

The Doctrine of Sakti in the Gita.

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It is well-known that this doctrine of *Śakti* is of the essence of the living Hinduism of to-day. It is thought and said by some critics within and without India that the *Śakti*-cult grew up independently of Vedic Hinduism and eventually invaded and pervaded the latter. This is not a correct view. The doctrine of *Śakti* is as old as the Vedas and is hence an eternal fact of life and factor of thought. We can therefore expect to find it in the *Gītā*, which is the quintessence of the Upaniṣads.

Apart from the *Śākta* Upaniṣads proper, we find a clear reference to 'बहु शोभमाना उमा हैमवती' in the beautiful *Kenopaniṣad*. It was She that taught Indra about the Supreme *Brahma*. The *Śākta* Upaniṣads naturally contain more details about the significance and function of *Śakti*. *Śakti* has a *Māyā* aspect, an *Avidyā* aspect, and a *Vidyā* aspect. When She is viewed as the *Matrix* of the universe, She is called the *Mūla Prakṛti*. When She is viewed from the point of view of the cosmic functions, She is *Sṛṣṭi-sthiti-saṃhāra-kāriṇī* or *pañchakṛtyaparāyanā* according as we regard the cosmic functions as threefold or fivefold in character. From the point of view of the threefold cosmic function of knowledge and desire and action, She is called *Jñāna-Śakti-Ichchhā-Śakti-Kriyā-Śakti-Swarūpiṇī*. In Her own essential nature She is called *Sachchidānandarūpiṇī*.

All these concepts are as old as the Vedas and as new as the latest science. Sir John Woodroffe has well pointed out: "The modern dynamic view of the constitution of Matter—a view that has tended to dematerialise Matter; a view that sees in the atoms of Matter a vast magazine of power; a view that is faced with a residual element of the inexplicable in all its mechanistic explanations; a view that sees in radio-activity the drafting of a new and practically inexhaustible energy into the hitherto-supposed closed and constant realm of physical energies, already shows that Physical Science has taken vast strides towards the *Śākta* position, which (a) makes Power to be the essence of everything; (b) makes Power in reality immeasurable in everything and in the universe for the matter of that; and (c) makes the "Dynamic Point" the Perfect Magazine of Power." Science is, however, not mere physical science alone. If we take it along with the Vital and Psychic Sciences, we reach inevitably the grand synthesis of *Śakti* as *Sachchidānanda*. Sir John Woodroffe says: "Mental Science, in dealing with ordinary psychic and the *parapsychic* phenomena, is steadily veering round to a position whence one can have not a very distant view of the ultimate Truth as held in *Śākta* Vedāntism."

I have referred to the most ancient and the most modern aspects of the

doctrine of *Śakti*. Midway we find the doctrine as we find it in the *Vedānta-Sūtras* or *Śūriraka Mīmāṃsā*. It demolishes by rigorous logic and all-round criticism the *Sāṅkhya* doctrine of an independent *Prakṛti*. The *Sāṅkhya* does not deny God but holds that the existence of God is not proved. Though Śrī Śankarāchārya affirms the unity of *Brahma* and supports the *Vivartavāda*, he gives a clear and high place in his system to *Śakti*. He says in his *Bhāṣya* on the *Vedānta-Sūtras* (I. iv. 3) that the causal force or power which becomes the universe is not insentient or independent but is sentient and dependent on *Paramēśwara*. In fact, *Paramēśwara* can be described as the Creator only because of His connection with Her.

नहि तथा विना परमेश्वरस्य स्रष्टृत्वं सिद्धयति
शक्तिरहितस्य तस्य प्रवृत्त्यनुपपत्तेः ।

The fact is that, though the terminology in the Vedas and the *Gītā* and the *Brahma-Sūtras* and *Śakti* scriptures (Tantras and Āgamas) may differ, there is a congruent body of doctrine which is in harmony with modern Hindu thought and with the latest science. It would not be possible to demonstrate it in detail here, but we can easily draw conclusions supporting the above view by a brief and exclusive study of the *Śakti* doctrine as found in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The word *Śakti* does not occur directly in the *Gītā*, but the doctrine of *Śakti* is clearly stated and developed in the *Gītā* through the equally expressive and significant words *Prakṛti* and *Māyā* and *Guṇas*. In Chapter III, verse 5, it is said:

कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥

See also Chapter XVIII, verse 40. Thus the *Guṇas* are born of *Prakṛti* and determine the nature of our activities. The thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā* refers to *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* in great detail. It shows that the *Puruṣa* or *Jīva* (Śrī Śankarāchārya says in his *Bhāṣya* on Chapter XIII, verse 20: पुरुषो जीवः क्षेत्रज्ञो भोक्तृविपर्ययः) remains in the body and enjoys the qualities (*Guṇas*) manifested as pleasure, pain, etc. In Chapter XIII, verses 19 to 21, it is said that *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are eternal and that the *Vikāras* (body, senses, mind, etc.) and the *Guṇas* (pleasure, pain, etc.) are born of *Prakṛti*; that the *Puruṣa* is the *Bhoktā*, is the enjoyer, and that the *Puruṣa* remains in *Prakṛti*, manifested as the body and the senses, and enjoys the *Guṇas* (pain, pleasure, etc.) which are born of *Prakṛti*, and that his enjoyment is due to his *Guṇa-sanga* (attachment to *Guṇas*). In Chapter XIV, verse 5, the Lord says that the *Guṇas*, viz., *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, which are born of *Prakṛti*, bind the *Dehī* (*Jīva*) in the body. In Chapter XV, verses 7, 8 and 9, He points out that the *Jīva* enjoys the *Viśayas* (objects of nature) with the help of the mind and the senses and that he takes them with him when he migrates from the body, just as the wind carries the odours of flowers with it.

Thus, in this exposition we see the *Sāṅkhya* modification of the doctrine of *Śakti*. *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are described as separate and eternal, and the entanglements of *Puruṣa* in the *Prakṛti*—*Guṇas* are due to *Guṇa-sanga* (Attachment to *Guṇas*). The diversities of action are due to the action of *Prakṛti*,

while the *Puruṣa* is really detached and separate. In short, the *Puruṣa* by means of egoism and attachment (*Abhimāna* and *Saṅga*) regards himself as doer.

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।
अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥
तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।
गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥
प्रकृतेर्गुणसंमूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।

(Chapter III, verses 27 to 29)

प्रकृत्यैव च कर्माणि क्रियमाणानि सर्वशः ।
यः पश्यति तथात्मानमकर्तारं स पश्यति ॥

(Chapter XIII, verse 29)

From this exposition the natural next step is to say that *Prakṛti* leads the *Puruṣa* on by means of the *Vāsanās* left by actions in previous births.

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥

(Chapter III, verse 33)

मिश्रैष व्यवसायस्ते प्रकृतिस्त्वां नियोक्ष्यति ॥

(Chapter XVIII, verse 51)

The compulsive power of *Prakṛti* is stated also in Chapter VII, verse 20.

Thus far the doctrine of *Śakti* is in the *Sāṅkhya* stage in the *Gītā*. The glory of the Upaniṣads and especially of the *Gītā*, which is their quintessence, is that they take the doctrine of *Śakti* to a loftier stage. The Lord says in the *Gītā* that both *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* (called also *Kṣetra* and *Kṣetrajña* in Chapter XIII of the *Gītā*) are His *Prakṛtis*, *i. e.*, His *Aparā* (lower) *Prakṛti* and *Parā* (higher) *Prakṛti* respectively:

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेष च ।
अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥
अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥

(Chapter VII, verses 4 and 5)

Thus the *Prakṛti* of the *Sāṅkhyas* has been shown in its true relation of His *Śakti* dependent on Him (पारमेश्वरी शक्ति, as Śrī Śankarāchārya describes often). The *Jīva* in his state of functioning in and through matter is described as the Lord's Higher *Prakṛti*. In Chapter XV, verse 7, the same word (*Jīva*) is used and *Jīva* is described as being an *Aṃśa* of God. In Chapter IX, verses 4 to 10, there is a magnificent description of the manner in which the dependent creation takes place by the power of God. He does so by controlling *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति स्वामवष्टम्भ्य). See also Chapter XIV, verse 4. He is at the time its *Adhyakṣa* (Overlord and Controller); and He is *Udāsīna* (unaffected)—vide Chapter IX, verses 10 and 9. He is unattached (Chapter XIII, verse 31). He creates and supports, but is not contained by His creation and is above it and remains always full and infinite (see Chapter IX, verse 5; Chapter X, verses 41 and 42; and Chapter VII, verse 13).

Thus the *Gītā* has lifted the doctrine of *Śakti* to the loftiest height. Such is God's *Yoga* (पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् Chapter IX, verse 5 and Chapter XI, verse 8). An even more wonderful sublimation of the doctrine of *Śakti* is connected with the *Gītā* doctrine of incarnation as stated in the world-famous verses in Chapter IV (verses 6 to 9). We find there the words प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय, which we find reproduced as प्रकृतिं स्वामष्टम्भ्य in Chapter IX

verse 8. But in the latter verse we learn about His creation of the bodies of Jivas. But in Chapter IV, verses 6 to 9, we learn about His own incarnation, which is divine in nature and which is due to His Grace (जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यम्), and which is unlike our birth, which is the inevitable result of *Karma*.

We find in the above-mentioned verse (Chapter IV, verse 6) another important word *Māyā*. The *Gītā* refers to a *Māyā* which deludes and which cannot be crossed except by self-surrender unto Him (see Chapter VII, verses 14 and 15). It refers to the *Māyā* of *Īśvara*, who resides in the hearts of all of us and whirls us round in the merry-go-round of action. It refers to a *Yogamāyā* which hides Him from us (Chapter VII, verse 25). It refers to His *Ātmamāyā*, which leads to His incarnation out of Grace (Chap. IV, verse 6).

The *Gītā* refers also to a yet higher sublimation of the *Śakti* doctrine. There is a stage, a point of view, an experience wherein *Śakti* is, and is felt to be, identical with the Absolute. In that experience Matter and its evolutes are realized as being only the Absolute. Nay, the *Jīva* also is realized as being one with the Absolute. The former realization is shown in Chapter IX, verse 5 ('न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि'), and the latter realization is shown in Chapter XIII, verse 2 ('क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रषु भारत').

Thus *Śakti* is shown first as being independent, then as being dependent

on God, and then as being identical with the Blissful Absolute. The doctrine of *Śakti* in the *Gītā* has lifted *Śakti* from plane to plane. The *Gītā* thus gives us an exposition of *Śakti* which is true to the Vedas and true to Science and to Hindu religion in its living form to-day and in accordance with the realization of the saints and sages and seers all along.

There is a verse in the *Gītā* in which this crescendo of ideas is taught in a beautiful way:

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।
परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन् पुरुषः परः ॥

(Chapter XIII, verse 22)

Bhoktā refers to the *Chārṇvāka* School, which regards the body as the *Ātmā*. *Bhartā* refers to the *Tārṅkika* School, which says that there is a soul which does actions. *Anumantā* refers to the *Sāṅkhya* School, which says that *Prakṛti* is the doer and that the soul merely imagines itself as the doer. The other words refer to the state of soaring above गुणसङ्ग and show another order of realization, *i. e.*, उपद्रष्टा (साक्षी), महेश्वर, परमात्मा and पुरुषोत्तम in regard to the true nature of the soul in relation to the universe. Thus the *Gītā* gives us the quintessence of the doctrine of *Śakti* in a brief yet comprehensive way and raises it from the doctrine of independence to that of dependence on God and yet further to the doctrine of identity with God.