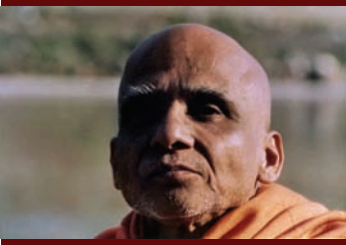


Religious Festival Series

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THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

SANKARA - THE GENIUS

By Swami Krishnananda



Acharya Sankara

Introduction

The necessity which any religious adherent or spiritual seeker would feel for a book of this kind should be obvious. Generally, religion goes by rituals and performances of general routines come by way of tradition, but the mind of man, being what it is, also moves with the routine and does not always feel competent to visualise the vital role which religious observances play as vehicles which embody a deeper significance which may best be described as spiritual. There is a *meaning* behind every *act*, or ritual in the religious field, even as there is a hidden purpose behind the implementation of any project or the doing of any work. Rarely are religions seen to awaken themselves to the spirit that they are expected to convey, the living flame which they enshrine and without which they remain forms without content.

Here, we believe, is a precious gift to everyone who seeks assistance in probing into the philosophical depths and spiritual values behind the injunctions of the religion of man.

(From the book, 'Spiritual Import of Religious Festivals' by Swami Krishnananda. Copyright The Divine Life Society 2006.)

An Analysis of Chronological and Logical Process

Today is Vaisakha Sukla Panchami, the fifth day in the bright fortnight in the month of April-May, when we celebrate the advent of the great Acharya Sankara who is often referred to, by his followers, as Bhashyakara (the commentator on the Prasthanas - the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita). The famous and memorable event of his life and work is a consequence of the chronology of social history as well as a consequence of the logic of human thought. The immortal service that he has done for the world is thus an outcome of a chronological process as well as a logical one.

First of all, let us see what is the chronological significance of the work of Acharya Sankara in the social history of India particularly and the world in general. Chronology is the sequence of history, and if we trace back the condition of the human society, particularly in India, during the time of the most ancient of human conditions available to us for study - the time of the Vedas from where we begin the study of human history - we realise that there was, during the time of the sages of the Vedas, a spontaneous tendency to recognise God in creation. This is the specific characteristic of the time of the Veda Samhitas—to visualise and to behold the creator in what is created, and to see the One in the many. Destiny, perhaps, willed that this should be the beginning of our cultural history so far as it can be recollected by our memories and available data, historically as well as archaeologically. The Samhitas of the Vedas are spontaneous hymns and prayers offered to God in His multifaceted manifestation as this cosmos. To the sages of the Veda Samhitas, the rise of the sun was a manifestation of God. It was the glorious God Aditya that was rising. The dawn was a

manifestation of divinity. Similarly, the sunset had its own glory, revealing the divinity of God. The heat of summer, the pouring rains, the cold of winter, and the changing seasons, all that is visible as well as conceptual became a vehicle for enshrining devotion to God. It was a spontaneity of feeling which was, in a sense, a natural result of the intuition of the sages. Throughout the Samhitas, if you make a deep study of them, you will see spread out in various places, thoughts and devotional feelings in their various emphases and stresses, all beckoning the aspiration of the human soul to what is implied and what is hidden behind the manifested phenomena.

Now here, in this psychological situation of mankind, we have a twofold significance from the point of view of cultural history. On the one hand, it was a visible expression of an inner realisation by which the sages plumbed the depths of infinity and proclaimed for all eternity and to all mankind “*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti, Indram Varunam Mitram Agni....*” All the variety, whether in the field of the Adhidaiva (the transcendent, the presiding principle) or the Adhibhuta (the objective, the world) or the Adhyatma (the subjective, the individual), is a glorious facet or expression of the Supreme Being who is designated in the very commencement of the Rig Veda as “*Ekam Sat*”,—the One Being, without associating the Being with any cult, creed and religious faith. The most catholic definition of the Supreme Reality we have for the first time given in the body of the Rigveda Samhita. *Ekam Sat*—The One Being, One Reality, One Substance, One Existence - that the sages recognise and designate as the manifold. In various ways they sing of the glories of this One Mighty Being. But on the other hand, for pure exoteric observation, it would rather look like an acceptance of polytheism or the worship of the many Gods, as if there is a real multiplicity of the realm of the Adhidaiva, as a counterpart to

the multiplicity that we see in the realm of the Adhibhuta or the physical world. The variety of the physical world became the source of a susceptible feeling in the minds of people later on, through the passage of time, that, perhaps, the souls also are many and the Gods also are many, because the objects in the world are many!

This is a slightly posterior period to that of the exuberance of the Veda Samhita Mantras wherein there was only a spontaneous spiritual outpouring of devotion to the One on account of Its having been recognised in realisation, in direct experience. But, when we make a study of these outpourings, they do not look like the manifestations of the One Experience. All study that is historical is exoteric, prosaic, mechanised and sensory, and hence the esoteric significance that was the background of the very origination of these Veda Mantras, got lost in the process of time, in the passage of history. The outward form, the visible significance of it as hymns offered to the various centres of divinity, the many Gods as they usually say, got emphasised, and these Gods became not only objects of reverence, but also objects of fear. It was not that Gods were always beneficent. They could also be wrathful. While in the earlier stages of the Veda Samhitas, it was not fear of God or even a reverence, in the ordinary sense of the term, cherished towards God that was the cause of these hymns, but an automatic outpouring in ecstatic poetry of a diviner experience felt within; later on, these recorded hymns became historical record of the utterances of the ancient masters. These Mantras which were visibly recorded for posterity, became objects of study and also vehicles for invocation of the

many Gods. To the originators of these Mantras, the Gods were not manifold; they were the many phases of the One. But, now, they lost their connection with the original unity or the background, and only the phases are seen as the multifarious divinities presiding over the quarters of the cosmos—the Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Aryama and many such celestials. These deities began to be invoked through the very same Mantras which were originally the revelations of the sages. While in the original Samhitas, in their primordial condition, they were effects of a diviner experience, now they became a cause rather than an effect of an invocation of these multifarious Gods. We invoke these Gods by placation, by propitiation, by begging and by requesting them not to do us any harm. We pray: “Oh mighty God, save us from calamities, from catastrophies. Oh great God, give us all our needs and desires. May our wants be fulfilled.”

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In a third stratum of thought in this march of social history, these very divinities which were thus propitiated began to be recognised as almost like human individuals. Now, they can get angry as any human being can get angry and they can also be pleased as any human being can be pleased. Perhaps, they could even be bribed through various types of offering. Thus we hear of contention among the very Gods and fights among the celestials, which is really very strange. How could the Gods fight amongst themselves! But that is envisaged by the mind which studied the Gods and the celestials in the light of human nature. As we are, so the Gods also are. So, as we please people, we have to please Gods also in the very same way, applying the same methodology as we apply towards human beings. When a

friend comes, you give him a cup of tea, hot water for bathing, a lunch, and a soft bed for reclining and resting, and he is mightily pleased. Even so do we appease the Gods by offering the very same articles of satisfaction as we offer to human beings.

But how could we transfer these objects that we would like to offer to the Gods in the celestial region? They are invisible! The celestials are not known and they are not seen. So sacrifices or Yajnas were instituted, and the holy fire, the sacred Agni became the secret messenger or the carrier of the oblations to the Gods. We say, “*Agnaye svaha*” and offer to the Supreme Messenger of the Divine Being, Agni. May He be pleased. In all the Havans and Yajnas, you will find the first deity to be invoked is Agni. This ritual is called Agnithapanam. It is invocation of the celestial behind the principle of fire or the divinity of fire who is called Fire-God, Agnidevata. He is first invoked and then He is told: ‘Please take this to Indra’, ‘Please take this to Yama’, ‘Please take this to Varuna’, and so on. He will carry our offerings to the particular deities who are addressed through the Mantras, with the suffix ‘Svaha’, in the Yajnas.

Now, you know very well how we have slowly drifted away from the original intention of the Veda Mantras, by the degeneration of time process, advent of Treta, Dvapara and Kali Yuga, or whatever you may call it.

So, the emphasis got completely shifted from the universal to the external, material and even prejudiced way of thinking. The offerings in these Yajnas or sacrifices meant to propitiate the Gods that are many, were in the beginning holy articles, such as clarified butter and certain grains, pulses and wood from sacred

trees like Asvattha, Palasa and so on, gruel cooked out of rice, Payasam, Charu, etc. But, once we make a mistake, we do not stop with it. It goes on multiplying, and there is an aggregate of errors; mistake after mistake began to be committed with the pious intention of propitiating the Gods. All kinds of offerings were poured into the sacred fire. Well, it came to a climax when even living beings were mercilessly offered, because of the belief that a particular Devata would be pleased. There were occasions, which we can read in the Puranas, when people who had no children prayed to the Gods for bestowing upon them a child, on the condition that it would be offered again to the Devata, as a Balidana. Such is the desire for a child, though it is meant only to be sacrificed later on! This practice continues in some parts even today, even in this fag end of the twentieth century. Narabali, and Yajnas such as Gomedha, Asvamedha were instituted for acquiring material gain, increasing earthly

prosperity, and side by side with a conviction that the Gods would be pleased thereby. We have not only gone away from the centre of truth, but we have also now begun to interfere with the welfare of other people in the world. This is naturally intolerable to the very law that operates in the universe. Where is that original intention of the Veda Mantras which was only a consequence of the great Divine experience of the Supreme Being by the great sages, and where are we now, utilising these Mantras for offering

oblations in the sacred fire for propitiating the multiplicity of Gods for earthly suzerainty and sensory satisfaction!

It was at this time that Gautama, the Buddha, was born in this country. When anything goes to the extreme, the other extreme is set up.

Where is that original intention of the Veda Mantras which was only a consequence of the great Divine experience of the Supreme Being by the great sages, and where are we now, utilising these Mantras for offering oblations in the sacred fire for propitiating the multiplicity of Gods for earthly suzerainty and sensory satisfaction!

Very hot day means, there will be a cyclone; winds shall start blowing, breaking branches of trees, and there may be a shower. Now, the clock has come full round and the hour has struck for the other extreme step to be taken. While there was a deep feeling and conviction that there are many Gods, guarding the quarters of the cosmos, who are our well-wishers and without whose satisfaction we cannot be happy in this world - these very Gods, who were regarded as our very life, were denied by Buddha. He said that they did not exist at all. This is the other extreme. See where we have come to! You say, the Gods are protecting you; I say, they do not exist at all and it is your mind that works. So, from the spiritual realisation and mystical experience of the sages of the Veda Samhitas, we came down to a worship and inner adoration of the multiplicity of Gods. Then we came still further down to the time when we began to make physical offerings to the sacred fire for the satisfaction of the Gods without any feeling or compunction in offering living beings, even human beings, in the sacrifices. There was such a thing called Narmedha or the offering of a human being in sacrifice. If the Gods themselves do not exist, where comes the sacrifice? It has no meaning. So, the first historically known reformer in our land was Gautama, the Buddha. He was a reformer in the sense that he put a check to the further growth of this externalising tendency of ritualised devotion to an imagined set of multiplicity of Gods. But for him, it would have landed people in a catastrophe. We do not know what would have happened. This tendency was checked by the psychological philosophy of Buddha and the divinities were completely ignored. Now, the divinity, if at all

there is, is the thinking principle in the human being himself. The world is made by the mind, it is purely psychological. It is a projection of ideas. It is a notion in your mind that is this world and even these Gods. This was a beautiful psychological analysis made by the Buddha, which was an ethical idealism which he propounded in contradistinction to the ritualistic ceremonialism of the Brahmanas which succeeded the Veda Samhitas.

The world is made by the mind, it is purely psychological. It is a projection of ideas. It is a notion in your mind that is this world and even these Gods. This was a beautiful psychological analysis made by the Buddha, which was an ethical idealism which he propounded in contradistinction to the ritualistic ceremonialism of the Brahmanas which succeeded the Veda Samhitas.

It sometimes happens, children interfere with the transistor and spoil the whole music which the parents had tuned. This happened in the case of the followers of this great reformer, who began to interpret his teachings in their own way, even as it happened with the followers of the Vedas also who interpreted the Mantras in their own way, and landed themselves in ceremonialism, ritualism and mechanised sacrifices. That the world is only an idea, and that the Gods do not exist, which was one of the predominant teachings of the Buddha, received special emphasis in certain schools of Buddhism. And Buddha's philosophy did not end with the death of Buddha. It continued, but in a ramified form, not as a single stream. It ramified itself into four streams at least—the Vijnanavada which taught that internal ideas manifest themselves as external objects, the Vaibhashika which held that really existent external objects are directly perceived, the Sautrantika which contended that the perception of external object is entirely determined by the processes of internal ideas, and lastly we had what has been called Nihilism, Sunyavada, or the Madhyamika doctrine which was the view of there being nothing at all in reality. So this controversy was another kind of catastrophe that got itself

introduced into human thought. From somewhere we have gone to some other place, not knowing the direction at all. The intention of the originators of the great thoughts and the sages of divine experience were all wonderful. But, time has its own say in every matter and things slowly get diluted as time passes on. The pure gets adulterated until it loses all content, meaning and reality. The worst mistake that we can do in anything is to go to the extreme in it. Even in a good thing, we should not go to the extreme. Then it ceases to be a good thing, and becomes a bad thing. Even truth can become untruth, when it is taken to the extreme. Ahimsa can become Himsa when it is taken to the extreme. Virtue can become vice when it is completely taken to the breaking point. So all these good thoughts which are necessary as reformations in the history of man, got distorted by the passage of time and people began to argue in various ways positing realities according to their own whims, fancies and predelictions, and there was again another chaos.

The next step was the advent of Sankara to rectify this extreme that was brought about in human thought by the adulterated forms of Buddhist idealism, which were all extreme types of thinking. They had some truth in them, but they were not the whole truth. For example, it is not true that the world is created by our ideas and yet it is true that our ideas have some say in the projection of the forms of objects. It is not true that the objects are physical in their nature, yet it is true that they have some physicality in them independent of human thought. It is not true that nothing exists, as the Nihilists say, but yet it is true that things do not exist as they appear to the senses. All these aspects of truth had to be brought into relief by a new method of

approach altogether which was the purpose of the mission of Acharya Sankara. This was the consequence chronologically speaking, as I mentioned to you, a historical reason for the teaching which Sankara gave in the way he did it.

I started by saying that besides the chronological process, there was also a logical reason for the development of this thought which is another interesting stream of the psychological history of man. While what I have said so far is the historical, purely sociological or chronological aspect of the significance of Sankara's work in this country and in the world, let us now see its logical significance. His thought is a logical consequence of all thoughts that preceded before his coming into being. There were systems of thought called the Darsanas. You must have heard of the schools of thought known as the Nyaya, the Vaiseshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and certain other mystical and ritualistic philosophies which were in minority, of course, yet prevalent during the time of Sankara. The immediate or rather the crudest form of human perception is taking for granted whatever is seen by the senses. "Oh, I am seeing it there, and therefore it is there. Just because I see it there, it is there." This is the

It is not true that nothing exists, as the Nihilists say, but yet it is true that things do not exist as they appear to the senses. All these aspects of truth had to be brought into relief by a new method of approach altogether which was the purpose of the mission of Acharya Sankara.

uncritical acceptance of things. You know very well that just because something is there before your eyes, it need not necessarily be there. Because, certain things can present themselves before our eyes, yet they may not be there really. Yet uncritically we accept everything that is visible to the eyes. Now, this philosophy of uncritical acceptance of everything that is visible or everything that is sensible, to put it more generally, became the

incentive behind the systems of thought called the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, whose

conclusion is that things are physical and psychological. There is no other reality conceivable. This conclusion is arrived at by a system of logic, argumentation, or a systematic, syllogistic process of argument. Inasmuch as the followers of this system entirely depended on the syllogism of human thinking, logical argumentation, deducing things from given premises, the system is called the Nyaya. 'Nyaya' means logic. It is, therefore, a logical system of pluralistic realism. It is logical because it is syllogistic. It is pluralistic because they accept multiplicity of physical entities. It is realism because the world, according to them, is external to the human mind and it is not a part of the process of human thinking. What about God? Is there a place for a Creator in this scheme of things? Yes, there is a place. But He is like a potter making a pot, a carpenter making a table, an engineer or a mechanic constructing a machine. What does this imply? The potter can make the pot or not make it, and he can break the pot, if he likes. The pot has nothing to do with the potter and it is completely outside him. By a similar analogy, God was regarded as an extra-cosmic being, outside the cosmos. The potter cannot be inside the pot and he is outside the pot. So God cannot be in the world and He is outside the world. If He is in the world, how can He create it? So the logical realism of the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, which are brother-systems, concluded that God is beyond the world and outside the world. And a multiplicity of material was posited as the stuff out of which this extra-cosmic creator began to mould this cosmos, as a potter would shape a pot by manipulating the clay-material that is available to him outside.

How could we reach this God who is extra-cosmic and what is the way? Is there a ladder from earth to heaven where God lives? His hands cannot reach us and our thoughts cannot reach Him. There seems to be some defect in these systems. This was the decision made by the Sankhya which was a later development of philosophical thought.

But many questions posed themselves before the minds of people. This philosophy was found not satisfactory. How could we reach this God who is extra-cosmic and what is the way? Is there a ladder from earth to heaven where God lives? His hands cannot reach us and our thoughts cannot reach Him. There seems to be some defect in these systems. This was the decision made by the Sankhya which was a later development of philosophical thought. According to this School, it is not true that there are many physical entities or realities as the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika thought. All these manifold objects could be boiled down to certain fundamental essences or principles which are the building bricks of the cosmos. While the Vaiseshika and the Nyaya thought that there is earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, soul and so on, all independent of the other, though in their finer essences as atoms etc., yet the multiplicity was accepted. But the Sankhya thought out this matter more deeply, and felt that it is not true that there are five elements. They are only five degrees of the intensity of one element. One element or principle, one being or stuff has modified itself into various densities. This was what Sankhya taught. There are not five elements - earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Even the mind is not an independent entity. It is also a modification, in a particular form, of the very same stuff which is the substance out of which the cosmos is made. And if at all we have to accept more than one reality due to the exigency of experience and thought, we can at best accept only two entities, consciousness which sees and that which is seen, the experiencer and the experienced, the seer and the seen, or, to put it more precisely, consciousness and matter. These are the only two things that exist

anywhere and not more. We do not have five elements, many souls, etc., absolutely independent in their inner structure. So, there was a logical development of thought from the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, when the Sankhya philosophy developed its conclusions in regard to what is called Purusha and Prakriti. It is this Purusha and Prakriti that we generally call God and the world, in popular language. Why should we accept two entities? Who told you that there is a Purusha and there is a Prakriti? How do you know that there is consciousness and there is matter? Can you prove this? Can you substantiate this thesis? Yes, was the answer of the Sankhya. No human being can escape noticing an object outside in the world. You may try your best and stretch your imagination to its farthest limits; you cannot escape the recognition of an object outside. It is there. It may be this or it may be that. But something is there outside. That is what you call matter. Matter is that which is other than consciousness, that which consciousness recognises, sees or comes in contact with. That which has not the characteristic of consciousness is matter. The distinguishing feature of that which is different from consciousness is that it is non-intelligent and therefore it cannot think. This is a wonderful philosophy. You can read it in detail in your leisure. And as a matter of fact Vedanta is nothing but an amplification of the Sankhya. The seed of the Vedanta was sown by the Sankhya itself. We have to give enough credit to the thinkers of the Sankhya for having paved the way for the onward march of later thinkers like Sankara.

Well, there is something very interesting to note in this philosophy of the Sankhya again. Is this satisfactory? The Sankhya thought that for

certain obvious reasons the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika were not satisfactory, especially in its theory of God. The Liberation, the nature of the soul and such other conclusions of the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika were almost preposterous. No thinking mind would accept them. So, the Sankhya came forward and proclaimed that liberation is a fact. There is such a thing as liberation or salvation. But, salvation is nothing but Purusha resting in himself, consciousness resting in itself, thought merging into its source. It is self-illumination of consciousness, independent of its contact with matter. This is Kaivalya, Ekatva, Absolute Independence. Thus there is no provision for God in the Sankhya system. This is not

Matter is that which is other than consciousness, that which consciousness recognises, sees or comes in contact with. That which has not the characteristic of consciousness is matter. The distinguishing feature of that which is different from consciousness is that it is non-intelligent and therefore it cannot think. This is a wonderful philosophy.

necessary at all, because we can get on in the world even without a God. Why not? The world and the world experiences are nothing but the contact of Spirit with matter. And liberation is nothing but separation of the Spirit from matter. We have explained the whole of experience here and hereafter with these two principles alone, Purusha and Prakriti, Consciousness and matter.

But, and a great but, can you get on with this philosophy? Can you

answer all questions of ethics and practical life with these two principles of Purusha and Prakriti alone? No, we cannot answer all questions and solve all problems with these two principles alone, because there is a small difficulty caused by the acceptance of the Law of Karma which is recognised even by the Sankhya. Karma is nothing but the reaction that is set up to an action. It is the nemesis that follows every action that an individual or Purusha does. Merit is rewarded and demerit is punished. But who does this? Does Purusha reward himself for the merit he does, and does Purusha punish himself for the sin he

commits? This would be a very absurd conclusion obviously. Who would like to punish oneself! Even if I do a wrong, I would not like to be punished. But there is nobody else who can punish the Purusha for the wrong that he does. Prakriti cannot do it, because it is unintelligent and Purusha will not do it because he himself is the doer. So, this is no good. The need for someone to dispense justice was felt by the Yoga system of thought which came after the Sankhya.

The Yoga School was systematised, not originated of course, and logically presented by Patanjali later on. Yoga said, an Isvara is essential. Otherwise, you cannot escape this difficulty of the Law of Karma. Reward and punishment will be meaningless on the basis of the Law of Karma, if a Supreme Dispenser of justice does not exist. God exists, said Patanjali. But this God is only like a judge in a court with whom we are not directly connected except when there is a case. When the case is over, we do not care for the judge. We go away homeward. Such was the God mentioned in the Sutras of Patanjali; very essential, very necessary, yet not organically connected with our life. He hangs loosely in the system of Yoga. So, for the first time in the history of philosophical thought in India God, world and soul, all three were posited in a manner satisfactory for all practical purposes, in the system of Yoga propounded by Maharshi Patanjali.

But what is the goal of life according to Yoga? Is it God-realisation? According to Yoga God-realisation is not the goal. Because this God is necessary only for the sake of dispensing justice to the Purushas. The goal of life is self-withdrawal.

Consciousness or the essence of the Purusha resting in itself is liberation and the final goal of life. It has nothing to do with Isvara who is

also, after all, one of the Purushas, though He may be a special Purusha, Purusha-visesha. What is the internal relationship among Purusha, Prakriti and Isvara? There is no proper answer. Unless there is a relationship among entities, how can we posit the entities? It is logically inadmissible and it is an untenable thesis. We should not say that there are two things, unless we are able to explain the relationship between the two things. How do we know that they exist? Our consciousness that posits the existence of two objects transcends the two objects. The very fact that we know that there is a God and a world and there are Purushas, shows that we who make this judgement have intrinsically some thing, some principle which seems to transcend the limitation of these three posited principles. Here we have an introduction to the Vedanta philosophy. God is there. Yes, it is wonderful. World is there. Yes, we see it. The Purushas are there. Yes, we do experience them. But what is the internal connection among these things? What is the relevance that obtains between these three principles? This could not be answered by either the Sankhya or the Yoga.

With this introductory remark on the inadequacies of all the earlier systems of thought, Sri Sankara came forward as a genius of philosophic thought, as a master who could solve with one stroke all the problems of life with his mighty system of psychology, wondrous system of metaphysics, his master technique of Yogic meditation and his soul-enrapturing ideal of the realisation of Brahman as the goal of life. Such was the significance, chronological as well as logical, of the great mission and work of Acharya Sankara in Bharatavarsha,

which has done mighty good not only to the citizens of this country but also to all seeking souls throughout the world.

So, for the first time in the history of philosophical thought in India God, world and soul, all three were posited in a manner satisfactory for all practical purposes, in the system of Yoga propounded by Maharshi Patanjali.

The goal of human life depends upon the relation of the human individual to the world. Unless this relation is understood, the goal also cannot be properly specified. We are very much connected with the world outside, we know it very well. And unless we know what sort of connection it is that we are supposed to have with the world outside, we cannot properly ascertain the nature of the goal of human life. Religious teachers and prophets came to specify the goal of human life, the ultimate purpose behind all the activities of mankind. And they differed from one another in their concept of the relation of the individual to the cosmos. So we have schools of thought - Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta, known as the orthodox schools of philosophy; the Charvakas, the Jainas, the Vaibhasikas, the Sautrantikas, the Vaijnanikas and the Sunyavadins among the heterodox ones. Even in the Vedanta, we have various sections - the Advaita, the Visishtadvaita, the Dvaita, the Shuddhadvaita, the Dvaitadvaita, Achintyabhedabheda, Saiva Siddhanta, the Sakta School, and so many other schools. The schools are so many that we do not know where we stand, finally. This was the condition of the human mind in its philosophical level when Sankara's advent took place on this earth. Hundreds of cults and dogmas prevailed. Pasupatas, Saivas, Bhairavas, Kapalikas were all rampant during his time. He came to give to mankind a gospel of healthy living.

It is not easy to understand the gospel of Adi Sankaracharya. I do not believe that even today the majority of mankind really understands it. It is not just a glib word 'Advaita'. What is the meaning of Advaita? That itself is a difficult thing to conceive. It is not a system opposed to other systems, but a method of interpretation

But suffice it to say that the Vedanta of Sankara came as a remedy to the diversified ways of thinking which created an unnecessary conflict even in daily practices of human beings, and this he did without going contrary to the injunctions of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

of values by which we can healthily coordinate the existing systems of thought and construct a system of philosophy according to which we can live happily in every stage of our life. I do not intend to go into the details of this philosophical background. But suffice it to say that the Vedanta of Sankara came as a remedy to the diversified ways of thinking which created an unnecessary conflict even in daily practices of human beings, and this he did without going contrary to the injunctions of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Scripture and reason were the two aids in the arguments of Sankara. He was a tremendous logician, the like of which it is difficult to imagine ordinarily, who based his arguments entirely on the principles of logic, but without contradicting the intuitional revelations of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Every argument was logically precise, culminating in an irrefutable conclusion. But it was based on the evidence of the scriptures like the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Samhitas of the Vedas. He came to combine the validity of scripture with the limitations of reason and the value of reason. Intuition is not opposed to intellect, was what Sankara proclaimed. Nor can we say that intellect is complete in itself. The conclusions of the intellect have to be corroborated by the revelations of the Srutis. Sruti, Yukti and Anubhava—scripture, argument and experience—have to go parallelly along a path leading to a single goal. Scripture is the support for the argument, while argument supplies the strength for the exposition of the scripture, both of which lead to the direct experience or Anubhava. Reality is experience. Brahma Sakshatkara is the same as Anubhava of the Supreme Being.

Unfortunately, today we have no proper

expositions of the Vedanta philosophy. They are all in bits and tracts, here and there; a complete philosophy of Sankara is not available in any single book. You read any book written anywhere, but you will not find a complete philosophy of his presented. There will be only a section of it, a part of it, a phase of it or an aspect of it presented, so that it always gives a wrong view of the philosophy. This is unfortunate; but this is understandable, because it is not easy for a single man to write or to touch upon all the aspects of this single, all-comprehensive philosophy.

The Upanishads themselves are all-comprehensive and an exposition of them, which is the system of Vedanta, has naturally to be many-sided. You cannot read any particular text-book and say I have understood Vedanta. Because all text-books deal with certain aspects—the theory of perception, or the logical part of it alone, or only the Sadhana aspects of it, and so on are touched upon. We have masterly expositions of Advaita Vedanta given in such books as the Khandana Khanda Khadya of Sriharsha or the Tattva Pradipika of Chitsukha or the Advaita Siddhi of Madhusudana Saraswati, but you will not understand the spirit of Vedanta even after reading all these books. Because they are only arguments leading to certain conclusions of Advaita but not the entirety of it. Even if you read the Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Sankara, you will not know or understand the entire teaching of it. It requires study under a Guru to have a complete view of the entire perspective of Sankara's teaching.

It is really interesting that the fate of the Advaita Vedanta later on, in the passage of time, was similar to that of Buddhism. It was misrepresented. As Buddha was

misrepresented, Christ is being misrepresented, Sankara was also misrepresented. So to counteract the misrepresented attitudes came other Acharyas like Ramanuja, Madhva and others. You cannot wholly and satisfactorily explain the subtle relation of soul to God. Though many schools of philosophy have come up, they are like dismembered bodies, and not a complete whole. Just because we have limbs cut off and thrown everywhere, it does not mean that we have a complete human system. Unfortunately,

we have only such limbs cut off—Dvaitins, Advaitins and Visishtadvaitins, etc. But we do not have a very satisfactory and happy blend of thought. Therefore, it is necessary that such a new orientation has to be attempted, without a biased approach of any school, keeping in view only the goal of mankind as a whole and not merely as a system or a school of thought. Such an attempt has to be made and the success of it depends entirely upon the genius of the man concerned, because Sankara himself was a genius.

Sankaracharya's works must be studied not merely for the philosophical depths of his writings but also for the beauty of his language. Of

course, unless you know Sanskrit you cannot appreciate his style. 'Vakyam prasanna-gambhiram'—his sentences are very smooth-flowing, very deep and beautiful. They are not complicated arguments. They are very simple, but full of depth and literary beauty which you will find only in such poets like Kalidasa. Of course, Sankaracharya mostly wrote his commentaries in prose though he has also written poems of various kinds. They are so simple, so sonorous and so beautiful. For the beauty of the language of Sanskrit, and the depth of philosophical wisdom and the help

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they can offer us in our practical life, his works have to be studied. There is a beautiful poem by Sankara known as Prabodha Sudhakara. It is a very beautiful work because it combines Bhakti and Vedanta. Sankaracharya was also a devotee. All great Vedantins are also devotees. It is very mysterious. Madhusudana Saraswati was an utter Vedantin but he was a devotee of Lord Krishna. We do not know how we can combine. But they did.

Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was a great admirer of Adi Sankaracharya and in his teachings you will find the spirit of Sankara. If you can understand Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj properly, you can understand Sankaracharya also. Of course, it is very difficult to understand both, because they are many-sided geniuses. So let us study their works and try to live a practical life of Vedanta and Bhakti.

