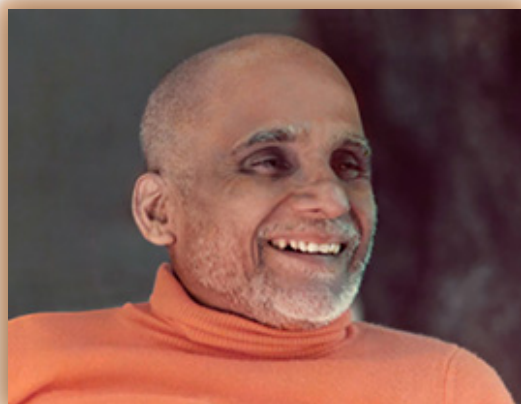


THE HERITAGE OF INDIAN CULTURE



SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society

Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org



ABOUT THIS EDITION

Though this eBook edition is designed primarily for digital readers and computers, it works well for print too. Page size dimensions are 5.5" x 8.5", or half a regular size sheet, and can be printed for personal, non-commercial use: two pages to one side of a sheet by adjusting your printer settings.

CONTENTS

Publisher's Note.....	4
Chapter 1: The Vision of India.....	5
Chapter 2: The Vision of True Religion	19
Chapter 3: India's Culture and Civilisation	34
Chapter 4: The Foundations of India's Cultural Vision	47
Chapter 5: The Systems of Varna and Ashrama.....	61
Chapter 6: The Veda Mantras	76
Chapter 7: An Outline of the Vedas	86
Chapter 8: The Relationship Between Man and God	99
A Brief Biographical Sketch of Swami Krishnananda.....	88

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This lecture series entitled *The Heritage of Indian Culture* was given by Swami Krishnananda during the course of eight Sunday evening satsangs in 1980. Here Swamiji brings to light the vision of India, which sees the totality of the various manifestations of life and visualises the One in the many, and how this has relevance in our lives today. Swamiji explores the meaning and development of culture and civilisation, the role that philosophy, religion and scripture have played, and why Indian culture has remained so rich and vital through the passage of time while other cultures have perished. Swamiji also discusses the individual's role in society and integrates this with our process of evolution towards the attainment of the Ultimate Reality.

Swamiji's masterful analysis and in-depth, all-inclusive understanding, combined with his brilliant style of expression, give us a penetrating insight into this important subject and make it a delightful read.

Chapter 1

THE VISION OF INDIA

We are here to consider some of the general features of our life which direct and decide our human relationships, and consequently, the solidarity of mankind. Human relation is the primary consideration in the organisations of the world which go by the name of 'nations' or 'governments', or even lesser bodies than these. We have come to learn through practical experience that our daily needs in life are social, and our conduct is also related to this. In academies and universities this peculiar relation among people is called 'Humanities', which is a deep subject that covers a vast range of studies into the psychology and sociology of human behaviour.

The behaviour of a person, or the conduct of a body of people, is generally known as their culture. Students of history and the humanities are acquainted with the great cultures of the world and with the behaviours of human minds through the passage of time, which are imposing and enlightening for students of anthropology as well. When we read about the history of the cultures of the world, we seem to be reading through a drama of human activity, such as the plays of Shakespeare or Kalidasa where human conduct and a psychological manoeuvring are portrayed in such an interesting manner that they seem to touch our hearts and, incidentally, also guide us in our day-to-day affairs. History is a great lesson for us even today. We do not study the history of mankind merely to amuse ourselves with a story

of ancient times. It is an instruction to us at the present moment in regard to our own social conduct.

The knowledge we have gained from the study of ancient cultures—beginning with the Babylonian or the Assyrian, the Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman, the Chinese, the Indian, and the later offshoots of these major organisations of human behaviour—gives some insight into human nature. I would like to regard culture as the behaviour of human nature. It is the upbringing of the social unit that man is which speaks in the language of the culture of that person. We generally say that so-and-so is a cultured person. Though at that time we may not be actually defining ‘culture’ in an academic manner, we have in our mind some idea as to what culture is. We associate goodness, politeness, humility, servicefulness, and a capacity to understand and feel the circumstances and the position of other people when we conceive of the structure or character of culture. Great historians such as H. G. Wells, who has written an outline of the history of the world, and those who have made studies in this line such as Arnold Toynbee, have covered an area which may be said to constitute every minute detail of psychological conduct.

We are surprised that many of these cultures have died and even the remnants are hardly visible these days. We have to dig into the bowels of the Earth to find out if there is any remainder of those ancient cultures of antediluvian times. Cultures perish. They do not seem to survive the passage of time, the reason behind which should also become an interesting subject of our studies. Students of culture and history have very carefully come to the

conclusion that when cultures cannot accommodate themselves with the requirements of the passage of time, they become moribund and die out.

The world moves through the passage of history; we may call it the passage of time. After living some years in this world, we have seen how time moves. Do we not feel the necessity in our day-to-day existence to adjust and accommodate ourselves with the requirements of time? Do we stick to our old dogma which was valid twenty years ago? It must have been a valid ideal, no doubt, but that validity has become out-dated under the circumstances that prevail today.

Thus it is that the great teacher Acharya Shankara mentions in one of his commentaries that dharma, which is the law of life, is relative to place, time and circumstance. It is not a rigid procrustean bed into which every person is tied, whatever he be and wherever he be. Hence, cultures seem to be relative adjustments and envisagements or outlooks of mankind under certain geographical and social conditions.

We gather from an interesting reading of mighty histories of the ancient past—such as the history of Greece, or a more interesting dramatic history written by Edward Gibbon under the title *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—that these are not merely stories told to us, but are tremendous lessons of mankind's cultures telling us why they perished.

India also had its own culture, and it has its culture even today. It has been a surprise to many students of history that how, under the vicissitudes of time and the

onslaughts of inimical forces, India's culture should still be able to show its head above the surface of the Earth, and not be buried under the debris of the ground as other cultures met their fate. A great student of India's culture was Sri Aurobindo, and we had many other stalwarts of this type, who opined that if India is alive today in consonance with the basic requirements of its own ancient culture, it is because of the spirituality of its outlook. Here, we have to strike a very cautious note when we speak of the spiritual outlook of India—about which we may have time to think over more deeply later on—because we are likely to suddenly jump to the conclusion that spirituality means a God-seeking mentality of man, which consequently also implies, perhaps, a kind of indifference to the values of social and practical life. These are matters which require very deep consideration in our own personal, social, and political interests.

The Roman and Greek cultures were mighty, no doubt, but they no longer exist for a single reason—namely, their incapacity to accommodate themselves with the requirements of the passage of time. When the times required them to change their ideals and ideologies, they refused, and they were crushed by the iron hand of nature. Nature does not respect persons. Nature has no friends, even as nature has no enemies. Nature has a purpose; this is something very important to remember. Nature loves only its purpose and nothing else, and it also loves those people who are in a position to help in the fulfilment of its purpose. Those who adamantly cling to an ideal which was once in conformity with certain activities of nature in the

interest of the fulfilment of its own purpose, but which are now not required, will be shunned.

Diet is a necessity for the human body, but it does not mean that the body should be given the same diet under every circumstance, at every time. The conditions of the body will tell what type of diet is necessary, or whether any diet is necessary at all under those conditions. So, while nature requires that everyone should exist, and does not desire that anyone should perish, the intention of nature is not the perpetuation of individual forms, but of ideals and ideologies. This is, again, a deep theme that is hidden behind the outer history of mankind's formations. Human history, when it is studied in a philosophical manner—not as we study it in high schools, but in a deeper sense—becomes a study of ideals and ideologies, rather than the activities of kings and queens or the dates of wars that took place, etc. History does not mean the story of kings and queens; it is something else from the point of view of nature or the universe as a whole. If kings and queens were the only important things, they would not have died. But they were not important. They were necessary as certain vehicles or instruments for the fulfilment of a purpose which was more impersonal than themselves.

But cultures such as the Roman, to give only one instance among many, stuck to the personalities and the ideals of certain persons and groups of individuals rather than having the flexibility that nature expected from them in the interest of the larger purpose, which was not merely Roman. Nature is not Roman or Greek; it has a wider eye. Therefore, anyone who cannot see through the eyes of

nature will not be permitted to live. This is something very important to know. There is no use of our looking at things, and then insisting that those visions should persist always. We are saved only if we are in a position to collaborate with the ideals of nature.

These cultures which are not seen today have died out because nature does not want them. They clung to forms, and nature does not want merely forms, just as we are fond of motorcars because they are necessary for some purpose but if the purpose is not served by the possession of the motorcar, it has no value. The vehicle itself is not important; only the purpose it serves, or is expected to serve, is important. So, when an individual or a group of individuals—or a culture, as we may call it—cannot serve the purpose that is the great intention of nature as a whole, it is cast aside. It is given an exit order, as the director of a drama closes the curtain on an actor whose role has ended.

All great men have gone, and no one can remain. No one can remain because all these ‘someones’ or ‘anyones’ are forms projected by the intentions of nature for the fulfilment of its own super-personal purpose. We are unable to understand this philosophy of nature. We think that nature’s affection is for the body itself, and we think that life is nothing but the possession of buildings, lands, currencies, etc. But life is not the possession of buildings, lands, and currencies; these are, again, like motorcars. Our buildings, lands, and monies are vehicles which we are permitted to have, provided that they fulfil a purpose—or rather, the purpose which is the intention of nature. Otherwise, we will be dispossessed of these ideals. Our

money will go, our property will go, our land will go; everything goes, and even the body may go, because the world is a large visualisation in the Supreme Eye of God, and it is not a house built for any person. Hence, cultures which were rigid, adamant—egoistic, we may say—and were not prepared to understand the requirements of the movement of time, had to receive a blow or a kick due to nature's requirements, and they are no more. We can only read about them in books, but cannot see them today in their original form.

Our attention here is on certain cultures which are existing today and have not died out like the Roman or the Greek. A great example before us is the culture of India, which has not died in spite of the tortures to which it was subjected throughout history. Students of Indian history know the troubles and the difficulties through which people in India had to pass. It is a wonder that they have not perished. One of the reasons behind this persistence of the culture of India is its accommodating capacity, which does not reject the ideals of the past and does not ignore the ideals that may advance in the future, and also does not turn a deaf ear to the calls of other cultures of the world that are existing today. The vision of India may be said to be an impersonal vision which by chance, or by the grace of God, or by a miracle, we may say, it has been able to entertain.

Today, people in India are a medley of various problems and memories of the past, hopes for the future, and so on. In spite of this, there is nevertheless a little candle flame burning in the corners of the country which

cries out in the language of the ancient culture. One of the reasons is, as I said, the accommodating capacity of the culture.

You may be wondering what this accommodation is, and where comes the necessity or the ability to entertain such a view. The ability to accommodate oneself with other people's ideas and ideals is not merely a charity that we extend to others. It is not a grudging condescension towards the attitudes of other people, but is an understanding and an affection one feels for the outlook of others. When I agree with you, it does not mean I grudgingly, somehow or other, do not mind your ideas. That is a different thing, a negative accommodation. A positive accommodation is an appreciation of your point of view. I happily get on with you, not because I somehow or other have to tolerate you, but because I see in you a value which is dear to me also. This is a great vision indeed, and hard to entertain in one's mind.

Most people cannot see any meaning in the outlook of their enemies, and sometimes they cannot accommodate even the point of view of their own friends. I have my friends, though I may not be able to appreciate all of their ideas and ideals. But if they are my enemies, I totally hate them. This is usually the tendency of man's mind. But the culture of Bharatavarsha has been entertaining an outlook of a different nature altogether. Hatred was not its policy, and I do not think that even today India has a policy of hatred. Rather, there are people who think that its affection for other cultures is its weakness. It may turn out to be a weakness when it is expressed in an unintelligible or

unintelligent manner, but the essence of it is not weakness; it is strength and goodness. Even goodness has to be expressed in a good manner, because wisdom is the law of life, finally, and it is not ethics or a mere outward conduct that is to support our existence. The ethics and morality of life are necessary, of course, but the wisdom of life is greater because it includes ethics and morality, and transcends them in a wider interpretation of their significance, rather than merely their outward forms.

Thus, to come again to the point which I mentioned earlier, the culture of India has been an accommodating outlook. We may think that Indian culture is Hindu culture. Here I have to divert a little regarding the word 'Hindu'. There is no such thing as 'Hindu', really speaking. Hindus are not 'Hindus', because that word does not exist in the culture of India. It was coined by people who came from outside India to designate the land and people they saw here. The Persians and the Greeks were the first people who came from outside India, and they had to cross the river Sindhu, which is now called the Indus. They had no idea as to what sort of land extended beyond the river, so Sindhu was regarded as the name of the country as well as the people and their culture. The Persian language pronounces 'S' as 'H', so 'Sindhu' becomes 'Hindu'. In Greek, 'H' becomes 'I', so 'Hindu' becomes 'Ind', which has become 'India' and 'Indians'; and 'Hindu' still persists.

The name of this country, and what their culture was called before these people entered India, is a different matter. I am just mentioning that the name of this country is not India, and the people in India are not Hindus. These

names have come by accidents of history. Therefore, there is no such thing as Hindu culture, or even Indian culture, in general parlance.

It was a culture which was associated with a vision of perfection. Even today, people sometimes call it the vision of the *sanatana*, or the Eternal; and the culture or the law that is associated with this Eternity is oftentimes called *sanatana* dharma. But today it means something different from what it originally meant; it has become a sectarian doctrine opposed to other doctrines. Names are great problems these days. We cannot give a name to anything, because the moment we designate a thing by any particular name, it sets itself in opposition to things which have another name. It is our laboured intention to discover the non-opposing culture that is India—the Bharatiya *sanskriti*, or we may say, the culture of India.

The culture of India, therefore, is such a comprehensive vision of the values of life that it transcends the outlook of ordinary religions. We may say that the culture of India is not Hindu religion, if by ‘religion’ we mean what Hinduism is in our minds at the present moment. If Indian culture was merely identical with Hinduism, it could not accommodate other religions; but we live peacefully with other religious cults and faiths.

In India during medieval times, ambassadors came from the court of Queen Elizabeth; and during the reign of Shivaji, ambassadors came from European countries. They were greeted and taken care of with such affection that they left with a tremendous encomium for the government of India prevailing at that time. We should read these histories

with great caution and care. There was no antipathy to the views of other people, because somehow in the blood of the people in India was ingrained a kind of tolerance born of an understanding that truth is multifaceted.

Now, the multifaceted vision of reality should naturally take into consideration the forms it takes in other cultures and other views of life. The prophets of the religions which reign supreme in the world these days naturally told great truths, but do we not think they differ from one another? We think that one religion is opposed to another religion because of the divergence of the codified instructions in their respective gospels, and the consequent conduct which people adopt in their own countries on the basis of these gospels of their prophets. The geographical conditions and historical circumstances of the times required a gospel of the type which was delivered by those great men during those hours. The religious preachings of the prophets were like prescriptions of a physician to diseased humanity. When we are ill with a particular disease, a particular prescription is given to us; but if we are ill with some other disease, the same prescription is not given, nor is the same prescription given to another individual. Something like this has been the reason behind the divergence of the instructions of the prophets of those religions that reign supreme today, and it would be foolhardy for people to think that they represented a complete truth for eternity without requiring any kind of change or amendment whatsoever.

It is difficult to believe that the prophets themselves believed this. If the prophets of the various religions sat

together in a conference, it would be doubtful that they would disagree with one another. They would be so happy to meet. Each would be smiling and embracing one another in the commonness of the vision that they had in their own selves but manifested outwardly with certain limitations as were required under the geographic and social conditions. But the followers of the prophets spoiled the religions. They cannot smile; in fact, they frown at other faiths, which was not the basic or fundamental viewpoint or standpoint on which India stood, right from the time of the Vedas.

There was somehow, for reasons which we cannot easily know today, a great spirit of accommodation and tolerance in the minds of people here. This is why, in spite of the social problems, political onslaughts, and ignorance of various types which is prevalent in illiterate and dogmatic circles, there is a spirit prevalent yet. The outward forms shake, but the spirit is stable even now. Thus it is that there is a hope which India is raising aloft as its banner, to whose light people turn for guidance even at this moment when the international situation may be said to be in a state of turmoil.

Whenever people think of yoga or the religion of God, they think of India. This is something very mysterious. Why should they think of India, and not any other country? It does not mean that India contains only religion and nothing else. That it contains something more than religion is the reason. Religion is not adopted by India as a cult or a bifurcated pattern, along the ruts of which it has to drive its vehicle of daily existence. To the vision of India—which would be the proper way we can describe the culture of

India—the religious piety of the cults and the faiths was not merely an aspect of the vision which it held aloft, but a permeating influence which converted the whole of life into religion.

I read an interesting line in a great work of Sri Aurobindo which I liked very much, which says that people generally complain that India's fall is due to its religion, but Sri Aurobindo says that India has failed because of the lack of religion. India has somehow or other got into a quagmire, and maybe it had to pass through a test period where it had to blink a little to the totality of the vision of religion which it originally entertained during the time of the Vedas and the Upanishads, and it turned a blind eye due to the repercussions which it had to bear during the vehement movements of the tempestuous winds that blew over its surface during the passage of time. It is difficult to maintain the vision of God throughout one's life. Even a prophet cannot maintain it, and for a large country like India to maintain this concentrated vision of totality of its religious attitude perpetually, in every walk of life, for all times, would be a terrible job indeed. It failed many a time; it could not understand. "Many times, Homer nods," as we are told, and India also nodded.

But even with this nod, India was not asleep. It awoke. Now and then it recovered from its slumber. It got out of its bed of complacency and remembered the foundations of its outlook. Today we are in the year 1980, which does not have happy circumstances either socially, politically or internationally. Notwithstanding all these problems, is there not a ray of hope in our hearts? Are we weeping and

crying that we are in hell? Though oftentimes it appears as if we are in hell, and we are likely to cry out, "Get thee behind me!" as Christ said to Satan, yet even the most depressed melancholy individual seems to have a ray of positive hope. From where has this hope come? This is the foundation of our great culture, into whose mysteries we shall dilate a little more.

Chapter 2

THE VISION OF TRUE RELIGION

The vision of life entertained in India has been called Darshana or perception of Truth, whose moods and manifestations have been adopted according to the various degrees and requisitions of people's practical existence. Nothing in the world has been more misunderstood than religion, because whatever be the hectic effort of the human mind to consider religious values as permanent, they have somehow managed to escape the grasp of the practical evaluations of life, and remain an isolated and future achievement which has segregated the secular from the spiritual. Even in the parliament of Britain there is the Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal, the upper house and the lower house, the upper one consisting of spiritual leaders and the lower one consisting of temporal or secular leaders. It is difficult, usually, to bring about a rapprochement between vision and life; and if India has struggled to achieve anything worth the while, it is nothing but this harmony between vision and living. Conceptual perception and inward realisation have been recognised as the essential determinants of the daily routines of life.

Now, the way in which the spirit, or the religious value, shows its impact upon practical life depends upon the manner in which life itself is revealed before our eyes. What is life? If we can know what life actually means, we can also have an idea as to the way in which the spirit has to enliven it. If life is a pursuit of the spirit, naturally every routine of life is that. Every vocation is supposed to lead to this

recognition of the spirit in the forms of life and, therefore, every form of life becomes a vehicle or a temple in which is enshrined this deity of the spirit.

The cultural values of this country are commensurate with the visions of all mystics the world over. This lofty vision was not the prerogative of the people in India of ancient times, because great men do not belong either to the East or the West; they are a category by themselves. They form a fraternity in their own way, and they live in a realm of eternity, as it were. People who are acquainted with the cultural values of the world, who have made a deep study of world history—especially cultural history—would also be aware of the similarity that exists, and must exist, among lofty thinkers of all times and climes. Whether it was Socrates, Plato, Plotinus or Meister Eckhart in the West, or Acharya Shankara, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharishi or Sri Aurobindo in the East, it makes no difference. They saw the same thing with their eyes, which were internal, indrawn, and far above the limitations of the visions of our fleshy eyeballs.

The manifestations of life are the vehicles through which the spirit has to manifest itself. This was the first recognition of the culture of India, and the recognition of any truly worthwhile, abiding culture. Where the spirit is absent, there is only a corpse. This does not require much of an explanation. If there is any branch of our life which is bereft of the spirit, it remains a corpse; and it will decay, decompose, perish into debris, and become only a matter of memory. Every limb of the body is charged with the prana shakti in us, which is the vitality; therefore, there is no

lifeless part in our body because the spirit is permeating and pervading every part of it. Likewise, if life is to be permeated with the spirit of the aspiration of man in general, it has to be a harmonious completeness. The great masters of yore in India—the subject which we are dilating upon here—contemplated the various manifestations and ramifications of human life, and girt up their loins to see that the flow of the spirit through the channels of life is maintained perennially, so that Bharatiya *samskriti* becomes *sanatana samskriti*.

What are the avenues through which we see life manifesting itself? Our needs are the pointers to these various branches of human life. Life manifests itself in various branches because of the needs felt by man, and the conduct of the human being in the various directions of his desires and aspirations may be said to be the various facets of his life. We have a necessity for security—a desire, we may say, which arises on account of our placement as physical finitudes, a fact which an investigative understanding did not forget to notice. The lofty aspiration for contact with the Supreme Being did not ignore the shambles in which human nature is engrossed and the weaknesses to which human nature is generally subject—the needs which the various aspects of the human personality cannot ignore. Thus, it was the wisdom of the masters that felt the need for classifying human life into the various fields of activity through which the needs of the human being can be fulfilled in the requisite proportion.

We have the need for protection and sustenance. This need arises on account of our being among many

individuals; we are a society of people. This was the first and foremost vision that could be available to any prosaic perception, and inasmuch as there are individuals with similar aspirations and weaknesses scattered in different directions, there arises a necessity to bring about a harmonious coordination among the internal urges of the different types of individualities. What is individuality but the affirmation of an ego—an assertion of one's own self? The affirmation of oneself naturally conflicts with the similar affirmations of other selves, because it is impossible to live in the world with a total self-affirmative spirit which has no concern with other similar affirming centres.

Students and historians of political science have held the opinion that originally people lived in a state of nature—like wild animals, as it were. There was no security for any individual, as there is no security for animals in the forest. What security, what protection, what safeguard is there for a poor deer in the jungle? At any time it can be pounced upon by a wild beast. Which creature, which crawling insect, can regard itself as safe? Such was the pitiable state of man once upon a time, says the school of political science led by Thomas Hobbes, a great political thinker of Britain. There must be some great truth in what he says, and he propounds this doctrine to tell us how governments originated. An opinion of this kind is also promulgated—somewhat similarly, though not identically—by Bhishma in the Raja-dharma section of the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata. The necessity for rule, administration or government arose on account of a need felt by people for mutual security.

But the theology of Hindus—the religious vision of India, we may say—has something different to say in the light of the cycles of time, which it regards as very powerfully determining the conditions of living. We are told about the four yugas—Krita Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga, Kali Yuga. The age of truth, *satya* or perfection is called Krita Yuga or Satya Yuga. It is the millennium, the golden age of utter harmony and supreme peace. Bhishma said there was no government in Krita Yuga, and perhaps this is also mentioned by Sri Krishna in the Eleventh Skanda of the Srimad Bhagavata. There were no scriptures, and there were no teachers of religion. There was no administration because each individual was a crystal, as it were, which reflected every other crystal of individuality so that everything was reflected in everything else. There was no hardboiled isolation of our physical encasement that we see today. People were like mirrors, as it were—clean glass, crystal—who could feel their presence in everything in their proximity. This state of life, naturally, did not require any external control or mandates.

A necessity for external control arises when that which requires to be controlled does not know the way in which it has to conduct itself in relation to others. When any particular individual or group of individuals loses sight of the goal towards which total humanity is moving, a need arises for regulating the movement of this aberrant section of mankind, and then comes the need for a system of government. The epics and the Puranas tell us that this was the beginning of Treta Yuga.

In some Puranas, such as the Vayu Purana, we are told such fantastic things about the conditions that prevailed in Krita Yuga, or Satya Yuga, that we would wonder whether such things could be possible at all. Tilling land was not necessary, as the harvest seemed to grow automatically of its own accord. People did not die prematurely. There were no courts of legal jurisdiction because there were no quarrels and no differences of opinion among people; there were no courts of justice, no advocates of law, no legal enactments, no system of ethics or morality. All these were out of point in a kingdom of values where everything was perfect to the core. The sun shone as it ought to shine, and rain fell as it ought to fall. Such enrapturing visions are given to us in some sections of these Puranas.

There was a deterioration of things, and then people required a ruler. The beginning of the system of administration is a story which is told by various people in different ways. The great metaphysicians of the West, such as Hegel, are of the opinion that the need for harmony by way of political administration arises on account of the reflection of the Absolute in the particulars. This is a highly philosophical reading of the working of political governments in one's life, and there is also great truth in this opinion. The need for harmony is the need for a government, because every individual resents a chaotic state of existence, a life which is bereft of any kind of relation with others. If anyone loves anything in life, it is harmony and orderliness. The philosopher's opinion is that the need for orderliness in life is the reflection of God in individuals.

God is Perfection, the Absolute, the highest harmony that one can imagine. Inasmuch as it is an Eternal presence, it is also present in the scattered particulars, even in the farthest aberrant movements of the physical individualities of human beings. Even in the widest departures of the human individual from the centre of Truth, Truth does not leave the individual; it pursues him wherever he goes. God is present even in the vilest of individuals, and the Absolute moves with its affirmations even in the farthest corners of human departure. This is the philosophical explanation given by Hegel and others for the need people feel for political security. And it may be true, at the same time, that in spite of this philosophical background of the need felt by people for administrative systems, the empirical beginning of administrative circles might have been as described by Hobbes. People sat together and conferred that it is pointless to fight among themselves, and so they needed a kind of order and system in their existence. They appointed an authority, which we may call the monarch or any type of administrative head, who is supposed to work in collaboration with the machinery that is set up to implement the ideals and ideologies that are the aspirations of man and any group of individuals.

This prosaic and perhaps grossest form of human need was not ignored. The Artha Shastras of ancient India are regarded as equally important as the Moksha Shastras or the other sciences, because while moksha is the liberation of the spirit, it was borne in mind by the wise men of yore that this liberation is effected gradually by untying the knots, one by one, from the lowest to the highest. This was really a

penetrating vision which went to the very core of the problems of life and could not afford to ignore anything that is relevant to this freedom of the spirit, which is the ultimate aim.

But with the degeneration of time the vision gradually blurred and, unfortunately, became adulterated with the sensory and egoistic affirmations of the body. Life in the spirit became somehow identified with a vision of the future, and practical life became a matter of the present. Though it has been told again and again that the aim of life is an eternal presence and not a futurity of achievement, whatever be the number of times we may be told this truth, it is easy to forget the vital relationship that exists between practical involvement and ideal aspiration.

Seekers of truth, students of yoga, and preachers of religion can easily commit this mistake of soaring high into the lofty regions of ideology, which is the fate of religion today—not only in India, but perhaps everywhere. Either we cry out in the name of God who is not in this world, or ignore His existence totally. A spirit of false renunciation gets associated with this false conception of religion, which unfortunate consequence has resulted in the criticism that Indian philosophy is a world-negating ideology. But this is farthest from the truth.

A degenerating outlook of life, which somehow presented itself before the human eye for reasons which we cannot examine at present, became the reason for this carping criticism. While every criticism has some truth in it, it is not wholly true. We can appreciate that the truth of the criticism lies in the fact that we always look upon

divinity as something which has nothing to do with our inner desires. We consider all our desires as devils, unholy satanic urges, and so we abruptly conclude that religion is nothing but a hastening into monasteries, putting on a hood or an ochre cloth, and dreading the very sight of the world. We have a fear of the perception of objects, and a peculiar, obnoxious, isolated attitude towards the things of sense, which resulted in what we call the occupation or vocation of religiosity.

Today, we live in a world where we have to be very cautious. We can no longer be foolhardy. The world has shown its true colours to some extent; it is not going to give us a long rope as it used to earlier. It has begun to show its teeth and claws, and if there is some truth in the saying, “nature, red in tooth and claw,” perhaps the teeth and claws of nature are visible these days, to some extent, when no man can lay his head on his pillow with total security. Thus, a need to understand life has become the urgency of the hour; and if we are going to be content and complacent with our usual go-lucky attitude, we will have to pay a heavy price by way of utter repentance when it will be too late.

Our religions have become a mockery. This is the great truth. We are not going to be saved by our religion; nor is religion going to save mankind if it is to be a practical vocation of getting on in life, to somehow earn a name as a religious man, a pontiff, an acharya, a guru, a sannyasin, a yogi, a minister, a pope. If these are our ambitions and aspirations, God forbid, we do not know what is going to be our future.

We have to go back once again to the original sources of the vision of true religion which became the entire occupation of all life, and not merely one aspect of life. Our religions are only in the lecture halls or temples; they are not in the taxi stands or tea shops. Our religions are far, far away from the dirty roadside where beggarly people sell their wares. We have become accustomed to the idea of God arising only under a peculiar physical atmosphere; and when we are about to draw our last breath, it is not very likely that we will be in an atmosphere where we can see or perceive this religiosity.

The great masters who had the vision of India's culture regarded the many sides of life—the political, social, ethical, economic, aesthetic, civic, and axiological sides—as different aspects of one totality of life. If there is anything praiseworthy in the vision of India, it is the vision of this totality of the various manifestations of life.

We can imagine how far this criticism of India's religious outlook is removed from the truth when we realise that an emphasis was not laid on any particular branch of life. In India we have the most perfect artists and musicians, not merely monks who meditate on a super-transcendent Absolute. The perfection which architecture has reached, sculpture has attained, music, dance, literature have realised should be a surprising recognition and realisation to people who see only a negation of values in the culture of India.

Unfortunately, our people today seem to confirm the value of this criticism by confining their religious aspirations to worship in temples, and feeling hatred for human values in general. When hatred is rampant and is

rancorous in the hearts of man, whatever be the cause, how can religion be a seed behind it? The ethics of life is nothing but the reading of the meaning of the present in terms of the ideal that is above it. The morality of a situation can be judged by the standard of the ideal or the aim towards which it is moving, and in the light of which its significance is to be read. How do we know what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and what is immoral, what is ethical and what is unethical? What is the standard of our judgement? The standard is nothing but the immediately superseding state of perfection in the light of whose constitution and characteristics this would be worthwhile and meaningful. This would be a very effective pedestal on which we have to place our feet to rise to that immediately superseding level of perfection. Perfection in its totality is not reached at once. It is achieved gradually, stage by stage.

There is nothing utterly unimportant or meaningless in life, because if anything is totally insignificant and substanceless, we would not perceive it. There is some sort of value seen in some way, by some individual, under some condition, at some time—therefore, one is after it. A total nihil or a zero cannot be an object of attraction to anyone. Truth is present even in the worst ugliness and distortion, and the Upanishadic seers were pioneers who proclaimed that our own movement or evolutionary progress is always from *ananda* to *ananda*—not from *dukha* to *ananda*. Though we have been hearing again and again that life is *dukha*, painful, sorrow, this is but one side, and not the whole vision of it.

The negative emphasis on the painful aspects of life, and the consequent need felt to run away from these painful centres, again precipitated the advance of humanity towards a false reading of meaning into religion. No genius can have this vision always throughout life; not even the greatest of prophets can have the hardihood to affirm that this vision of perfection is always before his eyes. There are progressions and retrogressions in everyone's life, but a margin has to be given to all these because "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"; and we have to give this margin of concession to the foibles of human nature, together with the great strengths that are inside, which are the deeper spiritual aspirations.

The vision of life, which became the deciding factor of the various vocations of life in India, was the seeing of meaning in each and every thing. *Sarvam khalv idam brahma, tadjalan iti, shanta upasita*, says the Chhandogya Upanishad. Everywhere, a ray of hope is present; in everything, the light of divinity is implanted. Therefore, everyone can move towards perfection in his own or her own way, and there cannot be a standard religious outlook for every minute detail for all people. Religion, as the worship of God or the aspiration for perfection, cannot turn a blind eye to the physical needs of man and the social norms of life, or to the political security I referred to.

Human psychology is the answer to the question as to how we have to conduct ourselves in life. The questions arise from us, and the answers also will come from within our own selves. The way in which we are constituted psychologically will also be the way in which we would feel

the need to move outwardly in social life, and it will determine the type of government that we need, the kind of ethics that we have to adopt in our life, and so on. All these norms are relative to the psychological structure of the individuals.

These masters had the vision of the various levels or *lokas* of existence—Bhuloka, Bhuvvarloka, Svarloka, etc.—and all these levels have different types of morality prevailing in them, because their individual constitutions are quite different from the way in which we mortal physical individuals are made. The ethics of Svarga, the morality of Brahmaloika, are quite different from the morality that we would regard as most appropriate for us. Why go so far? Even in this very world, cultures vary and the principles or norms of ethics and morality change, and one differs from the other to such an extent that, due to various causes such as geographical, psychological, and ideological, one would look upon the other as odious. We cannot say that only our standards are perfect and others' standards are wrong, because, as I tried to point out, everyone has to rise from the level in which one is, and I cannot appropriate your level, nor you mine. Your standard of perfection—an ideal that you envisage before your eyes—arises from the particular level of evolution in which you are. You may be behind me or you may be ahead of me, but a hungry man is in need of physical food, while one who had a sumptuous meal may not be in need of that particular requirement.

Every constitution has its own variegated needs. The constitution that I am referring to is very complex. We are

not simple individuals as we appear. Our needs are multitudinous on account of the variegated involvements of our personalities in life, and it is not easy for us to say what our needs are. We cannot answer this question offhand because every one of us, every individual, is involved in circumstances which are beyond ordinary human comprehension. We have the very gross needs of this physical body. Hunger and thirst pursue us every day. We need to maintain the health of the physical body; we have the urges of the vitality within us, which press us forward in their own way; our minds think in one way, our intellect argues in another way; we are born of a type of parents who have raised us in a social atmosphere, which also has an impact upon our minds; we belong to a nation; we are human beings of one type, and so on. Our conduct is decided by the various types of individual and social associations in our life.

Therefore, a very cautious investigation into one's own self as placed in this multitudinous involvement would be very essential for taking a spiritual step, because, ultimately, there is no such thing as a spiritual life isolated from life in its totality. Again we have to emphasise that this bogey of 'spirituality' which has led us astray by a misinterpretation of its meaning has to be shed at once, because God is not the Father merely of the spiritual seeking souls; perhaps He is the Father of even the devils and demons. The Puranas tell us that the great Father—the progenitor of mankind and the parent of the celestials, such as Indra and others—was also the parent of the demons, who were the opposite of the devas. The Pandavas and the Kauravas were

descendants of Kuru, so both were called Kauravas. Diti and Aditi were two consorts of Kasyapa, the great descendent of Brahma, the Creator himself; and from such a great master and spiritual genius, we have these two bifurcations in the characteristics or movements of nature: the celestial, or we may call it the divine, and the demonic.

A true appreciation in a most harmonious manner, as it would be required, is difficult for prejudiced minds of man, for which he needs a complete deconditioning of his prejudices—racial, national, physical, ethical, and even intellectual. Therefore, we have to reiterate that the life spiritual, while it was the supreme ideal and ideology of the great cultural vision of India, was the vision of perfection. This is the reason why today India stands alive and breathes in the same way as it breathed years and years ago, in ages past. While today very unexpected and unfortunate departures from the norm of this perfection can be detected in our practical day-to-day life, we should also be happy that the germ of perfection is still present in India; and I, for one, do not believe that the culture of India will perish at any time.

Chapter 3

INDIA'S CULTURE AND CIVILISATION

Life, ancient as well as modern, is generally calculated and assessed in the light of what we regard as civilisation and culture. We usually, and often, speak of India's civilisation as highly advanced, and its culture as superb in every way. But a cultural or sociological study of history is not the proper way of getting a little deeper into the basic impulses that make culture the essential value of life. Why should anyone be cultured? Unless this question is answered, it is difficult to say what culture is. It is another way of asking, "Why should anyone be good?" We are very fond of saying that we have to be civilised, cultured and good, but have we found time to think of what consequences would devolve in our lives in the absence of this value?

A highly comfortable life of physical satisfaction and social security, with friendliness among the constituents of a society in the manner it is interpreted at any given moment of time, may be regarded as a highlight of civilisation and culture. But we speak of cultures and civilisations, and accept the presence of a multitude of these, implying thereby a simultaneous acceptance of the validity of these multiplicities, and meaning thereby that every culture is relevant to that particular circumstance of society which upholds it as its ideal. It does not mean that the whole of humanity has one culture, one civilisation, one way of thinking. Even the way of giving a friendly greeting differs from place to place, what to talk of other things.

Hence, when we speak of an ethical, moral or cultural society, we oftentimes speak tongue-in-cheek, not being able to assess the basic foundations of these efflorescences which appear outwardly as necessities in the form of culture, civilisation. A comfortable, happy life need not necessarily be a civilised life. Who can say that horses or elephants are not happy? Each group has its own standards of judging happiness, satisfaction, and even security. Animals in the jungle have a satisfaction of their own which is commensurate with the type of understanding with which they are endowed in the state of their evolution. Thus, the judgement of culture and civilisation also has something to say in regard to the stage of evolution.

There are various types of people in the world. Anthropologists generally classify humanity into races. This is only a broad classification of human beings, and it does not mean that we have given a clear-cut idea of the varieties of the outlooks of people. It is a peculiar classification based on the physiognomy or bone structure, and the appearance of the face—the nose, particularly. This kind of anthropological classification is not the same as a cultural classification. The anthropological evaluation, if it is applied to people in India, will not find one kind or one set of people throughout the country. There is a geographical impact upon the structure of the body, and many other factors which differentiate the way or conduct of the day-to-day life of people.

Why go so far? In India there are very obvious and interesting differences even in religious practice, as between the South and the North, for instance. In a state such as

Kerala, it would be a horror for a person to enter a holy temple wearing a shirt—and much worse, a turban. It is not only irreligious, it is unthinkable, horrid behaviour to put on a coat and worship a holy deity in a temple. But if we go to a temple such as Kedarnath, we will find the pujari wearing a turban and a coat, and it is not regarded as unholy or irreligious. Now, why should this peculiar distinction be made in the conduct of a person—whether it is religious or otherwise—from place to place? It differs not merely from place to place, but from circumstance to circumstance. Perhaps this particular example that I gave has some connection with the circumstance of living—the climatic conditions particularly, and so on.

The dharma of a particular individual or a group of people is the culture, to mention it in a broad outline. The necessity of a person or the need of a group of people under a given set of circumstances, in the light of an ideal that they hold as their religious deity, may be regarded as the determining factor in the expression of culture or civilisation.

In India we have various linguistic states. In one way, we may say each state has its own culture—though not in essence, at least in details. In essence, we have one single culture from Kanyakumari to the Himalayas, which is why we always speak of Bharatiya *samskriti*, Indian culture; but in minute details, we differ. Hence, when we speak of culture or civilisation, we have to take it in generality as well as in particularity.

Sometimes differences arise among people due to their behaviour, which may appear to be perfectly recognised

and valid from their own point of view—from the standpoint of their own culture and civilisation—but may be odd in another atmosphere. Our dress in India is an incoherent cynosure in a country like Britain, for instance; and to us, British or European dress looks something quite different from the way in which we would like to dress ourselves. Now, does dress make a culture, does language make a culture, or does the way of worshipping of God make a culture? What is culture?

If we go threadbare into this problem of culture and civilisation, we will find that it is not one, two or three things, but it is everything that acts as the warp and woof in this fabric of one's life, and a total adjustability of the human group may perhaps be called for in the expression of a culture. When a person speaks sweetly, behaves politely, and expresses a generous feeling of charitableness, one feels that the person is cultured or civilised. We generally speak of a person as cultured when there is a charitable expression on the part of that person in regard to others in feeling, in words, and in outward conduct. But while we may regard this standard of judgement of culture and civilisation as something very beautiful, almost approximating perfection, we have to go a little deeper into the causes that motivate the behaviour of a person in this manner.

Why should one be impelled to speak sweetly to another? Though we may accept that speaking sweetly is a part of cultured behaviour, what is it that prompts a person to speak sweetly to another person? If it is selfishness, exploitation—to utilise that person in some manner by

hooking that individual—then sweet speaking would not be a part of culture. It would be a dramatic, deceptive attitude, and we cannot regard sweet speech as a part of culture. Therefore, merely speaking sweetly is not a part of culture; there is something else behind it. Even a charitable act cannot be called culture unless there is some living force behind it, because we may express a gesture of charity with a highly selfish motive. Outward actions can bear the garb of holiness, intense culture, piety and civilisation, but they may have a peculiar axe to grind, which the individual alone will know. Thus, culture is not any kind of external gesture—neither dress, nor even language.

Sometimes people base their culture on their religion, their scriptures. There are scripture-oriented religions whose adherents interpret everything in their lives from the point of view of that particular sacred text. If something is not mentioned in that text, it would not be a holy attitude. The moment they discover a statement in the text concerning a particular behaviour, it becomes sanctioned. So, the book becomes the guide. These are some of the religions we have in the world. But there are other religions which are prophet oriented. They may have no books, but they have a leader, and whatever that person says is valid and final. There is a final validity of a particular conduct, whether it receives its inspiration from a prophet or a book, and this final interpretation of the validity of the behaviour of a person or a group of people makes it impossible for mankind to have one culture and one civilisation, because it does not appear that we have only one book as our guide or only one man as our leader. Sections of people have

different leaders—religious, political, and social—and different texts are regarded as holy in their own parlance.

So, how do we come to know whether a person is cultured or civilised? Civilised nations today are those who have up-to-date gadgets of physical amenities. From the point of view of the interpretation of culture as possession of the highest material instruments of action, India cannot be regarded as highly cultured because there are other countries that are more technologically advanced. If technological advancement is the sign of culture and civilisation, India lags behind. But would we say that culture is technological advancement? Certainly not! Nobody would say 'yes' to this, because something lurks within us and tells us that whatever be the might and force of the technology that we have in our hands, it may not be the criterion of our culture. We may be boorish in our outlook, notwithstanding the fact that we possess immense material wealth and tremendous technological power.

Also, wealth cannot be regarded as a sign of culture. An utterly poor person who has not even a morsel to eat may be highly cultured, and the wealthiest man may not be so. Therefore, when we study the philosophy and psychology of culture and civilisation we are in deep waters, and we would not be able to receive an immediate answer to the standard by which we can recognise the presence of culture or civilisation. It is certainly not any kind of external possession, nor does it appear simply an outward behaviour, because political tact sometimes appears to be highly cultured behaviour while it is only diplomacy, which

may suddenly become a turncoat and assume a different colour. Therefore, diplomacy is not culture.

A lot of study on this subject has been made by students of history, sociology, anthropology, and cultural values. One of the most recent studies was made by the famous British historian Arnold Toynbee, who has written twelve volumes on the subject of history as a movement of the culture and civilisation of mankind. There seems to be a curve of the movement of culture and civilisation. It is not moving in a straight line, and it is not even a parallel movement. Sometimes it looks like a cyclic movement. For instance, the culture of Krita Yuga, Treta Yuga and Dvapara Yuga may not be the same as the culture of our age. What we regard as the standard of perfection today might have looked very odious and meaningless to a person living in Krita Yuga. Because his outlook of the whole of life is so far removed from ours, our conduct may not resemble his idea of perfection.

Bringing together all these facts into the arena of proper judgement, we may safely conclude that neither culture nor civilisation is a utilitarian value; it is not a pragmatic approach to things. It is not that we can regard it as highly worthwhile today, change it tomorrow, and completely destroy it the day after tomorrow. Have we not seen cultures perishing, and new cultures rising? Why should a new culture arise, as if the old one was meaningless?

The whole of humanity appears to have been striving after a sense of values and a mode of living which would approximate itself to the norm of true culture and civilisation. From this point of view, we should say that we

have not yet reached the perfection of culture and civilisation. We are still on the way. Nature seems to be experimenting with various forms of culture and civilisation; and when she finds one form of it to be inadequate, she throws it out as a potter would a broken pot, and manufactures a new one, giving a new shape to it. So we have had cultures and cultures, civilisations and civilisations, ways and ways of living since the Palaeolithic Age—or from the time of Adam and Eve, we may say—and we do not know how many cultures have come and gone. Today we are seeing with our own eyes a few of them, at which we blink and stare with anxiety, with suspicion, with wonder, and sometimes with satisfaction.

We are likely to be satisfied with our own mode of living and grin at another's mode of living as something very odd. Now, the oddness of another's behaviour arises on account of its incompatibility with the standards that we have set as the norm of perfection, from the point of view of an ideal that is in our heads. Everyone has some ideal, and this is the final deciding factor in the expression of values. Our daily behaviour among ourselves—externally, verbally, and even in our feelings—seems to be guided, unconsciously though, by something which we are enshrining within our own bosoms as a highly noble ideal, perhaps the most noble ideal. The goal that we wish to reach, though we might not have reached it as yet, is that which gives form to our behaviour today. What we actually seek as the object of our quest is the force that gives colour to our behaviour in our day-to-day life; and our behaviour, when it has a connection with other people in our society,

appears as our cultured attitude—or our uncultured attitude—as we may call it.

Therefore, the norm of perfection, or the ideal that we hold as dear, is the reason behind our varieties of behaviour and the nomenclature we give to it as culture. Thus, it appears that the whole of humanity does not regard one single thing as its ideal—otherwise, there would be only one mode of behaviour, one conduct, and there would be less of friction among people. The battles, skirmishes and wars that we hear of, and the differences of opinion we are confronting every day, can be accounted for only by the differences of the ideals and ideologies of people. It does not mean that everyone is aiming at the same thing.

This is not a great credit to the so-called civilisation of this era. Inasmuch as we are supposed to be pursuing different ideals, naturally we should have different civilisations and different cultures. Then there cannot be world peace, and the talk of it becomes a will-o'-the-wisp. When I totally differ from you in the ideal that I hold as the norm of perfection, how can I be your real friend? I may adjust myself with you for the sake of social existence, but adjustment is different from friendliness. People cannot be really friendly in this world if their ideals are variegated, as they are today. If we have hundreds of cultures and religions with hundreds of ideologies behind them, propelling them, then there is a lurking differentia in the attitude of people, and one cannot eat at the same table as the other. This predicament explains, to some extent, the present stage of evolution of mankind. It is not true, therefore, that today man has reached that state of culture

and civilisation which makes him feel that he is the crown of creation, made in the image of God Himself. If God is the original of this kind of reflection, it would be a poor definition of God indeed. How could this distracted behaviour of man be regarded as a reflection of God's Perfection?

The reason why man is distracted in the pursuit of his ideals—as divided rivers flowing hither and thither, though all of them are aiming finally at their union with the ocean—is the pull which is exerted on man's conduct by the senses, which look upon their respective objects. We have intellectual cultures, and these are sometimes identified with humanitarian cultures; and some cultures, no doubt, are purely sensuous, which interpret human values only from the point of view of what the senses perceive.

Unless culture and civilisation ultimately become a light that is shed by the spirituality of values, it cannot unite mankind. In language, in scriptures, in food, and even in intellect, mankind is not one. Then, what is it that can make man one? Everything seems to be different. Is there any common denominator or common factor that can bring humanity into a single body of a focused aspiration for higher values? If man's instrument of action is food and clothing, technology, language, scriptures, or the stage of intellectuality that one has reached, mankind cannot be brought together into a single force. This is because the only thing that is common to all beings is the spirit, and everything else is different. The intellect is different, the mind is different, the senses run after different kinds of objects; therefore, desires vary. Hence, there cannot be a

common platform for all mankind to come together into a single forum of action unless mankind feels a need to root its activities on the spirit rather than the intellect, the mind, the senses or their objects. But it does not appear that we have reached that state. It does not seem that man is able to interpret his life from the point of view of the spirit which is in all things, because the spirit cannot be seen with the eyes.

Today, our culture has become sensory because we value it only from the point of view of perception through the eyes. A thing that is not seen with our eyes is not easily accepted. Though it may be intellectually conceded, philosophically accepted, metaphysically regarded as highly praiseworthy, it has not become a part of our day-to-day life because life is different from mere intellectual acceptance or emotional reaction. Our outlook of life has to be compatible with our longings of life in its wholeness. Until that time is reached, we will be segregated, isolated cultures.

Now, with the introduction we proposed in an earlier session, we have been trying to understand and study the standpoint of India's culture, particularly; and from one standard of judgement at least, it appeared to us that there is some peculiarity in the culture of India which is not discoverable in the cultures of the past that have vanished from our sight today. There were great and glorious cultures in ancient times which are now subjects of archaeological unearthing, and are no longer visible to our eyes. This peculiarity, which appears to be the reason for the survival of the culture of India in spite of the vicissitudes which it has undergone in the passage of

history, gives us some indication that there is something which can be identified with a common denominator of human culture. If it had been merely a passing wind, it would not have stood the test of time as it has.

We have in India today, in its essentiality, the same culture which was there during the time of the Rigveda, for instance. It has not changed. We have not changed even a whit in our outlook of life through these centuries that have passed since the Rigveda was composed, or, as historians say, since the Aryans ruled India, thousands of years before Christ. That outlook of life, that ideology, that interpretation of values, that interest in life seems to be the very same impulsion from within us today, at this very hour, in spite of other distractions that have taken possession of us due to historical reasons. We are not, in detail, the same persons that our ancestors were many, many centuries back. We are not, in detail, living the same kind of life as our Vedic seers lived. We neither eat the same food, nor put on the same kind of attire; perhaps we do not speak the same language, and our outward day-to-day behaviour in family, society, etc., is not the same as that which prevailed during Vedic times. Nevertheless, there is a basic fundamentality of conduct and outlook, as we should rightly put it, which persists and continues even today, and this *samskriti* of the Veda has managed to permeate into the veins of people with such intensity that it has not left us even now. The citizen of India, even today, has the same outlook as in ancient times, and would like to place the same norm or standard before himself to judge whether a particular attitude is right or wrong.

Now we come to another difficult subject: the rightness or the wrongness of an attitude—which has very much to do with cultured or civilised behaviour. This subject we shall take up next.

Chapter 4

THE FOUNDATIONS OF INDIA'S CULTURAL VISION

We may say that among the many nations of the world, it was India that first conceived of a proper blend between religion and secular life. Earlier we had occasion to notice that an excessive emphasis on the secular values of life to the detriment of the religious spirit led to the downfall of empires. We can give no other reason for their vanishing.

We have a very interesting twofold feature as an object of study in European history. The state and the church are two great examples of secularism and religion. The medieval ages, in Europe particularly, highlighted this peculiar irreconcilability between the king and the pope—the one getting impelled towards secular aggrandisement and power, the other insisting on clerical authority. There was a time when the pope was more powerful than all the kings. Religion took an upper hand, and the secular emperors were under the thumb of the pope.

When it is said that the church ruled the state, it is implied somehow that the world that is 'beyond' began to rule the world that is 'below'; the otherworldly values began to emphasise their authority over the phenomena of this world. But, this world is 'this' world, and cannot be 'another' world; and the other world is an 'other' world, and cannot be 'this' world. It is very difficult to bring them together. Hence, there was a conflict between the church and the state, due to which one of them had to fall. They could not move parallel, because there was no attempt on

either side to bring about a rapprochement between the two values—religious and secular. The king was totally irreligious due to the pomp and authority that he wielded, but he had to work under the threat of excommunication by the pope, which was a great difficulty for the rulers of Europe.

Everything in its own place or context has a great strength; it loses its strength when it is out of place. When it is out of context, even an elephant loses its strength. When the proper placement of values missed its moorings and religion became a sorrow to the world led by the king or political administrator, a boiling point arrived. Even a mouse will assert itself when it is cornered from all sides. The papal authority was thrown out, and the kings of Europe asserted independence not only as secular heads but also as religious heads. They were the lords spiritual as well as the lords temporal. King Henry VIII was perhaps the first to overthrow the papal authority in England, and he announced himself to be the religious as well as the secular chief.

Today we find that there is a peculiar feature cropping up in the evaluations of life by the nations of the world, which cannot be called either secular or religious in a technical sense, but a kind of chaos which has arisen as a bubble rising to the surface of a vast tumultuous ocean. While the authority of the church has been thrown out by the power of the state, the state itself is insecure due to the existence of other states. Every finite is threatened by the existence of another finite, to read philosophical meaning into political situations.

In the Middle Ages, there was tension due to the preponderating authority of the church over the state; but now there is tension of a different type altogether due to the existence of other states, which are girding up their loins as forces with daggers drawn at one another, for reasons we all know.

Now, where lies the fault? Is it in religion, or in secularism? It is in neither. There was no mistake on the part of the rulers or the emperors, nor could we say that there was some mistake on the part of the pope. There was a mistake in the bringing together of a harmony between two values of life which are equally important. Man is a body, and also a soul. Though we cannot say that man is not a body, he is not merely a body. Man is also a soul, but not merely an ethereal soul minus a body. The Kathopanishad says, *atmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety ahur manisinah*: The individual is a complex of the spirit, the mind and the senses working together with the vehicle of the body. Therefore, human culture cannot found itself entirely on an otherworldly religious outlook of life—in which case, we have the example of the pope and the churchian rule which could not succeed; nor can we emphasise the body and the senses entirely—as we have the example of the fall of the Roman Empire and the Greek state, and many other such examples.

In India, we have a blessed example—God be thanked, and touch wood. There is a persistent current flowing even today under the tumult of the outer surface of life's activity here, an upsurge within the soul of the nation for bringing back into modern existence the values for which people

lived in ancient times. The most scientific of all outlooks is that which was envisaged by the masters of India: the bringing together of the world here and the world hereafter.

The great teacher of Vaisheshika commences his Sutras with a famous declaration: *yato'bhyudaya-nihshreyasa-siddhih sa dharmah*. What is dharma? It is that by which we are prosperous in this world and attain salvation afterwards. Dharma is that cementing force by which we are prosperous here and also liberated afterwards. *Abhyudaya* in this world and *nihsreyasa* in the hereafter are assured to us by a proper inculcation of the values of dharma. Therefore, the criticism levelled against Indian culture by carping non-conformists that it is the negation of life is a misinterpretation.

India never negated life, nor did it affirm it as a reality in itself. It took its value in its own status; it called a spade a spade, as they say. Everything has to be recognised and interpreted from the point of view of its present existence in the level of evolution. The hunger and thirst of the body were not denied by the spirituality of India, and the existence of a need for mutual collaboration among people in society was not neglected. The great canons of the *pancha mahayajnas* enjoined upon every Grihastha, or householder, is a standing refutation of the charge against Indian culture that it is otherworldly, ascetic, and a denier of practical values. Who could be equal to the spirit of India's culture, which worships a guest as God Himself? This *atithi devobhava* principle is rarely observed in other countries, where an uninvited guest is not a welcome person; but in India it is the uninvited guest who is adored

more than the invited one. The invited guest is the *abhyagata*, whereas the uninvited guest is the *atithi*; and the *atithi*, not the *abhyagata*, is the deva.

But the etiquette of secular observances may trample upon this great ideal which the Indian mind has enshrined in its bosom from a different point of view altogether—not purely social or make-believe, but on the basis of a spiritual recognition of values. Anything that happens of its own accord is God's action, and this is the basis of the inculcation of the principle that a guest who comes uninvited is to be adored and recognised as Narayana Himself. The idea is that events that take place without the intervention of our personalities—or more properly, without the intervention of our egoisms—should be considered as divine interventions. Who brought that man to our gate, when we did not invite or call him? Who could have pushed him to our gate, if not something that is super-personal? This great belief in the presence of divinity in all things working for the welfare of all beings in various ways—God testing man in various forms—laid the foundation for these courtesies which we extend while welcoming an uninvited guest. How could one who denies the world have such a policy in life?

India never denied life. It denied only false notions of life, an erroneous interpretation of life, and not life itself. Otherwise, how could India produce such great painters, musicians, architects, sculptors, masters of dancing, musicians, and literary geniuses if Indians were deniers of the world? Indians would be brooding, weeping, and sitting with slouched backs in a corner, contemplating an

otherworldly value if this had been the truth. Every level of life was regarded as a divine level, on account of which, in his Ashtanga Yoga, Sage Patanjali strikes a balance among the various stages of evolution when he speaks of the importance of social virtues, and even bodily discipline, together with the necessity for mental abstraction and sense control, etc., for the purpose of ultimate communion with the Absolute.

The principles of Purushartha known as dharma, artha, kama, moksha are, in essence, the methods adopted for bringing together empirical and transcendent values. They are the foundation of India's culture, upon which are founded the principles of varna and ashrama. These Purusharthas together with varna and ashrama sum up the entire principles of India's culture. Everything can be read here in these few words. Through the fulfilment of these, life became complete socially, physically, psychologically, intellectually, and spiritually.

In the great messages bequeathed to us in the Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads we will find the beautiful blend they conceived between this world and the other world. Nothing was ignored, nothing was rejected; everything was absorbed, everything was remodelled, everything was divinised by the magical touch of the God-vision which saw a new significance in the various physical particulars of the world—even in what we may call the worst of secular values.

The material values of life, which are necessary for the maintenance of one's physical existence—socially, as well as personally—were taken care of firstly and primarily, under

great restrictions and conditions. Even medicine has to be taken under a prescription by a physician; and the physicians were the great makers of the Dharma Shastras, who knew how one could take advantage of the beauties and the pleasures of life while not contradicting dharma. *Dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamo'smi*, says Bhagavan Sri Krishna: I am the desire which is non-contradicted by dharma (or, not contradicting dharma). But it was difficult for people to understand that dharma regulates the fulfilment of the desires of man—*artha* and *kama*, physical and vital. We were not asked to dry ourselves up in the heat of a false austerity. We were asked to fulfil ourselves and to blossom into glorious flowers, rather than to become dry twigs due to false notions of *tapas* or austerity.

Great masters and geniuses of India were glorious comprehensive personalities, and not rejecting individuals. Great emperors were *brahmajnanis*, and householders were geniuses of spirit—by which we are taught that it is not only possible but also necessary to see the One in the many. The necessity and the capacity for visualising the One in the many is the basis behind the inculcation of these canons known as dharma, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*.

Man lives for the liberation of the spirit in the Supreme Godhead. That is perfectly so, and there can be nothing more glorious than this ideal. We live for that, we exist for that, and all our activities are directed towards that; but—and a very important 'but'—we have to remember that it is a graduated ascent. Nature evolves systematically, and whether it is the Sankhya or the Vedanta which is our philosophy, we are told that we cannot help conceiving the

relationship of the world with God in terms of an evolutionary process. It is not one solid mass known as the world suddenly getting tagged onto another solid substance called the Absolute; it is a very, very fine adjustment which is brought about by a refining of consciousness gradually, systematically, from its lowest involvements in matter to its highest, blossoming in God-consciousness.

Thus, the existence of matter has not been denied, while it is also told that it does not exist at all, finally. Very strange! We shall realise one day that the so-called material world does not exist, but it cannot be denied when it is an object of direct experience by a level of our individuality which is on a par with this object of perception we call the material world. The experiencer and the experienced are moving parallel in the process of evolution. When we evolve, the whole world also evolves together with us, as far as we are concerned. Our world goes together with us, and the experiencing subject and the experienced object are on a single level of reality. Neither is superior or inferior to the other, and that is why there is a coming together between the two. The heavenly regions—Indraloka, Tapoloka, Brahmaloka, etc.—are not experienced by individuals because they are on a different level of reality altogether; and because we are in a material world and involved in a material body, we are experiencing a counterpart in the form of a material world. Therefore, this reaction between us and the world outside in a physical form is one stage of experience, which is artha and kama. We cannot deny it unless we deny our own self—which we cannot do, for obvious reasons. The world will cease to be only when we

cease to be, and not before that. We cannot say, “I am, and the world is not,” because both are on the same level, enshrined in a single level of reality, and they go parallel. The subject and the object are not on different levels; they are on the same level and, therefore, when we deny one, the other also goes.

But a mistake was made by enthusiasts of religion and enthusiasts of secular life by ignoring one side and emphasising the other. Whereas the secular emphasised the outer world, the religious emphasised the individual’s visions of a super-world beyond the physical world, in spite of the fact that it was in the physical world; and that was a mistake. Religion is not an abrogation of the values that impinge upon us as solid realities as long as we are in them; it is an absorption of those values into our larger integrated personalities. Spirituality is an expanding of our personalities gradually, by larger and larger integrations, by which we absorb the world into ourselves by degrees, and do not reject the world in any degree.

Hence, one was not asked to reject artha and kama, but was expected to absorb them into one’s life by means of experience under the condition of dharma. This was something very important, the lack of knowledge of which has landed most people, whether in the religious realm or in the secular realm, in a pit. Dharma is that system, that principle, that law, that rule, that method by which one brings together the subject and the object in harmony in any given level of evolution. Hence, dharma rises from the lower level to the higher level, until the highest dharma is nothing but moksha. But there are other degrees of dharma,

and the law of the Supreme All-comprehensive Absolute operates even in the movement of a little atom, as well as controlling the workings of even such wondrous omnipresent realms as Brahmaloaka. That law of dharma controls the operation of even a minute electron, and perhaps it also operates the law by which wind blows, driving a dry leaf in a particular direction.

Therefore, the consciousness of the existence and controlling power of a superior reality that transcends the present relationship between the subject and the object is dharma proper. Our relationships, whether physical or social, are to be interpreted, arranged, organised, and utilised in the light of a higher purpose for which this relationship is maintained. The regulative effect produced by that consciousness of the presence of a higher ideal superior to both the subject and the object is the dharma that controls both the subject and the object. If the higher principle is lost sight of, the subject and the object clash, and there is war. It may be a war between two individuals or a war between nations.

It is the absence of dharma that is the cause of rebellions, skirmishes, misunderstandings, fights, battles, wars. Where dharma rules, clash cannot be; there shall be only harmony. But clashes are everywhere—individually in the body, and also outside in society. While dharma has to operate and does operate both within the individual and outside in society, its very presence is lost sight of due to the emphasis of the demands of the sense organs in the body, the clamours of the physical system in many other ways, and the egoism of man, principally. So, while artha

and kama are holy, sacrosanct in their own way, they are not permitted unless they are vehicles to enshrine this divinity of the transcendent presence beyond them. Unless and until they become temples of the worship of this deity that is superintending above both of them, subject and object, they become corpses, and not living values. Neither a human individual nor the society outside can have any sense in its existence. They are dead altogether if they are taken in their own outward forms and values and not seen in the light of that which is regulating them, controlling them, and expecting them to obey its own laws.

This is a very difficult concept to entertain in the mind. *Dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayam mahajano yena gatah sa panthah*. The great men of the Mahabharata tell us that we cannot know what dharma is. *Dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayam*: It is hidden in a cave, as it were, in the darkness of oblivion—perhaps in the cave of our own hearts. Unless we dive deep into our own hearts, we will not know what dharma is. Our conscience is the voice of dharma. The impartial voice that speaks deeply from within ourselves is the voice of dharma. It can speak inside us, and it can also speak from without by a consensus of opinion passed in a most impartial manner.

The important point is that in the light of India's culture, the secular values of life are not evil. Nothing is evil in this world when it is seen as a vehicle which carries a deep meaning within itself which is transcendent to its own outer form. Every *nama* and *rupa* is a vehicle for *sat-chit-ananda*. *Sat, chit, ananda, nama, rupa* are the five things that we see everywhere in the world. The Panchadasi says

that the whole world and each individual particular object are nothing but a complex of *asti*, *bhati*, *priya*, *nama*, *rupa*. The first three are characteristics of Brahman; the other two are characteristics of the world.

But what is the world, if it is only name and form? Minus *sat-chit-ananda*, what is the world? What is a pot, if it is not clay? If we remove the clay from it, we will see no pot. Likewise, if we remove *asti-bhati-priya*, remove *sat-chit-ananda*, we will feel nothing is there. That is why the world is supposed to be non-existent in one sense. It is existent as the pot exists, and it does not exist even as the pot does not exist. This is a highly technical theme. The pot does exist because it is clay. What we call 'pot' is only in our minds; it does not exist. But the pot exists; we can carry water in it, as we know very well. We cannot say that we have purchased some balls of mud; we say we purchased pots. The bringing together of *nama-rupa-prapancha* with *asti-bhati-priya* into a state of harmony—Existence Absolute, Consciousness Absolute, and Bliss Absolute—is the wisdom of life. One who is bankrupt in this wisdom will be a failure, not only in spiritual and religious life, but even as an ordinary shopkeeper or in a clerical job. A person who is a failure in one thing will be a failure in another thing also, because it is an incapacity to adjust to circumstances that makes him fail, and that incapacity persists wherever he goes, notwithstanding the fact he has changed his profession.

Coming to the point, dharma, artha, kama, moksha are the foundations of the cultural vision of India. Moksha is the deity which is worshipped in this vehicle of dharma,

artha, kama. When the deity is absent, we no more call it a temple; it is only an ordinary building, a dilapidated hut, a corpse with no sense. When nobody is living in a house, we do not value it; we do not even look at it. While artha and kama are the visible values of life, and moksha is the universal value of life, dharma is the cementing value of life. We know how important each one is in our life. Nothing can be regarded as wholly unimportant, because everything plays a role in the superstructure of a completeness called human life, which is an advance of the personality towards the fulfilment of existence, moksha—which is not cut off from dharma, artha, kama, but is the fulfilment that is attained as a transcendence, and not a rejection of them.

There is a difference between transcendence and abandonment. When a child becomes a youth, his childhood is not abandoned but transcended. Whatever value was present in the baby is also present in the youth, but the youth is not the baby. He is something different, far superior to the baby. Similarly, moksha is not this world, is not artha, is not kama, and is not even the so-called dharma; but yet, every one of these is present in it in a transfigured form—not in a particularised, isolated, objectivised form. That which we regard as an outside thing will be realised there as Universal Being. This world is not negated, but it will be seen there, experienced there, in a different way altogether. Our vision is corrected; things are not denied or abrogated from experience.

Thus, moksha is the highest dharma, and the way in which it produces its impact upon our practical life is the so-called dharma of our scriptures, our Dharma Shastras,

our social laws, personal regulations, regimens, disciplines, etc. This is a very interesting vision which does not ignore anything in this world, and yet does not consider anything in this world as complete. Such a wondrous vision was bequeathed to the great masters of yore in India, on the strength of which they brought down this law of moksha into the practical daily existence of society and the individual through the application of varna and ashrama, about which we shall speak next.

Chapter 5

THE SYSTEMS OF VARNA AND ASHRAMA

The perfect outlook of life considers four aspects which form inseparable ingredients of the very notion of perfection—society, the individual, the universe, and God. These four principles sum up the central objectives of what may be called the human perspective.

The Indian's outlook has ever been a movement towards the achievement of perfection in degrees. There has never been an attempt to jump over the scales of evolution, but rather a very systematised endeavour at completing the duties called upon everyone at every level of evolution, starting with the lowest possible form.

Previously I mentioned that this vision of perfection took into consideration four objectives of human existence known as the Purusharthas—dharma, artha, kama, moksha—which great ideal is implemented and worked out through the administration and organisation of society, and the discipline of the individual. The organisation of society took the form of the varna system, and the discipline of the individual took the form of the ashrama system. These are the famous varna and ashrama orders of the regulation of life as a whole.

No man in this world is complete, and no man can be complete. Inasmuch as the endowments of every individual are partial, human society would be a conglomeration of partial individualities; there would be nothing perfect anywhere. The human personality is an admixture of various levels or, we can say, forces. The layers of the so-

called individuality—the physical body, the pranas, the mind, the intellect, and the spirit—are all there in every individual, but none is fully developed in any person. If the body is perfect, the mind may not be; if the mind is perfect, the body may not be, and so on.

The wisdom of the ancients was such that they contemplated a system of introducing some sort of perfection into the social order by bringing together the various partial endowments of personalities into an ordered system, which gave the shape of perfection. In the Sankhya philosophy we have the famous example illustrating the work of *purusha* and *prakriti* jointly. *Purusha* is supposed to be like a lame person who can see; *prakriti* is supposed to be like a blind person who can walk. Suppose the person who can see but has no legs sits upon the shoulders of the person who cannot see but has legs; then there is an appearance of a complete ability to reach the destination. We can say there is a total individuality by a bringing together of two partial aspects, which is a good illustration to explain the point that we are making in connection with the varna system.

As no man is complete—no man is wholly spiritual, no man is wholly intellectual or rational, no man is wholly emotional or active, and no man is wholly capable of manual work, etc.—a necessity is felt to bring together the various partialities into a wholeness for the welfare of society. It is something like the system of give-and-take in the field of commercial activity. He who has rice but needs cloth will sell his rice to a person who has cloth; and one who has cloth but has no rice will trade his cloth for rice.

The old barter system was like this. Everyone has needs, but no one has the capacity to fulfil all their needs. What I have, others may not have; and what others have, I may not have. Therefore, in order that social solidarity may be ensured so that there may be some sort of perfect image produced in the totality of the social structure, the varna system was thought to be the most advisable method to be adopted.

What does the varna system mean, actually? We have a very crude notion of these ideas. We have often heard of the various castes, known as the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, the Sudras, etc. While originally it was a purely rational, scientific, impersonal contemplation of social values, it has gradually deteriorated into a kind of emotional appropriation of prerogatives, and has tended to become an obnoxious system. Well, we can call any dog a bad name and hang it, but all dogs are not necessarily bad. Likewise, a misinterpretation and a misconstruing of the original intention can become a travesty—as it is also in the case of the various religions of the world, for instance.

The original prophets and the founders were masters—Godmen and Incarnations who had the vision of the Supreme Supernal Light—who gave mankind a divine message with eternal significance. But when the prophet has vanished and the Incarnation has gone, there are followers who misinterpret, distort, and cut off one faith from another so that the very intention of the prophet or the Incarnation is lost, and we have only warfare among religious faiths. Such a thing has happened to the original system of varna.

‘Varna’ does not actually mean colour in a grammatical sense. It means the colour which is philosophically or metaphysically attributed to the so-called *gunas* of *prakriti*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These three properties of *prakriti* are the basis or the substratum of what are known as the colours. It does not mean the colour of the skin, as it is sometimes wrongly thought to be. It is the colour of the property preponderating in a particular individual in some measure—how much *sattva*, how much *rajas*, how much *tamas* is there in an individual. No one is wholly *sattvic*, wholly *rajasic* or wholly *tamasic*; there is some percentage of each *guna* in different individuals in various proportions.

The group of individuals who have the capacity to reflect a maximum amount of *sattva* are those persons who can think better in terms of the higher reason behind things than those who are predominantly *rajasic* or *tamasic*. So is the case with the other properties—*rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* has a tendency to activate everything, and tends towards energetic movement. *Tamas* is very heavy, dense and static. It does not move like *rajas*, and cannot think like *sattva*.

Society has many kinds of requirements and, as we have noted earlier, individuals constitute a society. Whatever is the need of a man is the need of society, so to say. We have hunger and thirst, and everyone in society has this difficulty—an urge to appease our hunger, quench our thirst, and wear clothing. Therefore, we also have a need for the procedure of give-and-take because everyone needs something. I have touched upon the principles of administration, almost bordering upon the system of political science, which tells us something about the origin

of the administrative system—the need for organisation in society, how people feel that they have to be governed by a principle, law or rule because individuals are isolated particulars scattered hither and thither—and that there is nothing visible in the world which can bring them together in the form of an organisation.

How can two persons come together unless there is something common between them? But what is common between individuals? We can see nothing in common. Each person is absolutely independent in many respects. It was discovered very early that this independence of attitude is to the detriment of individuals because one cannot be wholly independent unless one is also wholly perfect. An imperfect person cannot be absolutely independent; and, as no one in this world is perfect, no one can be independent.

Thus arises the necessity to be dependent on others; and the need for dependence calls for a system of relationship among people that lands us upon the system of the management of persons. And what is law, but the rule which tells us how to manage individuals? This also was necessary.

But the way of this administration, or the rationale behind the system of organisation, is most important, whatever that organisation be—whether administrative, economic, or anything else. Every action is preceded by a thought. We cannot jump into activity without thinking of the pros and cons of the steps that we are taking, because the thought is the constitution that we lay at the very outset before we implement a procedure. Hence, there must be people to think of the way to organise things.

Thus was sown the seed of the varna system. There would be the thinking or the rational type of people who contribute their might of knowledge for the purpose of the wholesome evolution and growth of society in its entirety; others would work vigorously by contributing their own abilities to maintain the organisational order or system; others would help in a third manner, by providing the economic means of sustenance; and there should also be people who would act like the pillars of the entire edifice of society, the footstool of the whole picture called human organisation. That we need people to work, and we need people to provide the economic means of sustenance by the procedure is well known. There is also a need for organisation and administration. And there is, above all, a need to think. Therefore, the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras are not superior and inferior types of people in society. This very poor interpretation is a travesty of the originally good-intentioned system.

We know very well how beautifully the Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda touches upon this system of organisation when it says: *brahmano'sya mukhamasid bahu rajanyah kritah, uru tadasya yad vaishyah padbhyagi shudro ajayata*. This image that we have in the Purusha Sukta of the Veda is illustrative of a very important significance hidden behind this system, namely, the organic character of people. As the human body is one organic completeness, society is also supposed to be that. The body is supported by the legs which stand firmly on the ground, and the legs are connected to the main trunk through the thighs, and there is the trunk, the whole body, and there is the voice which

speaks the wisdom thought by the mind. That there is a cooperative action in an organism of the human personality is well known to every person, and we have no partiality or favouritism in regard to any limb of our body. It is improper to think that the legs are inferior to the head, the heart, the trunk, the arms, etc.

In a family, no child is unimportant, though various aptitudes are visible in the children of that family. It is preposterous to think in terms of 'high' and 'low' in anything whatsoever in this world, because the intention of any type of organisation, including the organisation of the physical body itself, is not to pinpoint the superiority or the inferiority of any particular aspect or organ, but to achieve the collective focusing of force, and the cooperation that is behind these apparently isolated limbs, for a purpose entirely transcendent to themselves.

The leg does not walk for its own sake. What does the leg gain by walking? The leg can say, "Why should I walk? I gain nothing." What does the brain gain by thinking? What do the hands gain by grasping? If we take each item separately, there seems to be no significance in the action. The action is significant only in terms of a higher transcendent purpose. A machine does not work for its own sake. What does a machine gain by moving? Its moving is significant in terms of the output that results from its movement. The output of the machine is the transcendent purpose beyond the machine.

The limbs of the body work, not because that work has any significance of its own when viewed independently, but because it has a transcendent significance, which is the

maintenance of the whole person. The maintenance of the person is the transcendent intention behind the working of the isolated limbs of the body. Likewise, no individual can work, or should work, for himself. Otherwise, each one would be grumbling, "Why should I work?"—as it often happens these days. People do not understand the dignity of labour, the meaning or significance of work, even as one cannot know why the leg is walking. Its moving seems to be meaningless and unnecessary. But we know why it is moving. It has a purpose beyond itself.

Likewise, when we work, we are working for a purpose beyond the work. That is the spirit of karma yoga. If we look at the work merely as a skeleton of movement or impulsion of an individual towards any isolated motive, then it looks meaningless, absurd. It is very necessary to learn the art of unselfishness from the way in which the body works. What a wondrous mechanism; how unselfishly each cell is working! What for? Nobody knows. Why should the heart pump blood; what does it gain? Nobody knows. Why should the lungs breathe; what do they gain? Nothing. No one gains anything. But then, we should not say, "If I gain nothing, why should I work?" It is really a wonder and a surprise that gain is the motive behind every action. The whole of the philosophy of the Bhagavadgita is nothing but an attempt to cut down the growth of this selfish outlook which sees an ulterior motive behind every action and requires that a fruit immediately be yielded as a consequence.

The structure of society is a scaffold, as it were, raised for the purpose of an achievement by society, and is

transcendent to the outward form of society. We do not exist for our own selves, we exist for a purpose which is beyond ourselves; and inasmuch as I myself independently, or you yourself independently, cannot adequately contribute the requirements for the achievement of this supreme purpose, we come together in a group, in a team spirit, and create a cumulative effect which will achieve the purpose.

What is the purpose of organisation? Why should we have any kind of organisation of society at all? Why should each person not do whatever he can do? It is because the output is diminutive, incapacitated, poor, substanceless, and insignificant. When we come together in a group, we have a greater strength; therefore, there is a chance of achieving greater success. We have to reiterate once again that the system of the varnas is not a classification of superior and inferior individuals. It does not mean the Brahmana can insult the Sudra, because it is like the head insulting the leg—which is preposterous.

But man is man, and we cannot make him anything else. He has his own weaknesses. Selfishness is rampant, and however much we may try to sublimate it, it shows its head one day or the other. This peculiar selfishness tries to make the best of the bargain, and inasmuch as the essential or predominant trait of human individuality is the projecting of the ego in some form or the other, even this little facility—we should call it a facility and not a right—provided for contributing one's own might to the welfare of society is taken advantage of, and one who calls oneself a Brahmana feels superior to the Kshatriya, the Vaishya or

the Sudra. Thus it is that we are misusing the very instrument that has been provided to us for our own welfare.

Social integration and personal integration are absolutely necessary prior to our endeavour at cosmic integration and divine integration. As I mentioned, there are four aspects of our work—society, the individual, the universe, and God—and each one is equally important. We have to proceed from one to the other gradually. Actually, this is what is known as the system of yoga; and the whole of Indian culture is nothing but a grand yoga, if we would like to call it that. The attempt of the ancient masters in India was to transform every activity into a form of spirituality; they could see nothing but that anywhere. With this intention, it was endeavoured that even the humdrum activities of life in the midst of human society be converted into a highly purposeful worship, we should say, for the attainment of a superior goal.

Man does not live for himself. No one lives for himself or herself, and nothing lives for itself. Everything lives for something else. There is a cosmic urge towards a higher evolutionary achievement, and we have to contribute whatever we can, under the circumstances we are placed, towards an ushering in of a better day and a greater light by way of this evolutionary activity or movement. Hence, the envisagement of this structure of the varna system has a part to play in the system of the evolution of the universe itself.

It is not enough if we have an organisation of skeleton individuals. They must be powerful individuals. And so the

ancient adepts did not forget the need to discipline the individual. There is no use having a society of dry bamboo sticks; there must be vitality, energy, and capacity in them. The more the capacity of an individual, the greater also is the strength of society. If there is only a muddle-headed group of thousands of individuals, what will be the output of that society? It will be confusion. This is why the ancients considered that healthy, robust, well-educated, and highly idealised individuals are necessary for creating a perfect human society. What else is Rama-rajya that we are dreaming of? It is nothing but a society of these perfected individuals who have attained such a state of enlightenment that they do not need any kind of external coercion or force to govern them. Such was the great ideal.

Now, while it is necessary to organise individuals into a society because of the partiality of endowments of different individuals, it is also necessary, at the same time, to see that the individuals themselves are disciplined and perfected to the extent possible under the circumstances available. This perfection of the individual is attempted through what is known as the ashrama system. Ashrama is an order. It does not mean a building, such as the Sivanada Ashram. It is a stage of life through which one has to pass by means of an educational career and a process of training, whereby the forces or powers of the individual are harnessed for the purpose for which they are intended. The child grows gradually into the adult, and maturity takes place in the mind.

The ashramas are four, even as the varnas are four. While these four varnas—Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya,

Sudra—constitute the spiritual, political, economic, and manual aspects of the complete structure of human society, the ashramas—Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, Sannyasa—constitute another order altogether, which is towards the achievement of individual perfection.

When we are born into this world, we are like buds which are not yet opened. The child does not feel the impact of the world because its mind has not yet opened enough to receive the impressions of the outside world. It gradually grows, practically as an untutored physical individuality. At the earliest stage of the child, there is only body and nothing else. Before the form is manifest as the human body, it remains as a kind of shapeless mass. There is nothing but physicality there, for all practical purposes. The shapeless mass is given shape by the order of nature, and while it assumes the shape of a child, it still remains merely a physical organism, like a plant. A newborn baby is just like a plant. It has life, no doubt, but it can think only as much as a plant or a tree can think. There is no capacity for its mind to function in a more intensive manner.

The growth of the individual by stages can sometimes be compared to the various avatars of Vishnu—Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, etc. There is also some sort of evolutionary significance hidden behind the gradational statement of these avatars. They start very low, where we are like amphibians with merely an iota of *Homo sapiens*, or the character of humanity, but from that we gradually evolve into the *purna* or perfected avatara, as it is called, which is nothing but the completion of knowledge, where

enlightenment is attained to logical perfection. Its apex has been reached.

The educational process takes the form of ashrama dharma. What is called ashrama dharma is nothing but a process of education in a school; and our great heroes of the past visualised the whole of life as a period of studentship. We are students from birth to death. This is mentioned with great emphasis in the Chhandogya Upanishad, for instance. The various activities of our lives are parts of our apprenticeship in this school of education called life.

We are educated gradually through the adaptation of our individuality to the reality outside in terms of the levels of our personality, which are especially taken into consideration by the ashrama system. We have levels of individuality; we have to remember this very well. We are the physical body, but we are also, at the same time, the vital force; we are the mind, and we are the intellect and the spirit. We have to enable each of these layers of our personality to blossom into completeness—again, not by emphasising any kind of superiority or inferiority among them, but by giving each stage its own due, and considering each stage as a necessary step in the process of education. I mentioned that the four orders—Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra—do not mean a system of superiority and inferiority. It is similar to the various stages of education. A small boy studying in primary school should not be regarded as inferior to one who is studying in college, because that would be a poor way of looking at things. He is not inferior in any way, though he is in a lower grade because he has not yet reached that level of the other

student. So, while one may be at one level of evolution or stage of perfection and the other may be at another, it does not imply that one has any kind of right over the other. This is not at all the case. These four orders only mean that there is a necessity for everyone to keep in mind the principle of perfection present in each person, each individual—and, again, a need for cooperation and collaboration. One who has greater knowledge has to impart that knowledge to another who has lesser knowledge.

These stages of life, called the ashramas, are the processes of enabling the flowering of our personality into perfection, which is reached in the highest form of enlightenment. In the beginning we are tied to the physical body very forcefully, and liberating ourselves from it is a difficult task, but this is attempted. The body is to be fed with the requisite foods, no doubt, but it also has to be disciplined. It is like a bull, which may go wild if not taken care of properly. While the body can become wild like an untamed horse or an undisciplined bull, it can also become a good vehicle on which we can transport the weight of this entire life's activity.

The Guru-disciple relationship, which comes into relief when we think of the first stage of ashrama dharma, namely Brahmacharya, tells us much about the need for physical discipline. The Brahmachari—the lad who is just budding into youth—is given the fullest type of physical training by means of the service that he is expected to render to the master. By this discipline, he is given the very outlook of his life, not merely the opportunity of disciplining the body. He

knows how he has to conduct himself before others and in respect of other things, and a sort of ground is paved in the beginning itself for the contribution that he has to make later on when he becomes an adult, a unit of human society, as a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Sudra.

We have various types of desires. We are a bundle of desires, and these desires have to be sublimated. The ashrama system attempts to sublimate the desires, and not suppress them. Perhaps the ancient sages of India were the greatest psychoanalysts, even before the birth of the renowned Freud, Adler and Jung. These ancient sages knew very well that the so-called id, or the ego, or the superego of psychology, is there in every individual. Though they did not call the forces of the individual by these modern names, they knew of their presence. Perhaps, they knew it much better; and they knew what havoc these forces can work if they are not tamed, and also what good they can do if they are properly utilised. The energies of the system have to be harnessed for the supreme purpose of divine enlightenment. This is the great purpose of the educational system through the ashrama dharma.

Chapter 6

THE VEDA MANTRAS

If the culture of a country may be said to be decided by its religious outlook, its religion may be said to be based on scripture and popular literature connected with similar themes. We shall consider, at the outset, the literature of India, which is mainly in the Sanskrit language. These volumes of scriptural writing have not only sowed the seed of India's outlook of life as a whole, but have managed to influence public thinking, even at the present hour.

Sanskrit literature is very vast, and it ranges from any subject to any other subject. The earliest recorded document is a religious scripture, the Rigveda, followed by the other Vedas, known as the Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The Sanskrit scriptures are not confined merely to the Vedas. These original scriptures, the Vedas, are also known as the Srutis. '*Sruti*' means 'something that is heard'. These great books were not written on paper; actually, they were not written at all. They were recited by a teacher, and heard by the disciple. Therefore, one learned in the sacred lore of the Veda is regarded as a *srotri*—one who is well-rooted in the Sruti, which is that which is heard and then recited, not read from a book or studied independently. There was no such thing as independently studying the Veda; such a procedure did not exist.

While the Sruti is the primary scripture—the root, as it were, of the further branches of Sanskrit learning—its themes are expanded in various forms through the other groups of Sanskrit writing known as the Smritis, the

Itihasas, the Puranas, the Agamas and Darshanas. These constitute such a vast area of study that no single individual can be said to be a master of them all. We are here to only run our eye over an outline of the essential contents, themes and purposes of these writings, which act as a scaffolding of the outlook of life enshrined by India even to this day.

The original foundational guideline of this vast religious outlook is the Veda, which means a body of knowledge. The word 'Veda' comes from the root '*vid*', meaning 'to know'. While there are textbooks on arts and sciences, which also can be regarded as bodies of knowledge, how is it that we consider the Veda alone as an embodiment of knowledge? By 'knowledge', here we do not mean empirical understanding. We mean that which cannot be known through the processes of perception and inference, or the usual means of knowledge available to man; that which eludes the grasp of the highest endowments of man—the reason or intellect included. That has to be known. The means by which the transcendent reality is known is the Veda, the true knowledge—knowledge of Reality as such. It is not empirical knowledge, or knowledge of objects of sense; it is also not intellectual knowledge or scientific deduction; it is not logic; and it is not any kind of information that is gathered by experiment and observation. It is an intuitive grasp of the complete availability of Reality in its wholeness, and hence, it is knowledge that is religious, holy, or spiritual.

The belief of the learned and the devout is that this intuitive revelation called the Veda records that type of

knowledge which comprehends within its immediate grasp all the aspects of That which Is. To know a thing is to know it from every aspect and from every point of view. Our faculties, which are mainly psychological, are incapable of comprehending any object from all points of view. There is only a partial knowledge—sensory or intellectual—of anything. All the characteristics of an object cannot be grasped by the faculties by which we know things empirically. True knowledge is a complete grasp of the internal structure of an object, whatever that object be.

Hence, the Veda is supposed to give us a knowledge of That which really Is, and which does not merely appear through the senses by changing form. Appearance is that which changes its colours, its structure, its pattern, its form. Therefore, our knowledge of the world may be said to be relative knowledge, or knowledge of appearance. It is knowledge of appearance because it is knowledge of that which changes; it is not knowledge of that which is permanent. Hence, our knowledge also progresses, inasmuch as the characteristics of the object of knowledge change in the process of evolution. But there is no progress in intuitive knowledge; it is a complete grasp of Eternity itself.

Thus, it is difficult to know the true meaning of these revelations known as the Veda mantras. They are supposed to give us the external aspect, the internal aspect, and also the transcendent aspect of the subject which they treat or are supposed to comprehend. Hence, there is a variety of interpretation of the Vedas.

The *adhiyajna* and the *adhibhautika* interpretations give us a meaning of the Veda mantras with its relevance to the objects of the external world and religious performances in the form of various rituals and external practices. These days, most of the translations of the Vedas are of this type. They give a linguistic, philological or apparent meaning of the words as they could be etymologically grasped with the help of a dictionary or compendium.

The tradition has been to utilise or employ these mantras of the Vedas in religious performances called *yajnas* or sacrificial worships. Hence, many of the interpreters of the Veda have taken a stand which is empirical, physical, and ritualistic. The great commentary of Sayana is the standard exposition of the Veda. He was a master, an incomparable genius. To write such a voluminous exposition of all the mantras of all the Vedas—not merely the Samhitas, but also the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads—is not a human task. Sayana must have really been a superhuman individual. He has written masterly expositions in lucid Sanskrit on the entire body of Vedic literature. Sayana is regarded as the brother of Vidyaranya. He was not an ordinary person, because the lifespan of an individual is not sufficient even to read all that he has written, so how he wrote it is a wonder indeed. However, he has taken a ritualistic stand primarily, though he sometimes touches upon the religious, the devotional, and the meditational aspects when he sketches some cosmological hymns.

The external meaning of anything is not the only meaning. The description of a human being is not the description of the length and breadth of that individual's body. The chemical composition of the body does not describe the personality of the man, as we know very well. Likewise, a philological interpretation of the Veda cannot be said to give the real content or intention behind the revelation, which is intuitive and all-grasping. There is also the *adhyatmika* meaning, which has been attempted by such masters as Madhvacharya, who has written an exposition of the first forty chapters of the Rigveda.

There is also a transcendent meaning. We are told in an anecdote that certain devotees went to Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa and importuned him to explain to them the meaning of the Veda. It appears that he uttered one sentence: *Ananta vai vedah*. The Veda is infinite and, therefore, it cannot be explained in finite terms. The idea is that the Veda is not a book. It is not a text; it is not printed matter. It is not even a body of letters or words, but an embodied form of a revelation or a flash of wisdom which has Truth as its object. Such is the intent behind the mantras of the Vedas.

They are called mantras because they are supposed to protect when they are recited or chanted properly according to the requisite system. The mantras of the Veda are powerful incantations which can be utilised for any purpose according to the circumstances of the case, even for purposes other than religious.

People have attempted to discover empirical science and even technological means in the mantras of the Vedas.

For instance, a Shankaracharya of recent past wrote a book on Vedic mathematics, culling mantras from the Atharvaveda particularly, where he demonstrates that Pythagoras' theorem, trigonometry, and higher mathematics are all hidden within the outer form of the philological structure of the Veda mantras. However, suffice it to say that because of the fact that they are supposed to contain an intention which is all-comprehensive and divine in its nature, the Veda is called a holy scripture.

The Vedas are four in number: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. The Rig is a systematically composed mantra. It is very scientific in its makeup; and when it is set to music, it becomes the Sama. With the exception of a few mantras, the Samaveda is nothing but mantras from the Rigveda that have been culled and set to tune—a musical intonation of the mantras. The Yajurveda is practically in prose, interspersed with mantras in poetry. The Atharvaveda is variegated in its compass and touches many themes, not only religious but also secular.

The mantras as a whole, in a group, are called the Samhita. It is called Samhita because the words of the sentence are arranged in a particular order, and they have to be recited with a system of intonation which is called Shiksha, or the science of phonetics. They cannot be chanted however we like. They are not to be read as we read a work of prose or a novel. These bodies of mantras are called the Samhita because of the necessity to conform to a principle of intonation and chanting, and because they form a compact whole in themselves.

One of the purposes for which the mantras are used is ritual, or performance of sacrifice, worship, etc. The method of the employment of these mantras in sacrifice or ritualistic worship is described in another body of scriptures called the Brahmanas. They are mostly in prose, with a little poetry here and there; but they are very splendid prose, not ordinary language.

Many of the Brahmanas have as an appendix to them the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, which are supposed to be conceptual meditations or internal contemplations of the very form of the external worship of the sacrifice which the Brahmanas describe as a sort of mandate on the religious man through the utilisation or employment of the mantras of the Samhitas. As we go further, from the Samhita to the Brahmana, and from the Brahmana to the Aranyaka, etc., we find a change of outlook and appreciation of values in the Vedic body of literature. There is a total grasp of the whole of phenomena in the Veda mantras, where they begin to visualise the Creator in the forms of manifestation. There is no temple in the Rigveda, and no particular form of God is described. Creation as a whole is taken as the manifestation of the One Almighty; therefore, even the dawn and the sunrise, the seasons, the rainfall, the wind, the heat and cold, whatever it be, can be regarded as a fit object of religious and spiritual worship because of the recognition of the Almighty Being in the so-called manifestation. The plurality of perception is taken advantage of for the purpose of the worship of the unity behind this plurality. As we go further, from the earlier portions of the Rigveda to the later portions, especially

when we come to the Tenth Mandala, we will find cosmological hymns which fly high in poetry, composition and force of imagination, wherein they describe and portray a mighty ideal which seems to be the principal motif of the whole Vedic literature.

The chanting of the mantra is not merely for the purpose of the performance of a *yajna*, a sacrifice, but it can also be directly employed for meditation and prayer. Thus, the Veda mantras have a double purpose. They are the means to the contemplation of the Almighty in a form or offering of a prayer in some way, and they can also be utilised for ritualistic performances. While the Brahmanas lay much emphasis on the utilisation of the Veda mantras for sacrificial purposes, the Aranyakas lay stress on the internal contemplative purpose of the Veda mantras. We can worship God merely by thought, without any kind of external apparatus, performance or religious ritual. This is the purpose of the Aranyakas, which conceptualise psychologically, inwardly, the external form given to the application of the process in the Brahmanas. We are gradually treading a mystical realm, as it were, so that when we are in the Upanishads, we rise high above the level of the empirical interpretation of the Veda and touch its inner core. The *tattva*—the essential meaning, the quintessence, the last word, *anta*, of the Veda—is reached in the Upanishads. After having said everything, we ask, “What is your last word?” The last word of the Veda is the Upanishad. That is why it is called the Vedanta.

This is the primary foundational literature of India’s religion: the Veda Samhita, the Brahmana, the Aranyaka,

and the Upanishad. The body of the Veda, or the Sruti, is an order that is issued to be obeyed, and not merely a persuasion to our emotions to do a good act.

The comprehensiveness of the Veda mantras is such that it requires an explanation of their various points of view through the remaining branches of Sanskrit literature, known as the Smritis, the Itihasas, the Puranas, etc. The religious aspect is one thing, but there are other aspects of life. Man is not merely one particular function. He is not only a total being, but also an inward psyche and an external social unit. Because of the fact that the grasp of the mantras of the Veda has been comprehensive, intuitional, and they have touched upon every value of life, personal and social included, other branches of Sanskrit learning began to emphasise certain aspects which are subsumed in this totality of the Veda Samhita.

The Smriti emphasised only the ethical, moral, and legal aspects. The inspirational side took its form in the mighty epics—the Mahabharata, Ramayana, etc.—which were expanded in a more practical form in the Puranas. The ritualistic and the worship aspects took form in the Agamas and Tantras. The logical side of philosophical disquisition took form in the Darshanas. There are six branches of religious Sanskrit literature—Sruti, Smriti, Itihasa, Purana, Agama, and Darshana—apart from secular literature such as the Kavyas, the poems of Kalidasa, etc., the Natakas or the dramas, and such other popular didactic literature such as the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesa, and the works of Bhartihari. All these present an ocean of outlook which, when they are studied with a purely scholarly spirit, give us

some insight into the depths to which great minds in India have reached.

Chapter 7

AN OUTLINE OF THE VEDAS

In our survey of culture, we noticed the historical antecedents which suggested the implied causes of the ruin of cultures and the downfall of empires. Also, we could observe the presence of a supernatural purpose operating through human history, as if human beings are only the tools of the gods or vehicles through which nature fulfils her intentions. The philosophy of history is, therefore, an essential study in the understanding of the meaning and chronology of human history.

The cultural history of a country is involved not merely in the frail individualities of human beings or their empirical desires and expectations, but conditioned by a superior purpose, so that history becomes a cosmic motivation and not merely an empirical succession. These were some of the ideas through which we passed in our studies so far; and after this introductory approach to the vast subject, we entered into the precincts of India's cultural history, which we noticed is founded upon the basic concept of an integration of life's values commonly classified as the Purusharthas, or the objectives of human existence—dharma, artha, kama, moksha—the practical implementation of which is attempted through the classification of society through the varnas, and the arrangement in an ascending order of the life of the individual by means of ashrama dharma. Then, we had occasion to note the influence that scriptures exert upon the cultural outlook of a nation. We casually scanned

through the various scriptures of India, especially those available in the Sanskrit language. Primarily, Indian culture is a Sanskrit culture, though it absorbs into itself the sidelights that are thrown upon it by other forms of outlook engendered by vernacular literature and also, to some extent, customs and traditions.

The foundational scripture of India is the Veda, hallowed as knowledge which is an embodied form of divine wisdom which concerns itself with the revelation of realities that are inaccessible to the human senses and understanding. It is, therefore, *apaurusheya*—not written by man. Man cannot write a book on matters which he cannot understand and which lie beyond the ken of his perception. It is impossible to believe that man could have written the Veda, inasmuch as if it was a text with a human authorship, it would confine itself only to empirical knowledge and could not give us knowledge which is revelatory, spiritual, transcendent, and divine beyond human comprehension. The Veda is not written; it is not a printed book. It is not a book at all, in the modern sense of the term. It is a body of revelations which were handed down as a Sruti, or what is heard in a sacred manner from Guru to disciple. The Veda is known as a Sruti. It is what is heard, and not what is read in a library, as we do these days. It is sacred, hallowed, divine, and adored and worshipped as an embodiment of divine knowledge.

The Vedas are a very complicated body of knowledge. They are not a stereotyped, single beaten track of approach, but are composed of strata which vary in accentuation and even in the content of their knowledge. We usually classify

the Vedas into four—the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda—the oldest being the Rigveda Samhita. It is said that there are more than one thousand recensions of the Veda, and there is an Upanishad attached to each recension. So there should be that large a number of Upanishads—most of which are not available today. Nor do we have access to these recensions, which are so large in number. Basically only a few recensions are available, which differ from one another in a few instances of phraseology, accent, intonation, etc., but not essentially. However, for our purposes, we may say that the Vedas are only four, irrespective of these minor details of recensions, etc.

The Rigveda is the primary bible of India's culture. It is a collection of hymns, known as mantras. There is a difference between what we call a sloka in Sanskrit, and a mantra in religious parlance. For instance, the Bhagavadgita, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the writings of Kalidasa are in slokas or verses. The Vedas are composed in a style which is metrical like verses, no doubt, but has a sacrosanct affiliation which makes it considered to be a mantra—a divine revelation and a force, rather than merely an expression of poetic fancy. The other difference between a mantra and a sloka is that a sloka can be chanted in any manner one likes, but a mantra can be chanted only in one way—like a raga in music. One cannot have different approaches to a single raga. It is stereotyped and set, and everyone has to sing a particular raga in that way only. Likewise is this metrical chant, especially of the mantras of the Rigveda.

Hence, even today the Veda *pathshalas*, where Gurus teach the Veda mantras to disciples, follow this scientific approach of systematically introducing the mind of the student to the chanting of the mantra. This cannot be done by study or surface reading, just as music cannot be learnt by reading a book. It requires a teacher. There are very complicated systems introduced in the study of the mantras, as I mentioned, which only a Veda *pathaka* knows. The student is first made to repeat each syllable of the mantra three times. Afterwards, when the disciple is accustomed to chanting each syllable or word three times, one fourth of the mantra is chanted three times in the presence of the Guru. Then he has to chant the whole mantra three times. So, when he comes to the recitation of a mantra in its completeness, he recites it nine times. Only then is he supposed to have mastery over the pronunciation, and not before. Then he has to go on repeating by rote all the mantras of the hymn, with proper intonation and accent, as many times as is necessary until he commits it to memory.

This is a great science which is embodied in the limb of the Veda called the Shiksha Vedanga. There are six limbs of the Veda, which are accessories to the study of the Vedic scriptures. One of them is the phonetic system known as the Shiksha, wherein is laid down the principles of chant, pronunciation, intonation, etc. The importance given to the manner of the accent and the intonation during the chant of a mantra can be known when it is told to us that irrespective of uttering the words correctly, certain rishis changed the meaning and the intention of the chant by a

change of the tone when they were expected to produce an enemy of Indra who would destroy him. As the rishis did not wish that such a person should be produced by the sacrifice, nor did they wish to displease the person who employed them for this purpose, they uttered the mantra but changed the tune, and the opposite element rose up from the sacrifice, which instead of destroying Indra, was destroyed by Indra. Such is the importance that is attached to the way of intonation and the method of chant. Thus, we can appreciate the importance attached to chanting the mantra in a particular way—as distinguished from the slokas, which can be recited in various ways according to one's own predilections.

The meticulous care with which the ancient masters preserved the Veda can be appreciated if we know that not even one letter of the Veda has changed, nor has the Veda increased or decreased by even one letter during the ages or centuries that have passed. The credit should go to the great *panditas* of the Veda, who by the methods of *pada*, *krama*, *jata*, etc., maintained this precision of chant and word formation to such an extent that it is a marvel of how the sacred lore was maintained, which is unparalleled in religious history in the world.

I mentioned that Shiksha is one of the *angas* or limbs of the Veda, which concerns itself with phonetics, or the intonation with which the mantras are to be recited. There are five other accessories to the study of the Veda—five other *angas*, or limbs, as they are called. Grammar, or Vyakarana, is one of the limbs of the Veda. Unless the grammatical structure of the words of the mantra is known

clearly, its meaning will not be apprehended. Panini has been recognised as the foremost grammarian among the many others. He was not the only grammarian of India. There were at least eight grammarians before him, it is believed; he was perhaps the last and the most prominent, and is accepted to be the final word in Sanskrit grammar. In his great work called the *Ashtadhyayi*, Panini classifies Vedic Sanskrit and classical Sanskrit into two groups, so there is what is called Vedic grammar and classical Sanskrit grammar. Vedic grammar is mostly not studied these days; students of Sanskrit confine themselves only to classical grammar. However, the study of grammar is very essential to understand the meaning of the mantras of the Veda because they are written in a very archaic style of Sanskrit, not the modern Sanskrit which people speak and study. Therefore, *Vyakarana* is an essential limb of the study of the Veda because without it, its meaning cannot be known.

The third limb or *anga* is the *Chandas*, the metre. The metre is the way in which the mantra is composed, as in a poem. The speciality of the metre of a Veda mantra is that a particular metre is considered not merely as a way of the juxtaposition of the letters of the mantra, but a force which is injected into the mantra as a cohesive power. The metre produces one particular effect—and not another effect—in the same way as a particular intonation produces one particular effect. Thus, the meaning or the effect produced by the chanting of the mantra depends not merely on the words and the grammatical meaning thereof, but also the intonation and the metre in which it is composed. This is something very marvellous indeed.

Another *anga* or limb of the Veda is Nirukta, or the etymology, lexicon—or what we may call the dictionary in modern language. The etymological meaning of the roots of the words of the Veda is given in a body of literature called the Nirukta. The most famous of the Niruktas is by Yaska, the great rishi who explains the etymological derivations of each word, or at least the most important words, occurring in the Veda mantras.

Then there is another *anga* or limb of the Veda, known as Jyotisha or astronomy. The foundation of astronomy in India was laid by the Vedic seers themselves, who found it necessary to understand the movement of the planets and the entire stellar system so that they could perform oblations, prayers and sacrifices to the deities or the gods at an opportune time which is very auspicious and conducive to the production of the intended result of the prayer or the sacrifice—which, of course, depends upon the conjunction of the planets. So, the foundation of the beginnings of the science of astronomy was laid by great seers like Varahamihira, Aryabhata, etc., who elaborated this science into a marvellous mathematical technique of astronomical observations.

The practical side of the purposes of the Veda is delineated in a body of scriptures known as the Kalpa Sutras. These Sutras are of four types—Shulba Sutras, Shrauta Sutras, Grihya Sutras, and Dharma Sutras. These days no one even knows their names, but they are still there because they are directly connected with the performance of the religious ceremonies, prayers and sacrifices intended by the Veda, and the way in which one has to live and

conduct oneself in life, personally and socially. The Shulba Sutras are aphorisms which set down rules and regulations concerning the laying of the foundation for sacrificial altars, even to the minute details of the length of the *garbhagriha*, the number of bricks, the length and breadth of the altar, etc. They are directly connected with the external performance of sacrificial rites. While the Shulba Sutras are concerned with external nature, the Shrauta Sutras concern themselves with the internal apparatus of sacrifice. The methodology, the details, the chronological order, and every blessed minutia concerning the application of the mantras in the sacrifice, etc., are detailed in the Shrauta Sutras, which are very vast in their survey. The Grihya Sutras concern themselves with the rites and ceremonies, and the rules and regulations to be observed by a householder regarding his life, for transforming his personal and family life into a veritable sacrifice in the religious sense. The Dharma Sutras lay the foundation for what we today call the Smritis or the Dharma Shastras, which give details as to the regulative, ethical and moral principles of society and the individuals in society. The foremost among the Dharma Shastras, or the Smritis that arose out of these Dharma Sutras, is the Manava Dharma Shastra—or the Manusmriti, as it is known—and many other Smritis arose later on.

Hence, Shiksha, Vyakarana, Chanda, Nirukta, Jyotisha, and Kalpa are the Vedangas, the essential ingredients or accessories to the Vedic knowledge which is embodied in the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads.

The Vedas are four, and each Veda is divided into four sections—or, we can say, four books—known as the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads. The Samhita is a collection of hymns or prayers—chants and the incantation of formulae addressed to the gods and the divinities to summon them for various purposes. The Samhitas are mainly four—Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva. In the Yajurveda, there are two sections again—the Shukla and the Krishna. The Krishna Yajurveda is supposed to be older, and the Shukla comes later and is ascribed to the seership of Yajnavalkya Rishi. The Samhitas are, therefore, prayers offered to the divinities. The Rigveda is the principal Samhita. It is a metrical chant which is very systematic and scientific. The Yajurveda Samhita is partly in poetry and partly in prose, while the Rigveda Samhita is wholly poetry. The Samaveda is, with the exception of seventy-five mantras, a repetition of the whole of the Rigveda, only set to music as a chant. The Samaveda is not merely a poetic recitation like the Rigveda, but a musical transformation given to it. The Atharvaveda is a very large conglomeration of various themes which are practical in nature, including even medical science, astronomy, etc., and incantations, imprecations and applications of formulae, and summonings of various types, both earthly and unearthly.

The Brahmanas are books of prose which are lengthy narrations of the procedure to be adopted in the application of the Samhita mantras for sacrifices and other practical uses. But the Brahmanas are also a rich literature of a different type. They are not merely ritual injunctions for

the performance of sacrifice, though mostly they are that. They also constitute a rich literary piece containing legends and stories, laying the foundation, as it were, of the epics and the Puranas, which were to come in a larger form later on; and they even touch upon such subjects as astronomy. Even before the birth of Copernicus it was already declared in the Aitareya Brahmana that the Sun does not move; the Sun only appears to move but is actually stationary, and it is the Earth that moves, not the Sun. This proclamation is found in the Aitareya Brahmana, though these days we credit this knowledge to Copernicus because we never read our Vedas and do not know what rich treasure they contain. The Brahmanas such as the Aitareya, and the Satapatha especially, are grand forms of literature, majestic in their sweep and stimulating in their subjects; and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is the tail end of the Satapatha Brahmana. Each Aranyaka, or Upanishad, is attached to a particular Brahmana.

I have told you something about the nature of the Brahmanas, whose appendices, as it were, are the Aranyakas, which are the esoteric texts which interpret the exoteric injunctions of the Brahmanas in a mystical style. In the Aranyakas there is a gradual attempt made to inwardise the externalised approach of the Brahmanas through the sacrifices and the prayers offered to outward gods. The gods of the Veda, which appear to be external to us and controlling the phenomena outside in nature, and the rituals and sacrifices which we are expected to perform for the satisfaction of these gods, are now envisaged as internal forces operating through a subtle cosmos. That prayer and

sacrifice do not require any external apparatus or material is what we gather from the study of the Aranyakas, wherein we have the seed sown for internal meditation and a proclamation of the possibility of contacting Reality purely through mental operation. These are without any kind of external aid that is necessary for the Brahmana sacrifices, which are rich externally, demanding a lot of financial expense and even physical fatigue. The great *yajnas* contemplated in the Aranyakas are a mystical introversion of the very same *yajnas* and sacrifices described in the Brahmanas.

The gods to whom we offer our prayers through the mantras of the Veda Samhitas are not outside us. Though they appear outside, or seem to be external to us due to the largeness of the universe, they are not really outside. They are so related to us that they are not even an inch away from us. Thus, to contact these gods, an outward ceremony is not necessary; no material of any kind is essential. What is required is only our mind, our thought, our consciousness, our being. This system was practised in the forests, while the *yajnas* of the Brahmanas were performed mostly in the *yajnashtalas* of royal palaces and ritualistically consecrated halls especially devoted and dedicated for the purpose.

The Aranyakas are the first attempt at a mystical approach to the performances of the individual, whether personally, or in family or in society. The Upanishads are the crowning apex of the attempts of the Aranyakas, and give the final stamp of the possibility and practicability of communion with the powers of nature, with the gods of the

heavens, and with the Supreme Creator Himself by an adjustment of thought within, and a surrender of personality. This is a vast subject which forms an independent topic of discussion.

Thus, we have the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads. The Vedas are four in number—Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva—attached to which are the Vedangas, or the limbs, six in number, which I already mentioned. There is also what are known as the Upavedas, or the auxiliary Vedas, four in number—Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda, and Artha Shastra—each one connected to a particular Veda. Ayurveda is the science of medicine, health and long life, and is attributed to Dhanvantari, the divine sage who is supposed to have promulgated this great science of medicine and healing. This particular Upaveda is attached to the Rigveda. The Gandharvaveda is the science of music, or fine arts in general, we may say, which is connected with the Samaveda. The Dhanurveda is military science, which is attached to the Yajurveda. And the Artha Shastra is political science, economics, etc., which is attached to the Atharvaveda.

Thus, the body of the Veda seems to be a vast gamut of comprehension which, though it is regarded as a science of supernatural contact with gods and Reality, is also concerned with empirical life such as political science, military science, economics, etc.; and modern investigations have come to the conclusion that there are secrets in the Veda mantras which explain the mysteries of trigonometry, geometry, algebra, and higher mathematics.

Perhaps even the science of aeronautics, the making of rockets and so on, is hiddenly present in the mystical passages of the Veda mantras, which are impossible to understand without a master who has delved deep into them—a specimen of which we cannot find these days. We have practically lost this great treasure of the Veda.

All this is connected with what is known as the Sruti. I have given only a very bare outline, a skeleton of this masterly foundation of India's culture; and everything else that we hear of—the Puranas, the Itihasas, the philosophical sciences, the Smritis, etc.—only are ramifications, explanations or commentaries of the basic intentions and foundational doctrines of the Veda-rashi, which is the most adorable body of knowledge we have in India.

Chapter 8

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

Religion is manifest in seven ways. Scripture, philosophy, mysticism, theology, ethics, ritual, and mythology are the principal branches of the religious phenomenon. While there can be any number of details by way of the expression of the religious outlook in practical life, it is mainly concerned with these foundational features.

Scripture is the foundation of every religion, so to say, and it is believed to be a record of the revelations of super-sensory perception. A revelation, a scripture, is regarded as holy because it is not an intellectual workmanship of any particular author. It is a supreme insight, a light that dawns in the soul of a prophet, a sage or a seer, a light that speaks the message of God to man. Such are the scriptures, which are the basic references in all matters of religious doubt and difficulty.

The revelation which is the scripture, the intuition of the Divine Reality, is also what is known as philosophy when it becomes a reasoned argument substantiating the dictum of the scripture. Especially in India, it is laid down that the philosophical disquisitions, while they can stand on the strength of reason and understanding, should not contradict scripture. Unbridled reason is not regarded as a trustworthy medium of knowledge. By 'unbridled', we mean independent of scripture. So, while scripture is direct intuition, a revelation which is super-sensory, philosophy is intellectual, rational, a method adopted to convince the reason by arguments which are logical in their nature—by

induction and deduction, etc.—so that intuition, which is super-sensory, super-mental, super-rational, also gets confirmed by man's reason.

The seeds of theology and the other features of religion that I mentioned are actually laid in the scriptures themselves. In fact, we can find the foundations of every feature or aspect of religion in its scripture. The scripture is a storehouse of every blessed thing which a religion can be. It has its philosophy, the roots of reasoned arguments; it also has the seeds of mythology, ritual, ethics, and the general attitude of people in their social life.

The doctrine of theology is the concept of God as applied to human life, which again is a derivative from the proclamations of the scriptures themselves. In India particularly, the scripture, which has its foundations in the Vedas and the Upanishads, is also the basis of India's theology and philosophy, what to speak of other things such as mythology, etc. The Upanishads lay the foundations for the philosophy which is later called the Darshana, or the reasoned or rational perception of Truth.

The concept of God in its relation to the creation of the universe and the existence of the individual is the basis for theological doctrines. Theology is the science of God. It is the art of the disquisition of the nature of the Creator, or a system which argues the characteristics of the Creator in relation to His creation. Thus, inasmuch as it is accepted that theology considers the relationship that obtains between God, world and soul, and takes for granted the existence of this threefold principle, or tripartite entity, it is often distinguished from philosophy. Theology is not the

same as philosophy if we are to define theology as a propounding of God's relationship to creation as well as to individuals, who are the contents of creation.

But philosophy is defined in many ways, and people have not come to a clear conception as to what philosophy is. Though it is generally defined as 'love of wisdom', that is a very vague definition indeed because one does not know what this wisdom is in order that one may love it. However, those who thought that philosophy is the love of wisdom must have had in their minds the idea that wisdom is nothing but the wisdom of God. It does not mean ordinary, worldly wisdom. In fact, the great philosophic hero who, for the first time, perhaps, made the word 'philosophy' popular was Plato, and he and his disciple Aristotle did not consider wisdom to be merely worldly knowledge, but an insight into Reality. Now, inasmuch as wisdom is supposed to be the content of philosophy, and wisdom also has been identified with an insight into Reality, and it is the task or the function of philosophy not to have any predispositions or preconceived notions, it has to differ from theology, which already accepts the fact of there being a creation and individuals inside creation whose relationship obtains in the context of God's creativity.

These principles, which can be identified with an impersonal search for Reality going by the name of an abstract philosophical disquisition, as well as theological concepts which are more prone to a cosmological concept of God, are all to be found in the scriptures of India—in the Veda, and particularly in the Upanishads. The outcome of these systems of thinking is the effect they have upon the

individual's conduct and his relationship with other individuals in society. Thus, in a way we may say our notion of Reality decides our attitude to the world and our conduct with other people. Philosophy, therefore, taken in its true sense, lays the foundation for every other system of thought and every branch of learning, and a total outlook of life is manifest spontaneously from this foundational acceptance of the characteristics of Reality, which is the task of philosophy to discover.

Hence, while a religious outlook taken in its comprehensiveness has to root itself in a scriptural revelation, and it has a philosophy of its own which substantiates the revelations of scripture, it also has its own theology—a concept of God. 'Concept of God' is the important phrase to note here. God is not a mere concept. God is an independent Being, Existence in its own right, but when God becomes a concept, we turn from philosophy to theology. Our idea of God is the root of the theological doctrines of religion, but the idea of God is not the same as God Himself. God has a status of His own—an independent existence free from the ideas which may be related by the percipients in the form of the individuals who came subsequent to the creative act.

But, as we gradually come down from the scriptural foundational acceptance in the religious fields of philosophy and theology, we automatically come to our social and personal levels, wherein our external conduct has to perform a double duty: religious and secular. Our external conduct has to be religious and also secular, which means to say, it has to be a conduct in relation to God and

also a conduct in relation to other people around us. The outwardly manifest conduct of our individuality in relation to God becomes the rituals of religion, and our conduct in relation to other people becomes the ethics of society.

Thus, rituals are derived from the principal enunciation of the insight of a scripture through philosophy and theology, and we come down to our visual world of human relationship and assume a relationship even to God Himself. It is not given to man in his ordinary frail mortality to contemplate God in His Absoluteness. Whatever the scripture may say, it remains only in the scripture. It does not enter our mind because the mind of man is mostly physical, though it is dubbed 'psyche'. We call the mind 'psyche', and it is distinguished from the body, but we are wholly bodies, and we think in terms of bodies. On account of this bodily engrossment of the psyche, we are unable to contemplate the pristine independence of the Supreme Creator as He ought to have to been before the act of creation took place. God must have been something before there was creation; and in His status before creation, where there was no universe, we should not attribute to Him even such characteristics as omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. We cannot call God omnipresent because it implies spatial constraint, and the idea of omniscience and omnipotence are also involved in the notion of space and time. Hence, because space and time came after creation took place, we cannot become God as He is in Himself independent of these notions that have come down to us through the creative act.

Thus is the frailty of man in his attempt to conceive God in His pristine originality.

However, we see the world—we see the universe around us—and so in terms of our notion of the universe around us, we also have a notion of God as the Creator. We see a vast universe, a big world outside us, and with our causal arguments of the intellect we posit a God who is superior to and larger than this great effect as the universe and the world. So we think of God as a large being, a vast expanse encompassing the whole world, the entire creation. Therefore, we say He is present in all things. The argument is: The cause is present in the effect; therefore, God is present in the world. Thus, God is immanent in the world, though He is also transcendent to all the particularities in the world. Because we think of God in terms of creation—the universe and the world—we say He is *sarvantaryami*, *sarvajna*, *sarvasaktiman*: omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. Otherwise, we cannot think of Him. To think God is to objectify Him, to make Him external, which He is not; and, therefore, there is no such thing as thinking God.

So comes the need for ritual in religion, the practice of the adjustment of oneself in an external conduct motivated by an inward feeling of devotion and surrender in respect of the great Almighty who is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Transformer (or the Destroyer) of the universe.

While we are incapable of conceiving God in His originality prior to the creative act, we also find ourselves incapable of conceiving God even through His creation. The world is so large that we cannot imagine what it is. The universe transcends the comprehension of even the best of

religions. So, our attitude towards God is one of humble obeisance. There is an external act which we have to express in some way or other, which is, in our opinion, in consonance with the relationship that obtains between ourselves and God. Rituals in religion imply the relationship between the devotee (the individual) and God (the Supreme Being).

The different schools of thought, systems of philosophy and religion, are different ideas of the relationship of man and God. Thus, we have many philosophies. The many philosophies and the many religions are nothing but the outward expressions of the many ideas of the relationship between man and God. No one knows how we are related to God, or how God is related to us. I have one idea, you have another idea, and anyone can have any idea. These ideas of the relationship between man and God are the schools of thought, the systems of philosophy, and the doctrines or the faiths of religions. We need not go deep into these variegated fabrics of the philosophical structure or the foundations of religion, because many of them are known to us. Suffice it to say, among the many types of relation that we can conceive between ourselves and God, and between God and ourselves, three are fundamental and primary.

That we are totally different from God and God is totally different from us is one idea. There is a fear of God, a dread of the curse and imprecation that can befall us by the might of the Supreme Creator, and an abject feeling of helplessness in the presence of this terrific Might whose grace alone can save us as an act of compassion, and from

our side we can do nothing. We have no strength of any kind and are bereft of every capacity on account of our complete isolation from God. Man is a slave. Even to say man is a slave of God is a great dignity given to him, because man is worse than that, is the feeling of certain thinkers who cannot identify any relationship between man and God. All these notions of the complete duality between man and God lead to the practices and rituals of religion, which take the form of varieties of types of devotion, the principal form of these types being what is known as surrender of self—the technique of negation of oneself in an acceptance of one's total incapacity, as it is impossible to imagine that man can have any worth at all in light of the fact that he is isolated from God, root and branch. In India this is known as the Dvaita philosophy in the technical language of Sanskrit, but it is prevalent in other countries also. Wherever and whenever a drastic and marked distinction is drawn between man and God, we have the Dvaita philosophy.

The school of Sri Ramanuja—the Sri Vaishnava school of thought, as it is called—accepts a sort of relationship between man and God, though it is not intelligently clear. It is a sort of organic connection, something like the relationship of soul and body, which visualises an inward connecting link between man and God, though outwardly He is separate. The Sri Vaishnava school accepts the organic connection of the soul with the Almighty. The organic connection does not mean identical, nor does it mean complete separation. It is a relatedness comparable to the relation of the body to the soul or the soul to the body,

or the parts of the body to the whole body—*sarira-sariri-sambandha*, as it is usually known. We know that the soul is not the body, and we know that the body is not the soul, yet they cannot be separated. We cannot keep the soul here and the body there. They are inseparably related, yet the one is not the other. Also, though the parts of the body are not the body, and the cells of the body do not constitute the organism, yet they do constitute the organism; they are inseparably related. This is the Vishishtadvaita school of Ramanuja, and any school which holds this doctrine of the organic relationship of the individual with the Almighty is of this character.

The third school of thought is that which accepts the total identity, an utter inseparability of man and God in essence, a point which is made out by many philosophers in the West such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, etc., and in India by Shankaracharya, who cannot see any difference basically, principally, essentially, between that which is created and that which creates. They cannot see a distinction between the effect and the cause. The cause moves towards the effect, becomes the effect. As the clay in the pot is not different from the pot, God is not different from creation. Such is the visualisation of the relationship between creation and the Almighty—between man and God—by schools which accept the total identity of things.

All these schools of thinking, theology, philosophy and ritual have their place in scripture. We will find these mentioned in some form or other, in some modicum, in some corner of the Veda or Upanishads. The rituals, therefore, are the outward symbols expressed in religious

obeisance to God in terms of the relation that obtains between oneself and God. Before we perform religious worship or conduct a religious ritual, there is already an idea in our minds of the relationship between ourselves and God, and His relationship to us. That conditions the nature of the ritual, and also explains the meaning of it. Hence, while there are rituals in every religion, they differ in their inner connotation. The rituals of different religions and faiths may have an outward similarity, but the inner significance differs on account of the difference in the acceptance of the relationship between man and God.

Here we have, therefore, the features of the religious outlook—scripture, philosophy, theology, ritual; and ethics follows from that. Ethics is nothing but a further extension of the principle of the relation between man and God, and the relation between God and creation. How we have to conduct ourselves among ourselves as human beings will be decided by our idea of the relation that God has to the world and to ourselves.

Hence, philosophy is the basis of sociology and ethics, and perhaps even of politics, because political science and administration are nothing but a concrete implementation of our propriety in relation to, in regard to, the ethics and morality of human relationships. We have some idea as to what is good and what is proper, and on the basis of that idea we lay down our constitutions, rules, regulations, etc. But our notion of the good is conditioned by the nature of the philosophy that we follow and our concept of the relationship between God, world, and soul.

Finally, we conclude that every effort of man, and every enterprise in any field of life, is based on a philosophy—of which he may be aware, or he may not be aware. Even a cat has a philosophy of its own when it pounces on a mouse, though it may not be a written step which it reads before it manifests its activity in the way it does. The conduct of a person is not always intelligently analysed by that person in terms of a foundational philosophy, but it is subconsciously present. An idea of what is proper is present in the mind of every person. This idea of what is proper is the philosophy of that person, which is unconsciously projected in the form of external behaviour, conduct and action.

Therefore, the practice of religion is the practice of God-consciousness, in some degree or the other. It is to flood our personality with something super-mundane, super-personal and super-individualistic. When we become religious seekers, we become non-temporal not only in our personal life but also in our social existence.

This is the message of Bharatavarsha, the message of India's culture, the message of true spirituality, and the message of all the mystics, saints and sages of the world. God bless you all!

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj took birth on the 25th of April, 1922, and was named Subbaraya. He was the eldest of five children in a highly religious and orthodox Brahmin family well versed in the Sanskrit language, the influence of which was very profound on the young boy. He attended high school in Puttur (South Kanara District, Karnataka State) and stood first in the class in all subjects. Not being satisfied with what was taught in the classroom, young Subbaraya took to earnest self-study of Sanskrit with the aid of Amarakosa and other scriptural texts. While still a boy he studied and memorised the entire Bhagavadgita, and his simple way of doing it was not having breakfast or even lunch until a prescribed number of verses were memorised. Thus, within months Subbaraya memorised the whole of the Gita and recited it in full every day; such was his eagerness to study scripture. Reading from the Srimad Bhagavata that Lord Narayana lives in sacred Badrinath Dham, the young boy believed it literally, and entertained a secret pious wish to go to the Himalayas, where Badrinath is located, and see the Lord there.

By the study of Sanskrit works such as the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads, etc., Subbaraya was rooted more and more in the Advaita philosophy of Acharya Shankara, though he belonged to the traditional Madhva sect which follows the philosophy of dualism. His inner longing for Advaitic experience and renunciation grew stronger every day.

In 1943 Subbaraya took up government service at Hospet in Bellary District, which however did not last long. Before the end of the same year he left for Varanasi, where he remained for some time. But the longing for seclusion and the unknown call from the Master pulled him to Rishikesh, and he arrived there in the summer of 1944. When he met Swami Sivananda and fell prostrate before him, the saint said: "Stay here till death. I will make kings and ministers fall at your feet." The prophecy of the saint's statement came true for this young man who wondered within himself how this could ever happen. Swami Sivananda initiated young Subbaraya into the holy order of Sannyasa on the sacred day of Makar Sankranti, the 14th of January, 1946, and he was named Swami Krishnananda.

Sri Gurudev Swami Sivananda found that Swami Krishnananda was suitable for the work of correspondence, letter writing, writing messages and even assisting in compiling books and editing them, etc. Later on Swamiji was given the work of typing the handwritten manuscripts of Sri Gurudev, which he used to bring to him every day. For instance, the entire volume of the Brahma Sutras of Sri Gurudev, which he wrote by hand, was typewritten by Swami Krishnananda. Swamiji confined himself mostly to the literary side and never had any kind of relationship with visitors, so that people who came from outside never knew he existed in the Ashram. It was in the year 1948 that Gurudev asked Swamiji to do more work along the lines of writing books on philosophy and religion, which he took up earnestly. From that year onwards, Swamiji was more absorbed in writing and conducting classes, holding

lectures, etc., as per the instructions of Sri Gurudev. The first book Swamiji wrote was *The Realisation of the Absolute*, which was written in merely fourteen days, and is still considered by many as his best book—terse, direct, and stimulating.

When it became necessary for the Ashram to co-opt assistance from other members in the work of management, Swami Krishnananda was asked to collaborate with the Working Committee, which was formed in the year 1957. At that time Swamiji became the Secretary especially concerned with the management of finance. This continued until 1961 when, due to the absence of the General Secretary for a protracted period, Gurudev nominated Swamiji as General Secretary of the Divine Life Society, which position Swamiji held until 2001.

Swami Krishnananda was a genius and master of the scriptures, and expounded practically all the major scriptures of Vedanta. These discourses were given in the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy of the Society during the early morning sessions, afternoon classes and the regular three-month courses. Many of them have been brought out in book form and are authentic commentaries covering the philosophy, psychology and practice of the various disciplines of yoga. Swami Krishnananda is thus the author of forty-one books which were printed during his lifetime, fifteen books which were printed after Swamiji's Mahasamadhi, and twenty-four unprinted books which are published on Swamiji's website, each one a masterpiece in itself. Only a genius of Swamiji's calibre could do this in the midst of the enormous day-to-day volume of work as the

General Secretary of a large institution. Swamiji is a rare blend of karma and jnana yoga, a living example of the Bhagavadgita's teachings.

Such was Swami Krishnananda's literary skill and understanding of the entire gamut of the works of Swami Sivananda, numbering about three hundred, that when the Sivananda Literature Research Institute was formed on the 8th of September, 1958, Sri Gurudev himself made Swamiji the President. Again it was Swami Krishnananda who was appointed as the President of the Sivananda Literature Dissemination Committee, which was formed to bring out translations of Sri Gurudev's works in the major Indian languages. From September 1961, Swamiji was made the Editor of the Society's official monthly organ, *The Divine Life*, which he did efficiently for nearly two decades.

Swami Krishnananda was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Shankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev in a cryptic statement, which he himself has amplified in his article, "He is a Wonder to Me!" Swamiji, as the embodiment of Bhagavan Sri Krishna, lived in the state of God-consciousness and guided countless seekers along the path of Self-realisation. Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi on the 23rd of November, 2001.

All of Swami Krishnananda's books, plus many discourses, audios, videos and photos can be found on Swamiji's website at www.swami-krishnananda.org. According to Swamiji's wish and with his blessings, these are available freely to all. May the blessings of Revered

Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be with us always.