

KNOWING OURSELVES

Why should we know ourselves? This question seems to be on the lips of almost every present day young man. There was a time when it was thought that the duty that every man owed to himself in life was to know oneself. The Delphic Oracle spoke but a platitude of ancient times. Today however it has become important to raise this question again. We wish to know the world, the universe both in its physical aspect and in its social nature so that we may be able to live more efficiently and happily. Indeed we wish to extend the frontiers of our knowledge so that we may be able to master the universe. The hope of science is verily the unlimited extension of human knowledge and also the unlimited extension of one's duration in the world. Physical immortality is a goal that has been most attractive if not fascinating prospect. Kayakalpa of yore achieved both by means of rasayana and yoga seems to have had a short term but man has not ceased to entertain the dream. In Europe the three-score and ten, and in India satamanam or hundred years have been exceeded by certain peoples who had the good fortune of living well till one hundred and fifty. The knowledge of oneself thus has been not quite the problem - rather it is problem of living well during the period of living whatever may be

the duration.

Thus the perspective of the modern man has changed. What with the invasion of the technological age that promises the millennium of happiness in all its four parts the very pattern of individual and social and political life has been changing. Nothing of the past seems to be adequate to this new pattern. Call it the phase of Kali or the phase of the lower mind or call it the birth of the integral mind, the break up of the mind of man has been rather continuous and speedy.

It must be asked then how man will be under the challenge of knowing himself. The need is, as I have said, to live somehow and hope for a better world adjusted by the wisdom of the human head and heart. Not until this fails - and it need not for failure is not inevitable - will man be able to seek a meaning for himself. The meaninglessness of life as he finds it, lives in it, and grows in it if he can, alone will make the discovery of oneself imperative.

Many men – including scientists – have been arguing against the threat of the atom-bomb and such other inventions. Some have seen in this new threat an opportunity for religious values. But it is somewhat naïve and indeed it is a return to a kind of response that was tried previously – religion can be an atavistic response especially when it is not capable of revealing

the purpose of human existence.

Today we have turned our backs on the ancient goal of liberation from the human bodily existence and the society in which we grew. Liberation today is the liberty to have access to abundant life. Indeed very much early even it was well known that the goal of life is meaningless to mankind unless it can promise an abundant life here and now and God's Kingdom of happiness without sorrow is capable of being realised here. The appeal of most modern religions is to this aspect of life and today more than ever even the claim for revival of religious attitude is in respect of such a realisation of abundant life for all. This aspect may be considered to be the contribution of west to religion. Whilst mysticism may be considered to be the worship of the Transcendent and the longing for the perfect and eternal life the characteristic trait of religion seems in the main to be the longing to brine down that eternal quality or as much of it to play in the lives of men here and promote concord, happiness even of the physical level, harmony and a sense of humanity and rationality. This description is of course rather general but some or the western scholars are prone to say that religion is not the characteristic of the East whilst mysticism is its character. It is clear then that religion must be this worldly whereas mysticism is other worldly. **Religion seeks liberation in and of this world whereas**

mysticism seeks liberation from this world.

This neat kind of distinction between religion and mysticism is not acceptable to India. The tendencies of both are available even here, the spirit of St Thomas Aquinas as seen in his prayer¹ is about as constant the nature or the Indian bhakta or devotee. However the emphasis on the bringing down the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven is a call for transformation of earth consciousness itself and the attempt of some modern religions to fashion and shape and idealise that as the goal of man (parama -purusartha) is much more ambitious than the love of God for the sake of going beyond to our eternal condition or realizing our true self or merging ourselves in the vast Eternal Being beyond all change and flux and time and space.

¹ St Thomas Aquinas's prayer (quoted from St Thomas Aquinas: Gerald Venn p.62) "O God, in whom is every consolation, who discern in us nothing that is not your gift, grant me when the term of this life is reached the knowledge of the first truth, the love of the highest Good. Give my body, most generous giver of rewards, the beauty of clarity, the swiftness of agility, the aptness of subtlety, the strength of impassability; Add to these the affluence of riches, the influence of delights, the confluence of good things; that so I may rejoice, above in your consolations; below in the pleasantness of the place, within in the glory of soul and body; about me in

the delightful company of angels and of men. With you most merciful father may my mind discover the illumination of wisdom, my efforts, the praise of triumph, there where, with you is the escaping of all dangers, the distinction of mansions, the concord of wills, where reigns the amenity of spring, the lucidity of summer, the richness of autumn, the quiet silence of winter, grant me God life without death, and joy without sorrow, there where reign supreme freedom, true security, secure tranquility, joyful bliss, blissful eternity, eternal beatitude, the vision, and the praising of truth, yourself, AMEN.

Despite the scientific veneer of modern man, he is essentially living in an anthropo-centric world, man-centered rather than God-centered life. The man-centered world of humanism has a tendency to refute the important things, that we can realise anything and indeed we can plan our lives ourselves and do not need to have the faith, the belief or even the help of the highest spiritual force, namely God. If ancient sacrificial mysticism finally sacrificed God and made results come out of sacrifice itself without reference to gods or God, modern scientific mysticism is a revival of the same atheistic (or even euphemistically called agnostic) attitude that dispenses with the spiritual life of man, his

God and all that it entails.

We have always had in history the two ways of approach the theistic or God-centered or whole-centered (Purnanubhava) science, economics, ethics, yoga, and liberation, and attainment and the atheistic or man-centered, part-centered, science, economics, ethics, yoga and liberation and attainment or perfection. The latter is apakva, imperfect and never perfectible. The process of history has been a periodically dialectical swing from one extreme to the other. And a third path has always been open to those who saw beyond the God-centered world that mediated between the transcendent Reality and the man-centered world of Nature. The discovery of the self has oscillated between finding it in nature as part thereof, or as part of God and in either case it meant a partial realization. The whole truth about the self is incapable of being grasped as long as there is rightly or wrongly a dissatisfaction about either of the above solutions. There is a transcendent sense of self-existence that remains dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction is born not out of any cussedness or even the feeling that man is more than man, but out of the realisation that in nature and in society, in earth centered consciousness there is hardly to be had the sense of existence or being or living. This arises even when the theistic temper is on. Indeed the realisation of God enforces the transcendence of the human and his social and natural world. That is why to

know oneself one has to know God and only when God is known as transcendent to and not merely immanently the world and men, is there the real possibility of a liberated existence. Pragmatic approaches or political idealisms notwithstanding the high peak of Vedic thought has a far-vision whereas the modern astronomical temper too is surfeit with near-vision.

The Vedic seers saw clearly that we have to transcend the human and the natural and perceive both human and nature from the standpoint of the Divine. The concept of God in tantra reveals this dynamic sacramentalism revealed in the poises of the Divine as Being and the Divine as Power or Creativity or Mother. That it was later expanded to cover the meaning of the extraordinary multiplicity of posers and creations and statuses or gods and goddesses reveals how the One may be considered to appear as the many not fictitiously but really and truly, not for deceit and ignorance but for revelation and expression and redemption. The Pancaratra Agama is unique in this respect in so far as it introduces a concept of supreme import and this concept entails the realization of the five-fold status of God - four in his descent (avatar) and one in his transcendence, towards which all souls are being led through these descents and by these descents.

It is the realization that the one Godhead is indeed from which all other godheads arise - to which Sri Krsna

refers significantly /yad yad vibhuti mat sarvam Srimadurjitam eva va / tad tad evavagaccha-tvam mama tejomsa sambhavah // X.41. and says also that all this by one part of Himself – eka amsena - is established.

The Divine Godhead as transcendent is the goal of man; and the realisation of that Divine Godhead in His descents as the Creator, sustainer, withdrawer, redeemer ruler of all, as Samkarsana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, as the historical descents within and among men and the world – known much more as avatars in general usage (rudhi), whose last full descent is said to be Sri Krsna (though others include Buddha) and in the heart and in the icon (arca), is the pathway or how the Divine who is transcendent stoops to lead the humble seeker after the nisseyas. The arca, harda (antaryamin), vibhava (avatar) and vyuha (cosmic lord) form thus the leaders of man whom man can worship and serve and know. It is these four forms that act as the Vedic Agni to take us to the Visnu, the parama, and the Purusottama, beyond the ksara and the Aksara.

There is the worship of the temple icon which is the perceptible outer object whose presence and awakening within the heart posits the second descent - this is what is described as the realization of the Kingdom of God within, and capable of being so established in the hearts of all. Yogis realize God within themselves in their hearts, as the Inner Ruler Immortal. The realisation of

God as Avatar or historical personality with a divine mission to establish righteousness everywhere is much more difficult. Indeed it is only the Grace of God that makes the yogis perceive him as the Divine personality - Indeed Sri Krsna says that ignorant men treat him as just a man not knowing his divine nature - whose birth and activity are divine - janma karma ca me divyam. A Prahlada knew Vamana as an avatar, a Hanuman recognized Rama, Vidura knew Sri Krsna to be the Godhead - apart from the Rishis and Gods.

To serve Him in the world is indeed a glorious service and leads to the realisation of the Cosmic Deities of the three spheres of Bhur Bhuvah and Svar, and the great trinity spoken of in the Agamas. Above it one comes across that mysterious power called the Mother who throughout has been present as the protecting angel of the soul that had surrendered, and she is the Godhead who takes us across to the ultimate Realisation of the Transcendent – tamasah parastat, tad visnor paramam padam –the Brahma nirvana. This vision includes all that science may seek, religion aspire for and mysticism embrace. Surrender is the path, the method, and indeed ends in that unitive experience with God in all His fivefold nature, integrally. Sri Krsna taught this yoga in Pancaratra, and it is clear that the echoes of this doctrine are found in sections in all religions. We out to be satisfied with nothing less that the ultimate that is the

Indian way, the integral way, the only way – nanyah
pantha ayanaya vidyate.