

Mystical Approaches in the

Sri Krishna-Cult.

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Nārada in his *Bhakti-Sūtras* enumerates eleven species of spiritual love as follows:- (1) adoration of God's excellences, (2) the condition of an *inamorato*, love of the Lord's Beauty, (3) piety or devotion, (4) love of commemoration, e.g. the Lord's Supper in primitive Christianity, (5) to be the Lord's Servant, (6) a friend's love (cp. John's relation to Jesus), (7) wifely devotion, nuns as brides of Christ, (8) paternal or maternal love, e.g. the Madonna's love of the Divine Babe, (9) Self-sacrificing, self-dedicating love (cp. crucifixion of the Flesh and death of the old Adam), (10) love of mental absorption in the Godhead and (11) love that bewails desertion.*

All the different types of love for a personal God which Nārada described long ago have been exemplified through the ages in the lives of innumerable mystics and saints who still keep alive a living tradition of Divine love, sometimes unalloyed by philosophical thought, sometimes moving hand in hand with both philosophy as well as service to fellow-creatures. Nor are these peculiar to India. Every country and every religion has men who make experiments, sometimes daring, indeed, with the Reality and many such experiments choose the path of delicate and deep emotions and feelings.

Emotional mysticism, indeed, comes out of a universal need for inner adjustment.

There are sensitive natures in every age or country who in the pursuit of

Reality want to escape from the strenuous process of adjustment which man's behaviouristic relation to his milieu normally demands. There are many who adopt habits of plain living, take the vow of silence, or betake themselves to solitude in order to cut themselves off from the channels of reciprocal behaviour and focus the organic energy for the purposes of spiritual effort as far as possible. For such persons the inner adjustment is brought about by the creation of images and symbols, the overt motor responses, in relation to the environment, which, normally speaking, bring home the sense of life, becoming incipient. These images and symbols become an expression of human nature itself, fashioned by its normal impulses and interests, and these are possessed of an extraordinary vitality and restore health and vigour to the body.

All the impulses and interests emerge singly or collectively in the connection between the mystic and his God and we have different emotional approaches to Him. The domination of emotion or the blending of several emotions must be characterized by harmony and stability both, in order that these may crystallize into a religious attitude. Where the sex impulse dominates, it colours the religious attitude, whence the sentiment between mother and child or between master and servant is excluded. Later on, when the mystic outgrows amorous interest, the relation between the son and mother may supersede erotic sentiments and the new religious attitude will be coloured by emotions of reverence and submission. There is thus an evolution of man's religious attitudes

* गुणमाहात्म्यासक्तिरूपसक्तिपूजासक्तिस्मरणासक्तिदास्या-
सक्तिसख्यासक्तिकान्तासक्तिवात्सल्यासक्त्यात्मनिवेदनासक्तिन्मय-
तासक्तिपरमविरहासक्तिरूपा एकवाप्येकादशधा भवति ॥८३॥

which corresponds to the evolution of man's groups and values. The key to social evolution and cultural progress is furnished by the fact that man builds up a harmonious system of sentiments and relationships. With the change in instinctive dispositions that runs parallel with group organization and culture, there is accordingly a change in religious attitude so that the sentiments allow of co-operation and a harmonious fusion. It is thus that the religious life, which plays the dominant role in organizing permanent attitudes, weaves the pattern of social bonds. The different kinds of allegiance which religion inculcates play a significant part in the development of social organization. Such loyalties are not the result of natural impulses but of a complex scheme of social and cultural reactions, and these represent modes of man's both inner and outer adjustment.

Nowhere have the types of religious attitude been so clearly demarcated and appraised than in the memorable conversation between Chaitanya, the mystic religious preacher of Bengal of the 16th century, and Ramanand Roy on the banks of the Godavari during the former's evangelic tour in Southern India.

"How can the Reality be reached?" asks Śri Chaitanya himself.

"If we stick to duties relative to one's social group and stage in ethical discipline," answers Ramanand Roy.

"This is merely external, please go on."

"To surrender all activity to God is the best mode of attaining the Reality."

"This, too, is external; go on."

"The surrender of everything to God is the best way."

"But this, too, is external."

"Love with full consciousness of the Reality is the best."

"This also is external."

"Love without endeavouring to be conscious of the Reality is the best."

"Well, this is one way. Speak about another."

"Devotion from affection is the essence of Religion."

"Yes, this is another. Speak yet more."

"Loyalty towards Him as a servant is the best way."

"Yes, this is another. Speak again."

"Loyalty towards Him as a friend and companion."

"Yes, this is good. Speak again."

"Paternal tenderness is the best way."

"This also is good. Speak again."

"The love of the spouse for her Lord is the cream of religion."

"Yes, this is certainly the limit of human endeavour; but pray, tell me if there is anything yet farther."

"I did not expect anybody to ask further. But I tell you now that the love of Rādhā is the quintessence of human effort, whose glory is testified by all religious literature."

The various approaches to God mentioned here cover all human endeavours towards attaining the Reality, and, in so far as they include degrees of mystical contemplation, they are significant in a comparative study of the motivation and methods of mysticism.

In spiritual love, the senses no longer deceive nor beguile, but are consecrated. This is beautifully expressed by Ekanath, an Indian mystic of the 16th century, in the course of his elucidation of the doctrine of spiritual emotions.

"Though one restrains the sense, yet are they not restrained.

Though one renounces sensual desires, yet are they not renounced.

Again and again they return to torment one. For that reason the flame of God's love was lit by religion.

There is no need to suppress the senses; desire of sensual pleasure ceases of itself. So mighty is the power that lies in God's love. Know this assuredly, O first among kings.

The senses that ascetics suppress, the mystic devote to the worship of the Lord. The things of sense that the ascetics forsake, mystics offer to God. Ascetics forsake the things of sense, and, forsaking them, they suffer in the flesh; the followers of mysticism offer them to the Lord, and hence they become for ever emancipated.

Wife, child, house, self, offer them to the Lord. In this, above all else, does worship consist."

It is in the intimacies of relationships with Śrī Kṛṣṇa that the devotees satisfy instincts of self-assertion, sex or paternal impulses, and develop a loyalty which Professor Royce describes as a principle fit to be made the basis of a Universal moral code. The spirit of true loyalty is in its very essence a complete synthesis of the moral and the religious interests.* Now this loyalty springs from different relations between God and the mystic, such, for instance, as when the mystic regards himself as God's servant, as God's friend or comrade, as God's son or, again, as His elect bride, and therefore results in his different ethical attitudes towards society and the environment. And, indeed, the loyalty entails a gradual organization of the emotions so that there is less psychic conflict, and man develops a permanent

* Royce: Sources of Religious Insight.

organized attitude which is most in keeping with his social behaviour. Thus the danger that an emotional abandon precludes social obligations is avoided.

All religions emphasize different kinds of loyalty and historical traditions; myths or legends give direction and aim to such loyalties.

The Śrī Kṛṣṇa legends, handed down to popular imagination from the remote past, help towards the transformation of earthly love into a rapturous union with God, and direct the senses towards the mystery of God's finite love and sufferings for fellow-men.

It is here that the grace of God indeed makes the most passionate emotional appeal in India. Śrī Kṛṣṇa deserts heaven to create a new heaven on earth for man, in the villages and pasture-lands on the banks of the Jamuna, where He shares the joys and sorrows of the pastoral folks, living and suffering like a man amongst men. The whole tradition is as ancient as the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, which, in fact, has contributed to Indian thought the idea of a God of Grace. But this idea has been elaborated both by later philosophy and mysticism, and in different schools of Vaishnavism it has kept alive a rich tradition of ardent religious experimentation.

The whole life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa on earth has served as the basis of an analysis of different religious attitudes and their dominant impulses. God as the son is fondly caressed by His earthly mother, who can brook no long separation as He goes out with the village boys to tend cattle in distant pastures. The Boy makes sport with her infinite tenderness. He unites her outstretched arms only to elude her loving embrace. He steals butter from her pantry, trembles with fear and accepts her punishment like an ordinary boy; but, God as He is, He often

strikes awe and wonder in her heart by showing her now and then a miracle or standing with mouth agape to exhibit a hundred worlds within. Paternal tenderness is one of the strongest impulses and in and through God's relation with His earthly mother this impulse becomes a bridge to spiritual love. As the companion of the cowherds, God is their friend, philosopher and guide. He takes part in a hundred mischievous undertakings all for their joy, shares their frugal fare and hard toil, and shows like them infinite tenderness for the cattle under their charge. He is, in fact, the lost companion a man calls to for help when danger threatens. God as the never-failing Friend satisfies the gregarious human animal's eternal hunger to find its herd and herd-leader.*

It is, however, as the human lover that God excites the most tender emotions. Nothing can show God's Grace more than that He pines for man, His chosen bride, whose worldliness and pride refuse to surrender to the soft alluring melodies of the flute of a reed ever resounding since man's separation from God. God lays aside all His godliness in order to win over man; He tries all the arts and wiles which an elaborate Indian science of profane love has discovered. The climax is reached when we read in Jayadeva's "Gita-Govinda" God cajoling man by saying "O thou! surrender to Me thy generous lotus feet!"†

The episodes in the life of God now fondly clinging to the tender bosom of His mother, now running away to avoid her wrath, now crossing hill and dale in loving mission with the herd of friends and cattle, now playing on His flute to decoy his chosen bride from her daily round of duties, now disappearing suddenly and making His

bride suffer more than her heart can bear, now returning to her in the solitary bower, and now suffering from the taunts of her companions,—all these represent varied religious moods and attitudes, which the mystic deliberately seeks in order to find his visions of God enrich his spiritual consciousness.

Vaiṣṇava mystical traditions stress the infinite worth of Man and, what is more, men move fellow-men as objects of their worship. Man achieves a cosmic gregariousness and life is regarded as a cosmic drama of loving finite spirits, all reciprocating in their mutual relation the infinite love of God. It is well-known how the ancient monistic philosophy of the Vedānta was transformed in Bengal by Vaiṣṇava philosophy, which laid stress upon a community of souls in the unity of the absolute life. The monistic position was not entirely given up. It was maintained that God is infinite and at the same time a Person, but the limitation of personality does not apply to the case of God, whose infinitude of power can be felt by every finite being. Love demands a sympathetic and synthetic response. Thus the finite being is as much a requirement for God as God for the finite being. This idea is neatly expressed in a Bengali folk song which reiterates that there is no salvation because Love sees the equal reality and necessity of both the Divine and the finite, and holds each other in sweet, eternal communion. Rabindra Nath Tagore has translated the song as follows:—

"It goes on blossoming for ages—the soul-lotus, in which I am bound, as well as thou without escape. There is no end to the opening of its petals, and the honey in it has such sweetness that thou like an enchanted bee canst never desert it, and therefore thou art bound, and I am, and salvation is nowhere."

* Compare Gilbert Murray's 'The Stoic Philosophy' p. 41.

† 'देहि मे पदपल्लवमुदारम्'।