

yantra (device)," according to the *Divyavadana*, "is a piece of psychological apparatus to call up one or the other aspects of divinity." As a result, religious merit came to be acquired by purchasing or getting sculptured an image, building a temple and installing the image in it and doing its *Puja* or having its *darshana*.

Indian sculpture, therefore, was almost synonymous with iconography. Although Indian architects built palaces as well as temples, the former were more likely made of wood or other perishable materials. Not a single palace or other secular building of the early period of Indian history has yet been discovered, or is likely to be discovered; the houses of the gods, on the other hand, came to be made of stone or cut out of

rocks. To-day, they remain the only witnesses of the architectural grandeur of ancient India.

In India, art found its home in the temple which was not only the physical core, but the soul of the community. It was not a monastery of the ascetic, nor the fortress of the priest claiming semi-divine power, but the home of *Dharma*. The shapes and forms of its sculpture and the colour on its walls only recorded the heart-beats and the spiritual aspirations of a vigorous racial life.

This meaning and significance of the temple has persisted from age to age, though its materials have changed from bamboo to wood, from wood to the living rock, from the living rock to stone, brick, and marble built into edifices.

**SWEET THOUGHT**

ROYAL  
**Sri Krishna Sweets**  
PURE GHEE SWEETS

PONDY BAZAAR ADAYAR ANNA NAGAR  
PH: 4312345

**HE WHO NEVER  
FELL NEVER  
CLIMBED**

- Anonymous

From the Bhavan's President

## The Concept of Bhakti—II

R. Venkataraman

Whatever path one chooses for liberation, it must be totally suffused with surrender, which is the essence of *Bhakti*.

Ramanand travelled northwards, singing of Rama. Ramanand spurred religious activity among the general people, making religion a matter of emotion, not esoterics. The Alvars and Nayanmars of the South, like the saint singers of the North like Surdas, Kabir and Mirabai, drew from the mint of our religious heritage liberally. But they drew not the nuggets of metaphysical gold, but the humble coppers of devotion. It is these, after all, that enjoy currency and comprise the 'legal tender' of religious belief.

From this very soil of Bengal in the fourteenth century, there arose one who started as an

intellectual with razor sharp powers of analysis or criticism and who took immense delight in matching his lance with poets, philosophers and pandits of different schools. He later had a total transformation to the pa-

of bhakti for reaching godhood at his initiation into sanyasa. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya then went to Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and

Brindavan, covering the greater part of India in a little over six years. It is significant that, at the time of Chaitanya's advent in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the country was passing through a lot of turbulence and cross currents.

There were fierce dialectic



between Shastris and Vaishnavas in the South. Islam, which consolidated its position, particularly in upper India through the rulers, was instrumental in fragmenting and restraining the rites and practices of Hinduism.

Dawn arrives, however, when it appears to be the darkest. In the Gita also it is said that Lord manifests himself at critical junctures whenever there is decline in *dharma* and it becomes necessary to protect the virtuous and punish the vicious.

*Yada yada hi dharmasya  
glanirbhavati  
Bharata,  
Abhyuthanam  
adharmasya,  
tad a t m a n a m  
srujamyaham.*

(Whenever, oh descendant of Bharata, there is decline of *dharma*, and rise of *adharma*, then I body Myself forth).

In India also in



the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century we witnessed a tremendous vindication of *dharma* through the upsurge of the *bhakti* movement. A little before Chaitanya there were Kabir, who was mostly in the Varanasi-Gorakhpur area, Shri Sankara Deva, the great Vaishnav apostle of Kamrup-Assam, Guru Deva, the great Vaishnav apostle of Kamrup-Assam, Guru Nanak, who was born near Lahore and founded the great Sikh religion, and Sant Tulsī Das who was born near Allahabad and made Varanasi and Ayodhya his main areas of

activity, and who left an indelible mark on the Vaishnavas of India through his *Rama Charit Manas*. A short while after came Sant Tukaram in Maharashtra near Pune who electrified that part of the country by his devotion to Shri

Krishna in the form of Vithoba and Pandurang. Chaitanya went to various places of West Bengal like Katwa in Burdwan, then crossing the Ganga to Shantipur and ultimately on his way to Puri through Midnapore, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar and Konark. For more than two and half years Shri Chaitanya travelled in South India and Western India. It is amazing how in those days, walking on foot and through inaccessible jungles, unfordable rivers and inhospitable habitations Shri Chaitanya went from temple to temple and talked and sang to the lowly as well as the learned.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was so disturbed by the "spiritual aridity" of his times that he offered Harinam as a mantra by which, on the vast plain of metaphysical thought, plants and flowers of an active religious impulse could grow. In his travels through the country inviting and inspiring his audiences to share his rapture in Radha and Krishna, he presaged Sri Ramakrishna. In the

Ramakrishna Mission's religious services today, a special invocation of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is made. The *saakaara* worship propounded by the Mahaprabhu and, four centuries later, by the Paramahansa, has, in my view, played a very vital role in our society. But before I expatiate on that, let me continue briefly, this spirituo-historical peregrination.

At Tiruvannamalai where Ramana Maharshi, that embodiment of pure advaita lived, is located the famous temple to Arunachala. In Kanchipuram, within earshot of the Paramacharya's hermitage, is the celebrated temple of Kamakshi. Shiva and Shakti are worshipped in these places in their *saakaara-rupa* by thronging pilgrim-devotees. For the "unillumined", there is the temple.

All of you must have had occasion to visit temples of Tamil Nadu. You would have doubtless noticed that while the main *archana* is conducted by the priest in Sanskrit (or in

Tamil), these temples have the unique institution of the *odhuvaars* who, immediately after the *archana* recite the Tamil compositions of the saint-singers in a burst of pure emotion that balances the content of the *archana* which is by its nature, abstruse. The *archana* and the *odhuvaar* represent *advaita* and *bhakti*, in a symbiotic partnership.

I believe that *advaita* without the *bhakti* movement would have been relegated to the position of a distant faith, adhered to by a microscopic number. The vast majority of our people would have, without the *bhakti* movement, lapsed into primitive forms of belief, superstition and obscurantism. Even now, despite the influences of the Sanskrit fold, these evils exist. But for the *bhakti* movement, these evils would have engulfed our people. We speak of the *bhakti* movement, but in a sense, this is a mishomer because *bhakti* has been a continuum, not a one-time occurrence. From the days of Surdas, Kabir, Nanak, Tulsidas,

the Alwars, Nayanmars and Kamban down to present times, *bhakti* has been a living force. Harinaam was Chaitanya's contribution; Ramanama in our times, was Gandhiji's. That Gandhiji died with Ramanama on his lips is a matter of wonderment only superficially. To those who have studied his life, it was the most natural thing to have happened to one as saturated in *bhakti* as he. Like Ramananda, Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak and others identified with the *bhakti* movement before him, Gandhi addressed himself to all communities, including those outside the Hindu fold. *Bhakti* infuses all. It has not only saved Indian religious thought from debasement but has also been a powerful force for harmony.

Having heard this much, one might ask: We agree that both *advaita* and *bhakti* have co-existed; but are not the two contradictory? Can a belief in non-dualism be reconciled with the concept of a *jivatma* and a *paramatma*? Let us examine the

position. Adi Sankara in his later day composition, the *Bhaja Govindam* preaches the path of *bhakti* and speaks of the ultimate oneness of *jnana* and *bhakti*. Rajaji in his introduction to Adi Sankara's *Bhaja Govindam* said that *jnana* which does not lead to *bhakti*, is hollow. In one stroke Sankara thereby equates the validity of the two *margas*.

I mentioned Sri Aurobindo at the beginning of my talk. Sri Aurobindo, aided perhaps by the radiance of his physical personality, has always reminded me of the eternal, self-renewing purity of the snows. If in Sri Aurobindo we had a Himalaya of vedantic insight, we found in another son of Bengal, Sri Ramakrishna, a Ganga of *bhakti-vaad*. Sri Ramakrishna powerfully evokes the image of the Ganga, partly because Belur and Dakshineswar nestle beside this mother of rivers, but mainly because Sri Ramakrishna's personality was like a warm life-giving current wherein the pious could take a dip, to emerge cleansed by the waters of

spiritual love. If Sri Aurobindo's appeal was to the seat of the human mind, Sri Ramakrishna's was to the seat of the human heart. If the former's was a *tapasya*, the latter's was an *aradhana*.

It is said that there must be two entities, one doing the *bhakti* and the other to whom *bhakti* is offered and therefore it contradicts *advaita*. The essence of *advaita* is that there is only one—the Absolute in which the individual selves and the Prakriti are inherent. According to this conception *jivatma* is regarded as identical with the Absolute and in this situation of identity, *bhakti* will not be possible because there is no duality. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord himself distinguishes between *bhakti* at two levels – one higher and the other lower. The higher level *bhakti* is synonymous with self-knowledge. *Jnana* and the lower level *bhakti* is the same commonly preached and practised by the ordinary people for the fulfilment of various desires and wishes. Describing

the qualities of a real *bhakta* –  
*madhbhakta* – Chapter XII 13 &  
14 of the Gita says:

*Adveshta sarva bhootanam  
maitrah karuna eva cha  
Nirmamo nirahankara  
samadukkhah sukha kshamee.  
Samtushtah satatam yogi  
yatatma drudhanishchaya  
Mayyarpita manobuddhiryo  
madhbhakta sah me priyah.*

(He who has no ill will to anybody, who is friendly and compassionate, free from egoism and self, evenminded in pain and pleasure and patient, ever content, self-controlled and possessed of firm conviction, both mind and understanding fixed on Me. He – My devotee is dear to me.)

Thus the Gitacharya clearly defines a *madhabhakta* as one who surrenders himself to the Absolute, not one who hankers after worldly possessions. The same idea is forcefully put in Chapter XVIII.66 when the Lord says:

*Sarva dharman parityajya  
mamekam sharanam vraja  
Aham tva sarvapapebhyo*

NOVEMBER 30, 2001

*mokshyishyami ma suchah.*

Resigning all your duties to Me, (the all powerful and all supporting Lord) take refuge in Me alone. I shall absolve you of all sins, worry not).

That *bhakti* is the road to the Absolute is an acceptable postulation. Consider the relationship between the Himalayas and the Ganga: the latter flows from the former. For those who, by the logic of their marmic existence cannot climb the snows, *advaitic* reality comes at the doorstep. If you cannot scale the *giri* you still have the ghat. *Advaita* in Sri Aurobindo and *bhakti* in Sri Ramakrishna, are combined by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. The Gitanjali contains the unmistakable properties of both *tapasya* and *aradhana*. If Sri Aurobindo was the Himalaya and Sri Ramakrishna the Ganga then, surely Tagore was the Ocean. Into the throbbing surf of his sensibility, the Truth of monistic self-realization as well as medium of worship found lodgment.

If one analyses further, it will be evident that *Abhyasa*, *Jnana* or *Karma* without *Bhakti* is shell without substance. Performing rituals – *agnihotra* and others – all the time thinking of mundane problems of life or seeking knowledge of the Absolute without total surrender – *Saranagati* – to the Supreme Being or engaging oneself in *Karma* except as soulful offering to *Niskama* to *Kama* - *Isvara* will not led to salvation. One who is merely an expert tinker or turner is not a *karma yogi*. It follows that

whatever path one chooses for liberation, it must be totally suffused with surrender, which is the essence of *Bhakti*. It would, therefore, seem that no duality or conflict exists between *Advaita* and *Bhakti*.

I have posed the issues, given some impressions and would like students of philosophy to study the matter further. May the *Atman-Brahman* relationship as revealed to our people, individually and collectively, help us all fulfil our destinies.

“Lokaa Samasta Sukhino bhavantu”. (Concluded)

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