also dreamt of doing so himself one day. He knew that the sincere prayer of an ardent soul reaches God's ears, and He invariably comes to help His devotees.

Years passed. Vishnu became old himself. Now, he decided, was the time when he should start on his pilgrimage. The village people tried to discourage him because he was weak and because of his physical disablement. But he had unflinching faith in the Lord and that gave him strength and support. Had his old friend not taught him the prayer—'By His grace even a cripple can cross over a mountain?' So he joined a party of pilgrims. With a humble heart he followed his companions, telling his beads ceaselessly. It was an arduous journey, but what of that? He knew that all suffering would vanish at the *darshan* of the Badri Narayana. At last he was going to see the Lord!

The temple of Badri Narayana is situated in the Himalayas. It is 10,284 feet high in the eternal snows. It is so cold up there that only for six months in the year can it remain open to the devotees who come from far and near to worship Him. But for the six colder months of the year the temple is closed because snow blocks all the mountain paths, making it impossible for people to come and go. For the winter season, therefore, the high priest with all his entourage goes to Joshimath which is at a lower level, and serves the Lord in a temple established there.

Many devotees undertake this difficult pilgrimage, battling forward and climbing their way up to have a *darshan* of the Lord. But it is not only physical hardships that a devotee has to face. Like the mountain ascent, the path of spiritual ascent is also difficult. For He loves to play hide-and-seek with his own devotee. Though God is close to the devotee—dwelling within him—yet it is difficult to attain Him. As a poet sang:

Eyes cannot behold Thee, O Lord,
yet Thou dost guide mine eyes to see,
The mind cannot comprehend Thy glory, O Lord,
still Thou dost hide Thyself in the depth of mine heart.

After a difficult journey, Vishnu reached the valley on the right bank of the river Alakananda, where the temple is situated. And then, suddenly, on reaching the doorstep of the Lord, what did he see? The high priest, the Raval, had just closed the main doors of the temple! Vishnu and his party were too late! They earnestly appealed to him to open it. Oh, open it just once! They had come thousands of miles from down South. They had suffered endless hardships. Was their

journey to be fruitless? But the priest humbly replied that it was not in his power to break the temple rules. The temple was closed now and he would return after six months. The pilgrims should return then. The other pilgrims accepted their misfortune and walked slowly away. But not so Vishnu. He decided to stay on. He stood aside while the joyous crowd, which had formed into a procession led by the Raval and shouting '*Jai Badri Vishal ki jai*', started its journey down the mountain path.

When the rear of the procession was out of sight, Vishnu nearly collapsed on the cobbled pavement of the village. He sank to the ground, stunned. When he regained his senses he found himself all alone. The sky, a heavenly dome over his head, and the three majestic mountains, Nara, Narayana and Nilkantha standing guard over the place. He was like a speck of dust in that wide world. But what of that? In his heart dwelt the Lord. Seated in perfect solitude he pondered over the *lila* of the Lord and completely surrendered himself to God.

As evening approached, icy winds came howling down from the mountain tops. Lashed by the fury of the blizzard, he said to himself:

'This is my *maha-prasthan*a, the last journey. What if I give up my body here, as have so many holy souls before me?'

As Vishnu sat there awaiting the end, his mind absorbed in God, he heard the sound of a mule approaching. He looked up. Yes, it was a mule. And riding the mule was a boy. The boy seemed to belong to the hills. He stopped before Vishnu and said in a friendly voice, 'Why are you sitting all by yourself in this lonely place? Do not stay out in the open. Come with me. We shall take shelter together in a cave in the side of the mountain.'

Vishnu felt unwilling to go with the boy. He only wanted to be still and give his mind to the Lord. Nothing else mattered. Had he not come for the *darshan* of the Lord? But the boy would not take 'no' for an answer. Holding Vishnu's hand, and with gentle words of encouragement, the boy led him to a cave in the side of the mountain. Once inside the cave, they were safe from the storm. The young boy tried to console Vishnu by engaging him in conversation. But it was difficult to divert the attention of this devotee whose mind was so firmly fixed on the Lord.

A little later the boy took out some bread from his bag and they ate together. The mule was fed too. But Vishnu was so preoccupied

that even food did not help to divert his attention. At length the boy suggested, 'Come, my friend, let's play a game of dice!' Vishnu did not welcome the idea at all, but somehow he could not turn down the friendly invitation of this very charming young boy. They began to play and soon both were totally absorbed in the game. Hours passed. It seemed that they had been playing the whole night.

Suddenly the boy looked out through the mouth of the cave. 'Look!' he cried cheerfully, 'the terrible night has passed. The dawn is coming!' Having uttered these words, he at once mounted his mule and rode away.

Vishnu was astonished to see the boy leave in such haste. But a still bigger surprise was to follow. At the sacred hour of dawn, he saw the Raval—the same high priest he had spoken to the day before—slowly ascending the steep mountain path. Behind him was a long procession of pilgrims. The procession wended its way up towards the temple of Badri Narayana. The fragrance of burning incense, colourful banners, and the pilgrims' full-throated shouts of 'Glory to Badri Narayana', had changed the whole atmosphere.

From where he stood at the mouth of the cave, Vishnu watched in silence, his mind and body filled with divine joy. Here at last was the blessed hour when he would be granted the *darshan* of the Lord. But also his mind wavered in doubt. 'Am I mistaken?' he thought. 'Is it not the same high priest?' He rubbed his eyes again and again and gazed at the magnificent procession. 'It seems to be true all right. They are coming up the mountain and approaching the temple. Why, then, did the priest tell me yesterday that the temple would remain closed for six months?'

He hurried to the temple, and reached there at the very same moment as the high priest himself. Finding himself face to face with the priest, Vishnu's resentment burst out.

'Why did you lie to me yesterday?' he cried. 'You told me that the temple would remain closed for six months! Are six months and a single night all the same to you?'

The old priest was startled at his words. He looked puzzled.

'What are you saying?' he replied. 'I don't know what you're talking about. We have just returned after our usual six months' winter interval.' And the pilgrims standing near bore out the truth of this statement.

'But how is that possible?' cried Vishnu. 'I stayed in the cave with the boy for a single night and no more. Am I to trust you or my own experience?'

The priest looked closely into Vishnu's face. 'Boy?' he asked, 'what boy? Tell me about him.'

Slowly Vishnu narrated to the high priest the story of the evening he was left alone and a boy took him to a cave. The priest took no time to realize the identity of the boy. 'Have you still not understood who He was?' he asked Vishnu.

Vishnu's eyes opened wide in amazement. 'Oh,' he cried. 'The Lord answered my prayer! He came to me—but I, I could not recognize Him!'

Overwhelmed with wonder, the priest opened the main gate of the temple and requested Vishnu to enter first. Without a word Vishnu entered the temple. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He prostrated himself before the deity while the entire prayer-hall echoed with the hail, '*Jai Sri Badri Narayana ki jai!*'

In that blessed moment of communion, Vishnu lost himself in trance; the Lord had kept His promise.

Bhakti-Yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in Love. One single moment of the madness of extreme love to God brings us eternal freedom.

Swami Vivekananda

Thiruppavai, Songs of the Dawn

RUKMANI KUPPAMMA

ACCORDING TO the Hindus a year in human estimation is merely a day and a night of the gods. The dark half of the year, that is the night, ends with the cold winter month of Margashirsha* and the day starts with the bright half of the month of Pausha.† So, for the gods, Margashirsha is the dawn. Hence Sri Krishna declares in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (X.35), 'Of all the months I am Margashirsha.'

Margashirsha is considered so sacred in South India that all temporal activities are avoided then in order to devote time only to spiritual pursuits. To think of God is day, and to forget Him is night. During that month regular worship is conducted in all temples and in houses before sunrise, accompanied by the chanting of devotional songs. A regular feature in all Vaishnavite temples‡ is the chanting of the thirty songs of the *Thiruppavai*§ and the distribution of *pongal*, rice pudding, which has been offered to Sri Maha-Vishnu, the all-pervading divine force. Parties of devotees go around singing the hallowed names of God to awaken all souls to a higher plane of thought. Discourses on religious subjects are held in the evenings for the public.

Songs of the dawn, dedicated to the various deities worshipped under different names and forms, are many and they are sung in all languages. The most popular in South India are the *Thiruppavai* songs in Tamil. Their easy-flowing language set in beautiful poetry and sung by little girls has a universal appeal. The many references in the *Thiruppavai* to the stories of the *Srimad Bhagavatam* add to its sacredness. Of all the spiritual doctrines of the Sri Vaishnavite cult, devotion and service to God is the main feature. It is believed that even a single recitation of the *Thiruppavai* during the month of Margashirsha brings merit to the reciter. Music lovers render the verses in various tunes adding to their popularity. This collection of songs is

* Mid-winter, December-January.

† January-February.

‡ Temples dedicated to Vishnu; the devotee of Vishnu is called a Vaishnavite.

§ *Thiru* (Sri) means auspicious and *pavai* means a vow undertaken by little girls to obtain material prosperity and spiritual benefits.

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translated into Sankrit and other South Indian languages with extensive commentaries. Transliterations are also available.

Andal

Goda devi, known in Tamil as Andal, is the composer of the *Thiruppavai*. She is the only woman among the twelve Alvars, the Sri Vaishnavite saints who composed the well-known *Divya Prabandham*, 'Four thousand divine hymns', dedicated to Sri Maha Vishnu. These are considered to be the Tamil Veda.

It is said that Vishnu Chithar, a senior Alwar, found a female infant in his flower garden under a Tulasi bush (Basil). Being a great devotee of Sri Vishnu, he offered the little one to the deity he was worshipping in the temple and cherished her as a gift of God. He named her 'Godai' meaning a flower garland. She imbibed from this illustrious saint a deep devotion to Vishnu and to his incarnation Sri Krishna. Brought up in such an atmosphere of piety and devotion and endowed with a talent for composing poetry like her father, she had a natural yearning for union with her chosen deity.

In their little town of Srivilliputhur at the tip of South India, the deity in the temple is called Vata-patra-shayi. It is a colossal figure of Narayana in a reclining pose, with his consorts Sri Devi, goddess of wealth, and Bhudevi, goddess of earth, sitting at his feet. Vishnu Chithar had a large flower garden and made beautiful garlands for the deities. He also composed sweet songs which were the outpouring of his heart's devotion. Goda always had a feeling that Sri Krishna was playing with her and also teasing her at times by hiding. As she grew up this feeling heightened into blazing love. She used to decorate herself with ornaments and costly clothes and stand in front of a mirror to see if she was beautiful enough to become Krishna's bride. She decked her hair with flowers and then put on the garlands which her father had kept ready for the deity. She looked in the mirror and, at last feeling satisfied, quietly replaced them. One day, by chance, her father found her doing this and he was shocked. To him God was completely sacred, and no sacrilege could be tolerated. He thought, however, that she was doing this quite innocently and so he softly advised her not to repeat it. But she did not feel that she was at fault. She quietly replied, 'Am I not His beloved?' Her father could not understand her attitude. With great fear and remorse he again gathered

fresh flowers and made new garlands for the deities. When these new ones seemed to be not so attractive, he thought it was all due to his little daughter's error and prayed to God to pardon her ignorance. That night when he was very restless, a light suddenly appeared before him and a gentle voice said, 'O, Alwar! today you have deprived me of the most fragrant garland. Don't you know that it is the fragrance of the love and devotion of your daughter that I desire?' The Alwar felt that his eyes had been opened to a new vista of spiritual experience. Was his daughter a mortal or a divine being? He called her Andal, one who ruled over his heart and taught him real devotion.

Andal refused to marry as she was wholly dedicated to Krishna. Her pangs of separation grew day by day. Her father took her round to all the Vaishnavite temples and sang the glories of each deity. She felt most impressed by Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam. She dreamt* that Sri Ranganatha came in a procession led by a thousand elephants and married her. She explained to her companion in a song how all the rituals of the wedding were conducted. She felt calm and stayed back at Srirangam to enjoy the uninterrupted vision of her Lord.

In all Vaishnavite temples a shrine is kept separately for Andal and regular worship is conducted there daily. Special celebrations are held in the month of Margashirsha and on Andal's birthday in the month of Ashadha.†

Songs of the *Thiruppavai*

Goda devi's intense longing for the exalted presence of Sri Krishna found expression in the thirty songs of the *Thiruppavai*. She could neither visit the cowherd hamlet of Brindavan in the north nor could she hope to find any trace of Him there at this distance of time—except the ever-flowing river Jamuna and the permanent Govardhana hill around which Krishna enacted His divine sport with the simple milk-maids, the *gopikas*. How blessed they were, thought Goda! Their innocent love for Krishna as their playmate, their implicit faith in His extraordinary powers, their pure thoughts devoid of egoism and attachment to worldly ties, found an echo in Goda's heart. She desired to become like them, a dedicated servant of Sri Krishna, and so fulfil her life's mission. Her

* The Vishishtadvaita philosophy accepts the reality of all experiences at all levels, including dreams and illusions.

† July–August.

mystic imagination and her ecstatic devotional fervour carried her beyond time and space. She forgot her own personality. She considered herself—in a dreamlike vision—to be a *gopika* and completely identified herself with the cowherd clan of Brindavan. She was no more the Andal of Srivilliputhur, the daughter of an Alwar, but a milkmaid enjoying life in the company of Krishna. Just as the milkmaids had done, she desired to observe the vow of taking an early morning bath and performing worship to obtain Krishna's grace. This ritual, today called Pavai, is almost the same as the Katyayani-vrata undertaken by the *gopikas* of bygone days.

The Songs

Songs 1 to 5 of the *Thiruppavai* describe the rites based on the main principle of *Prapatti*, or self-surrender to Sri Vishnu.

1

On this auspicious full moon day of Margashirsha, let us have a bath, O daughters of this prosperous cowherd hamlet! Little girls wearing pretty ornaments! Come whoever may desire! The glorious Narayana, the son of the brave Nandagopa, the lion's cub of the beautiful Yashoda, the dark-hued, bright-faced one, will surely bestow his grace upon us and give us the drum to start our vow. People will surely extol our efforts.

2

All ye people! Listen how we observe this Pavai ritual. We get up singing the hallowed names of Narayana who is sleeping on the milky ocean. We take a bath early morning, avoid eating delicacies like milk and ghee. We do not paint our eyes or deck our hair with flowers. We must not indulge in any prohibited act or utter frivolous words. We honour savants and hermits with suitable presents as much as we can, and give alms to the poor whole-heartedly.

3

If we thus observe this ritual in the name of the Almighty who measured the earth and heaven, our prosperity will continue without waning and without a break. There will be regular seasonal rains and the tall stalks will bend with profuse ripe corn. The tiny fish will swim with glee in the water flowing in the fields. The humming bee will suck honey quietly in the flower cups and the hefty cows will generously

fill the pitcher with milk at a mere touch. There will be plenty on all sides to the joy of all creatures.

4

O rain God! Dive deep into the ocean and bring down the benevolent clouds dark like the image of Narayana. Let lightning flash like the glittering discus in His hand and let thunder remind us of the deafening noise of His white conch. May the sharp showers fall incessantly like arrows emerging from His mighty bow. Let the streams flow fully for our bath.

5

With body purified, speech uttering His name, mind immersed in thoughts of Him, if we offer fresh flowers at the hallowed feet of Damodara, the magician, who has come from the royal north, Mathura, as the beacon light of the cowherd clan, to roam on the banks of the clear-watered Jamuna, our sins past, present and future will be burnt away like cotton in fire.

Songs 6 to 15 describe how Goda goes from door to door to wake up her companions, calling them to join her in observing the vow. The Vedas extol the goddess of dawn, Ushas, as a mother appearing daily to wake up her children, calling them to go about their duties. Goda seems to wake up all the slumbering souls of humanity to their highest duty of attaining spiritual fulfilment. In every song she refers to the natural drawbacks of human nature which impede one's rise to a higher plane of thought. These drawbacks are ignorance, egotism, negligence, luxury, love of mortification, pride of ancestry, personal beauty, lethargy, forgetfulness and meaningless talk. No doubt her companions, the *gopikas*, being devotees of Krishna, are devoid of these drawbacks and yet she has to remind them that they have a duty to fulfil towards all creatures on earth by participating in the rituals that bring prosperity to all and that continue to ensure their love for Krishna. When she does not get a quick response she has to chide them, praise them, argue with them and try by all means to gather them together. Andal sings, 'O Jewel among us! you may be enjoying heavenly bliss on account of your austerities. Will you not utter a word in reply, if you cannot open the door? You know that Narayana, who possesses the fragrance of Tulasi, always generously bestows upon us all the materials required for our worship. Perhaps Kumbhakarna, a demon, who was killed by

our Lord in the past, has been defeated by you in a contest for sleep and so has bequeathed to you all his famous slumber; O heavy sleeper! Be quick! arise and open the door!

In each of these ten songs she points out how nature becomes active at dawn. 'The east brightens, the morning star shines, flowers bloom, birds flutter, sparrows converse, cattle go out to graze, holy men repeat the Lord's name and the temple conch blows.' More than all these, in the cowherd village, 'The milkmaids churn curds in every house while their heavy ornaments jingle as they move their hands up and down while singing the glories of Krishna.' And so she asks, 'Don't you hear any of these sounds?' Another song depicts a girl asleep on a comfortable cushion in a room full of incense and soft lamps aglow. When she is perfectly still, the singer girls appeal to her mother, 'O aunt! Won't you wake up your daughter? She is so motionless. Is she deaf or dumb under a spell?'

Holy company is the first requisite to make an aspirant dispassionate and firm in her resolve to attain the Supreme. No enjoyment is complete if experienced in isolation. So now in the company of all the *gopikas*, Goda, approaches Krishna's palace.

Songs 16 to 25 are addressed to those who live in Krishna's palace. At first they request the guard at the gate kindly to unlatch the jewelled door to let in this group of innocent girls. They seek Krishna's favour, as He has already promised to meet them. The guard here stands for the qualified preceptor, *acharya*, who holds the key to the spiritual realm. The *acharya*, therefore, must be first approached with due veneration. After going in they sing in praise of Nandagopa, Yashoda and Balarama and awaken them. The goodwill of these blessed souls, who are the eternal companions of God and who reside in His vicinity, will help them to arouse Krishna from His slumber. And, at last, they approach the Lady of Compassion, Daya Devi, who resides in the heart of the Lord. She alone can move Him to bestow His benevolent glance upon His creatures.

It is an established conviction that only Sri, as the mother of the universe, can mediate between the individual soul and the Universal Lord. She is requested to give them a fan (to drive away intruders) and a mirror to look at themselves after bath (an act of introspection). In the *Thiruppavai* the divine mother is called Nappinnai or Niladevi. With her permission they call upon Krishna to come out and sit on the

throne to hear the purpose of their approaching Him. They say:

'O gracious one! give us all the materials for worshipping you—a drum, a banner, a lamp, a conch and a choir of singers. When our vow is completed, we shall enjoy sweet pudding with plenty of milk and ghee, wear new clothes and adorn ourselves with fine ornaments as your gifts. You are the means and you are the end. Without your grace no one can perform even a devotional act.'

Songs 26 to 29 speak of complete self-surrender.

'O Krishna, it is not for material gain alone that we have come so early. We have come devoid of egoism and pride like the vanquished kings who lie at the foot of your throne. What we aspire for is consecrated service in everlasting company with you. While following you into the woods with the cattle we have played with you, had food with you, and we called you all sorts of names in our ignorance. Please bear with us. Our merit is that you have been living with us as a cowherd. We shall serve you for ever and ever in all successive births. Remove, we pray, any other desire which may lurk in our hearts.'

The last song states that the fruits of rain and prosperity for all in the land can be obtained by singing these thirty Pavai songs of Goda. Moreover, he who has the faith and devotion to sing these verses will be blessed with the eternal company of Sri Narayana, while His consort Sri Mahalakshmi, will bestow upon the singers all that is best in life.

Materialism in Indian Philosophy

S. H. DIVETIA

IN INDIA the materialist school of thought is very old and it developed because in post-Vedic and pre-Buddhist times predominance was given to ritualistic practices over spiritual values in life. The followers of materialism revolted against the strict conventions and formal observances of the then religious society.

It is important to note that a materialist is defined as one who repudiates the authority of the Vedas (a *Veda-nindaka*, a *nastika*); he is not one who does not believe in God. The Purva Mimamsa is an *astika* school believing in Vedic authority, but there is no mention of God in it.

Teachers of the School of Materialism

Some of the teachers of the materialist school referred to in Buddhist literature are Purana Kassapa, Ajita Keshakambali, Prakruddha Katayana, Maskari or Makkhali Gosala and Charvaka. Very little is known about their personal lives however.

Purana Kassapa worked in a family which had ninety-nine servants, and he was the hundredth servant. As he completed (*purana*) the hundred his master called him Purana, and Kassapa was his family name. He once left this family. On the way thieves robbed him of his clothes, and he somehow covered himself with grass and entered a village. Finding him naked the villagers took him to be an ascetic and treated him with respect. So he became an ascetic, and it is said that he had five hundred followers. His is the doctrine of non-action (*akiriya*). That is, he definitely denies the effects of action; good or evil. The effect of Karma is not at all transmitted through a series of births. This statement has some justification because transmission of the effect of action through a series of births cannot be empirically observed.

Ajita Keshakambali's personal name was Ajit; Keshakambali was the name given to him due to his wearing a stole made of hair. He was known as *Uccheda-vadi*, the Annihilationist, because he believed that at death the world is annihilated. He was a rank materialist. He believed that there is no such thing as alms-giving, no sacrifice, no rites and no benefits for good or bad actions. There is no such thing as this world or the next. There is neither mother, nor father, nor deity to

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whom one owes anything. Above all, there are no great men who can rise as spiritual leaders and who can speak with authority, or who have powers of intuition or who can perform rites. According to him a human being is composed of four elements, and there is no soul separate from the body. When he dies, the earthly element returns to the earth, the watery element returns to the water, the fiery element returns to the fire and the airy element returns to the air. The senses pass to space. When the body merges into these elements, wise and fools alike die, and do not exist any longer in any other subtle form.

Prakruddha Katayana's personal life is not known. He was revered as a popular preacher and a pilgrim. He was an anarchist and his school of thought was known as *Akrita-vada*. He believed as follows: Reality is *akrita*, similar to *anirmita*, an entity which is unassailable, steady and unmovable. It cannot cause injury to others. It is composed of seven all-pervasive elements which are earth, light, air, water, happiness, unhappiness and the soul (or life, *jiva*). These have no power to cause any good or bad effect, nor can they know anything. A non-materialistic streak in this philosophy is the belief in the happiness and unhappiness of life.

Some say that Makkhali Gosala was so called because he was the son of Makkhali, who was a medicant (*mankha*) and was born in a cowshed (*go-shala*). Others say, Makkhali is an Ardhamagadhi word; its original Sanskrit form is Maskarin, meaning a person with a bamboo staff, a travelling ascetic. He was the founder of the Ajivaka sect. He was a Determinist, a fatalist, and believed that one's actions have no resultant effects. There is no action, no power, no force, no human strength, no endeavour. Everything is due to fate only. All vertebrate beings, or those emanating from ovaries or seeds, become transformed in various forms by their inherent destinies only.

Charvaka is the founder of the famous Lokayata school. This path is called Lokayata because it holds that only this world, or *loka*, exists. Its followers regard Lokayata as the only Shashtra. It does not recognize the existence of the self as an independent entity, but regards matter as the ultimate principle and says that the only source of knowledge is sense-perception.

The Charvakas denied the authority of the Vedas in the most bitter terms. They said that the Vedic texts were tainted by the three facets of untruth, self-contradiction and tautology.

Samvit

'There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world, nor do the actions of the four castes, orders and so on, produce any real effect. Therefore, while life remains let a man live happily; let him eat butter even though he runs into debt, when once the body is burnt to ashes, how can it ever return again?'

Exaggerated emphasis on ritualism develops scepticism regarding rites. Meaningless formalism, hypocrisy, avariciousness and mendacity make one turn away from religion and philosophy. This is what led to the development of the materialist philosophy of the Charvakas which denied religion and moral responsibility of every kind. It developed its own incisive logic. Later, other Indian schools of thought, including Buddhists and Jains, protested against all this.

Following the logic of history, materialism, however, later degenerated into epicureanism, gluttony and immorality, and the Purva Mimamsa based on Karma become popular. It took a strict view of ethical life and made all rebels perform ritual worship and admitted them back into the fold of the Vedic religion. Immediately after the Purva Mimamsa came the philosophy of the Vedanta school with its theory of Absolute Monism and reasserted the basic teachings of the Upanishads. For a time the voice of materialism was stifled in India. But will it ever die? Due to the normal human tendency for sense-pleasures and gluttony, materialism, which is as old as philosophy itself, will always exist in one form or the other and thrive in one country or in another.
